

# Women and Equalities Committee

## Oral evidence: Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact, HC 385

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Members present: Caroline Nokes (Chair); Sara Britcliffe; Theo Clarke; Angela Crawley; Elliott Colburn; Kim Johnson; Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Questions 105 - 138

### Witnesses

I: Professor Jill Rubery, Professor of Comparative Employment Systems, University of Manchester; Dr Duncan Brown, Independent Adviser, Principal Associate, Institute of Employment Studies; Monica Costa Dias, Deputy Research Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies.



## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Jill Rubery, Dr Duncan Brown and Monica Costa Dias.

Q105 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's session of the Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiry into coronavirus and the gendered economic impact. This afternoon we have Dr Duncan Brown, Monica Costa Dias and Professor Jill Rubery to give evidence to us in this inquiry.

I would just like to start by asking each of the witnesses in turn. We know that there has been a lot of concern about the impact of flexible furlough, the late announcement of the availability of flexible furlough and the availability of furlough to those with caring responsibilities. Could each of you outline to us your concerns about the impact that had specifically on women, and whether that is still a problem for women at this point, with the original furlough scheme coming to an end?

**Dr Brown:** Good afternoon. Thanks very much for inviting me to contribute. Both the nature of the revised scheme, which obviously is not as generous as the original furlough scheme, and the late announcement of it are potentially areas of concern. If we look at other international comparisons like Germany, they are broadly continuing their schemes for up to another year. Therefore, although this is obviously a very expensive scheme, that might well have been desirable.

Two things are often missed. There has been a lot of discussion about the comparison with the German Kurzarbeit scheme. What is often missed is, "Why do we need an emergency scheme?" The Kurzarbeit is an ongoing scheme that is just tweaked according to the economic conditions. The second thing about the Kurzarbeit is that there are two standard rates: there is a rate for single people and a rate for parents. We had no differentiation such as that in the scheme. You have to analyse and do research to try to discover what the disadvantageous effect on women is without any recognition in the scheme that women face different issues at work and are being affected differentially by the pandemic.

**Monica Costa Dias:** I agree with all that. We know that the main announcement of this job support scheme, which extends the past furlough scheme, is slightly different. It is less generous, but in particular it creates additional cost for firms that face the choice of keeping two workers half-time or keeping one worker full-time and dismissing the other. It is actually more costly for firms to keep two workers half-time workers under this scheme than it is to keep only one full-time and not participate in the scheme.

We have not done work on this scheme in particular to say this, but it is not obvious whether it will have a gendered impact, in terms of whether women are more likely to be the ones who will stay, if firms choose to do this, or the ones who are laid off. We could worry that it could affect women more than men if firms, for instance, are worried that, further



down the line, extra measures such as school closures will come into place and women will be more affected by these school closures; they will need to stay at home, in which case they will not have anyone to do the job. In that respect, the effects could be very different. As Dr Duncan just mentioned, women face different demands both at work and at home, and hence there might be reasons to suspect that there might be different impacts.

I should just mention in addition that, in the last scheme, which had the caring responsibilities possibility, women were disproportionately the workers who benefitted from that part of the scheme, in terms of those who requested to be furloughed for caring responsibilities. This completely aligns with our data. We found that women take on more responsibilities at home during the pandemic. They take the bulk of the extra responsibilities that the shutdown has imposed on families. If these caring responsibilities are not taken care of in this new scheme, they may suffer with their lack of ability to request to be furloughed.

Q106 **Chair:** You said that women had benefitted most from the ability to be furloughed for caring responsibilities. Can you put any figures to that?

**Monica Costa Dias:** I have figures. I do not have them off the top of my head, but I can send them to you. We have estimated, using data that we have collected at IFS, together with people at UCL, how families with children have been affected by the pandemic and the shutdown and lockdown of many sectors. We have data both on fathers and mothers. We have asked explicitly whether they have been furloughed and who initiated the process—whether it was the employer or the employee. We see that, in the case of mothers, it is most likely that they are the ones initiating the process. This means that they have requested to be furloughed because of caring responsibilities. I will definitely send you figures after.

Q107 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Could I just ask whether there is any evidence of women who are not mothers but might have other caring responsibilities benefitting? Are those statistics too difficult to obtain?

**Monica Costa Dias:** We do not have data on that. There is no data on that, at least as far as I know. We know that different datasets give slightly different figures, so the evidence is still not conclusive. If we look at data from Understanding Society, which is the big panel data that we have available and which has surveyed families over the course of the pandemic, we do not really see that women have been furloughed in higher numbers than men have. If we take the entire population of women with and without children and the entire population of men, we do not see that more women are being furloughed from that data. You would infer that, if more mothers are being furloughed, in particular for caring responsibilities, the other women who are not mothers will compensate and they have been less furloughed than men without children.



**Professor Rubery:** I would like to take up the issue of leave for care. I have been looking at policy responses across the EU 28 for some work I have been doing. Although the UK did provide opportunities to request to be furloughed for care, it was not a right, and 20 of the 28 countries did provide specific parental leave arrangements during lockdown. Of those, 16 made that a right for the employees. It is an open question as to how many people were able to be furloughed during the lockdown. They did not have the right to be furloughed. That is an important issue. We also do not know how many were expected to work and care, and were not allowed to be furloughed for that reason.

I am particularly concerned as we move forward into this uncertain period where there are many school closures, or even just class closures, where many people have to look after children at short notice. Women may actually both lose income and also be at risk of being seen as unreliable, and therefore possibly singled out for that in this period of very high redundancies. In 18 of those 20 countries, jobs were protected for those who were taking leave.

I do not have data on what actually happened to the women in the UK because, as Monica has already pointed out, it has not yet been collected; it is early days. There are concerns that we did not actually provide parental leave and that we are not doing so now. This is an urgent issue. Also, those taking leave because their children are in schools or classes that have closed should be treated a little bit the same as those who have to self-isolate if they cannot work from home and have that same access to income protection.

That is one set of issues. Just following on from the comments from Duncan about short-time working, it would have been better in general—how far it is a gender effect is a matter again to be further investigated—not to have had a furlough scheme where you either did not work at all or you worked. If everybody had been put on short-time working, we would have had less of a situation where those on furlough would be those being lined up for possible redundancies. It would have been fairer if everybody had had their reduced hours where companies were not fully closed down. At the moment, women who are on furlough and who are parents with all these other responsibilities may be at greater risk. That is an issue to be considered.

Q108 **Chair:** You cannot as yet produce any statistics that back that up.

**Professor Rubery:** I am not working like the IFS and collecting new data and things. I am reliant on the publication of such data. No, I do not have that. I am saying there is more protection in many countries for people taking leave to look after children during lockdown.

**Chair:** I appreciate that. We are particularly trying to look at the gendered impact here, as opposed to specific protections for parents. That is an important distinction that we should try to make, and also comparisons between genders in this country as opposed to both genders



across many others.

**Professor Rubery:** I appreciate that. On the other hand, I am very confident that there will be increasing statistical evidence to show that it is mainly women who have been taking the prime responsibility for caring and home-schooling. That is certainly true in the Eurofound studies as well as in the UK studies. It is a general, already proven statistical relationship that women have reduced their wage work more, have had more involvement with home-schooling and children, have been more interrupted while they have been doing wage work and all these kinds of things. There are gendered effects.

We cannot say that gender issues are independent of being mothers. We know that that is a very important part of gender inequality. Even women who are not mothers at any time are often considered to be potential mothers. We need to look at what is happening with parents because we are mainly talking about what is happening with mothers, though there are some positive aspects of fathers sharing as well.

Q109 **Chair:** Yes, absolutely. We know from HMRC statistics that there has been a lower take-up of the self-employment income support scheme amongst eligible women compared to eligible men. Do any of the witnesses, particularly Jill, think that we should extrapolate any information from that difference? How would you explain that?

**Professor Rubery:** Again, it is an empirical issue that has not yet been investigated. I do not really know. I would expect fewer women necessarily to be eligible. They may be less likely to have completed tax returns and all the rest of it. Maybe they are just too busy. They are probably trying to keep their self-employment business going and looking after children.

**Chair:** This was specifically eligible women.

**Professor Rubery:** Yes. I find that a little bit of a mystery. I do not have any information on why that is and I do not think anybody will have yet until there are surveys that perhaps ask why women did not take it up. I am sorry; I cannot help on that.

Q110 **Chair:** Did either of the other two witnesses have anything that they wanted to add on that specific point as to why eligible women might not have taken up the self-employment support scheme?

**Monica Costa Dias:** My research does not touch on that.

Q111 **Sara Britcliffe:** Can I come to Jill first, and then Monica with the same question, please? We have heard and read evidence about the failure of the self-employment income support scheme to exempt maternity leave from calculations or count maternity allowance as income. What needs to be done differently to prevent or mitigate negative impacts on women?



**Professor Rubery:** I do not want to say the pandemic is interesting, but an interesting development under the pandemic is the rapidity with which many countries have brought in new rights for the self-employed. We were already discussing that, with the rise of the gig economy and the growth of women's self-employment, we should actually provide more formal maternity leave to those who are self-employed. There is an opportunity to learn from this experience and provide maternity leave to the self-employed. If the policy had been so designed, that would have allowed for calculating profits in the year in which people had been on leave for maternity only over the months when they were working and not on maternity leave. That would have given a higher monthly profit rate and not depressed their support to the extent that it appears to have done.

Recognising that self-employment needs to be included in the protection net is a new development across the whole of Europe. It may benefit men more than women in the first instance, but it does provide a safety net for all people. Many women are very vulnerable if they are self-employed, single parents or whatever, and they do not have these rights. This is an important lesson to be learned that we can innovate and change our welfare systems.

**Monica Costa Dias:** My research does not really cover the self-employed. As Jill just mentioned, it is a group that raises specific issues, so I would not feel comfortable commenting on that. It is not only that they are not as entitled to the safety net that the other workers have to protect them; they also do not make the same contributions either. An entire system needs to be thought of to bring them in in a different way.

Q112 **Sara Britcliffe:** We have just discussed some of the aspects of the coronavirus job retention scheme and the self-employment income support scheme, which have impacted women and men differently. What, if any evidence, is there that there has been discrimination against women in the design or implementation of these schemes?

**Monica Costa Dias:** In general, I think this job retention scheme was a super-positive move early on. Given the type of this crisis, which took employers by surprise, it was critical to protect viable jobs in the face of this huge shock. Again, I do not think the evidence we have so far is conclusive in terms of who has benefitted the most from this scheme and who has benefitted the least. As I said, what we saw in the data that we collected is that women were very disproportionately more likely to be furloughed under the caring responsibilities part of the scheme. Also, women were more likely to be working in sectors that were locked down and therefore would be more likely to furlough some of the workers and use the scheme. Therefore, they were also very much benefitting from the scheme through other processes as well.

We also know that women, for instance, are more likely to be in jobs that can be done from home. To some extent, their jobs will be more protected if they are not in the locked-down sectors. They are also more



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likely to be key workers. There is a balance of the distribution of jobs among men and women that is not clear. It does not allow us to clearly say, in terms of gender, which workers most benefit from which scheme.

In terms of implementation, I do not think there is really evidence, or at least that I know of, that points to there being discrimination in terms of the implementation of this policy. Of course, with more data coming out, there could be more evidence that employers select workers disproportionately on their gender when they decide who to furlough and who not to. I really cannot comment on that. To do that type of analysis, we really would need data of different types to what we have now.

**Professor Rubery:** I would not describe it as discrimination amongst employers at the moment, at least in terms of the implementation of the scheme. The concern is what happens when employers have to make difficult decisions about who to lay off. Without those rights that I was already alluding to for people to have their jobs protected when they are doing the vital job of looking after children who have been excluded from school because of Covid, we need their jobs to be protected on that basis. It would be not unreasonable for employers to find that people are becoming unreliable because of what is happening in the school system.

We also know that women may have more difficulty getting back to work because of problems with the care sector, particularly nursery care and the provision there for children under five. The private fees dropped away under lockdown according to the IFS research. We do not know yet, but many nurseries may have closed. After-school clubs may be less available. There is a danger that employers will begin to see women as less reliable because they are taking the burden of this care work. It is a function of those responsibilities as much as anything else.

The second thing that I would want to say here is that there has been a lot of concern about people being expected to survive on 67% of their wages under the new proposed furlough scheme for those who are closed down. In some European countries, there has been not just a cap at the top end for furlough, but also a minimum floor. Five countries have said people should not receive less than the minimum wage. That would have benefitted women quite a bit. There is quite extensive research that suggests that people who survive on low earnings are less able to survive a cut in pay. In that sense, it is not discrimination as such, but it is not designing a furlough scheme to protect those who are most likely to be low-paid. A very high share of those are women.

**Dr Brown:** Just to reinforce Jill's point, while there is no evidence of conscious discrimination, in terms of the application, the employment data that was out yesterday indicated that 480,000 jobs had gone in the first six months of this year. A lot of people noticed that 60% of that was young people under 24. What was much less noticed was that 90% were part-time jobs that had gone. Given that we know that women staff the vast majority of part-time jobs in the economy, it means that part-time



workers have been less well protected by the existing scheme than full-time workers. That has almost certainly differentiated affected women. Most of those have actually not gone on to the unemployment register; they have gone economically inactive. They will not be claiming universal credit.

That is quite important, particularly when, as Monica mentioned, there has been quite a lot of commentary on the job support scheme already. It would seem to favour in its application keeping on a full-time worker, probably a better-paid full-time worker, than two lower-paid part-time workers who also may be on zero-hours and less secure contracts, so they are easier to lay off anyway.

Q113 **Angela Crawley:** First, with relation to welfare and benefit, we are all aware of the pre-pandemic research that you all have conducted, but also from the EHRC and others, which already states that women are often impacted more severely by the welfare reforms. What needs to change in the design of the welfare system to reduce inequalities between men and women, and to reduce inequalities generally in a wider sense?

**Professor Rubery:** I have three things that I would like to stress with respect to the welfare system. One is in relation to conditionality-associated benefits, another is the level of benefits and the third is the eligibility for benefits.

Can I start with the conditionality? While it was very welcome that the conditionality requirements for benefits were suspended during lockdown, my understanding is they are being reintroduced. The problem is that our welfare system has been based on an assumption, which may or may not be true and I do not want to dispute it here, that if you really wanted a job, you could find one. Therefore, there was a lot of pressure on people to look for work, in the expectation they would find a job. The problem is we are not in that context at the moment. We do not know when we will get back to that context.

There are also many people who are having their lifetime careers disrupted and having to think again about where they want to work. If you add into that mix the fact that, as I have been suggesting, many women will have increased domestic responsibilities not just because of school closures, but because of children needing more support having lost out, childcare provision being perhaps more difficult to come by and other care responsibilities, then it becomes very difficult for them to spend all their time searching for jobs that may not exist and may not be the right ones for them.

We need a change of mindset, which would apply to young people and men as well as to women; I am just emphasising the female aspect of this and the responsibilities in the home as well. It would look at the more holistic approach to what is going on in their lives and what kind of support they need to retrain and find out about new jobs. Do they need to go back and complete their education? In Sweden, you can go back



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and complete your education using unemployment benefits. In the UK, you just have to search for jobs and find a job; there is not that developmental aspect. That is something we really need to think about if we want to build back better and do it with more gender equality.

That will be particularly true if women take jobs outside of their career areas, for example in the arts and entertainment areas that have closed down. They want to return to those, and then the conditionality really kicks in. It is very difficult in the UK to actually quit a job to give yourself time to search for another job in a different area, retrain, et cetera, without losing benefits. Generally, conditionality needs to change.

The level of benefits I have already hinted at: sick pay and universal credit are extremely low. It is women who are more likely only to receive the basic element of universal credit, even if they are eligible for contributory benefits, unless they are single parents. It is more likely that they have an employed partner, or it has been in the past. That is again an empirical question.

We also need to do something to extend rights to women to have benefits. There is an incentive built into the national insurance system at the moment for employers to create more short-hours, low-paid jobs because they get a benefit from not paying the employer's contribution. This does not exist in other countries. Even in Germany, which is famous for its mini-jobs, the employers actually have to pay quite a high levy on those jobs. In the UK, they get a free run. We hear about the free lunch for the self-employed, but we do not hear about the free lunch for the employers of people on short-hours, low-paid jobs.

We need to remove that and encourage employers to provide better, longer part-time jobs. I know not all women want to work full-time, but many part-timers want more hours, and they do not want to be excluded from benefits. That is another important factor.

Q114 **Angela Crawley:** You mentioned eligibility as the third criteria. Did you want to comment on that?

**Professor Rubery:** At the moment, 2 million women are not eligible for sick pay according to the TUC's research. They are probably not eligible for unemployment benefit because they do not earn enough, or not regularly enough, to meet the eligibility requirements. There are also the self-employed, but I have touched on that already.

Q115 **Angela Crawley:** I am conscious that Duncan may want to come in on this as well, but I was going to direct my next question to Monica, which may give the opportunity to refer to the previous question as well. As Jill alluded to, in March the conditionality was briefly suspended but it was then resumed again in July. Given what we know about the issues regarding reopening of childcare and education settings, what more do you believe the Government should do to ensure that the conditionality does not impact on mothers in particular disproportionately?



**Monica Costa Dias:** I do not think that the welfare system is biased against women by design. In particular, as Jill mentioned, it is lone mothers who have access to the most generous benefits. What we have is a welfare system that provides the bare minimum in terms of protection, in particular for working-age families without children. This is not necessarily gendered in the sense that you do not expect women and men without children to face particularly different impediments to work. Therefore, they would essentially be affected similarly by the low generosity and the low amount of insurance that we have embedded in the welfare system.

However, women are obviously much more often the main caregivers at home for children, but also later on for their parents, and sometimes for their partners. Because they are also typically on lower wages than men, they are much more likely to be in contact with the welfare system at least at some point in their lives. Essentially, one needs to think very carefully about what amount of insurance one wants to provide for families, in particular when the economy goes through a stage like what we are seeing now where there are no vacancies being created and no job opportunities. We expect job losses to actually increase in the near future.

How do we support those who are in work, or who are now out of work but who want to go back into work? This is partly the functioning of the welfare system and the amount of insurance that it has embedded. It is also how it relates and connects with the care sector for children, and later on for older people and sick people, essentially to remove from all workers, but from women in particular, the very high burden of care that they face.

Q116 **Angela Crawley:** Do you have anything to add in terms of what you believe needs to change about the design of the welfare system in terms of reducing inequalities? Is there any more you would like to add beyond the childcare?

**Monica Costa Dias:** One of the big reasons why the job retention scheme was really needed was exactly the fact that our welfare system is so bare-bones. It was essentially a replacement for an unemployment subsidy that is more related to what people actually earn when they are in work. Particularly since the last recession, the role of the welfare system in insuring families has been decreasing slowly over time, and so it was really depleted.

We have arrived at this stage where there are essentially no job opportunities. The biggest change we saw over this crisis was the amazing, awful drop in terms of the number of vacancies that are being posted. There are essentially no jobs available for people who are losing their jobs at this stage. The number of vacancies that we are measuring is in the range of 10% of what it used to be last year in many sectors.



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It is very difficult for anyone who loses their job now, even if they have no responsibilities whatsoever, to find a new job where they can actually work. These people could lack protection for a long period of time if this is going to stay here for months, or even more than a year. They are facing long-term unemployment at this stage. If they are going to face long-term unemployment with the amount of insurance that we have available for them, then it could be a really dire situation. That is really where we need to think more carefully about what sort of support we need to provide.

**Q117 Angela Crawley:** I am conscious that Duncan has not had a chance to come in, so I will come to Duncan first with my last question. The Treasury Select Committee has highlighted the need for the Government to conduct a study to examine the adequacy of, and the eligibility for, sick pay. Do you agree? What do you think the Government need to consider most urgently regarding statutory sick pay?

**Dr Brown:** Specifically on statutory sick pay, looking at Jill's very helpful threefold classification, the level at £95.85 has been generally recognised to be too low. The fact that the Chancellor had to increase it temporarily anyway recognises that. All parties see the need to move that to closer to a realistic level to live on. A range of surveys show that the majority of people who are not self-isolating are doing so for economic reasons; they just need to work. The Committee has already looked at social care, where this has clearly been a major issue.

Similarly, on the £20 a week uplift in universal credit, we have had the welcome removal of the freeze on benefits, but nonetheless the level of unemployment benefit has fallen back to its lowest level for 30 years. Again, the need for emergency support, exactly as Monica said, highlights how threadbare the social security safety net has become.

The other key issue that Jill raised around statutory sick pay is around eligibility. There is just no logic for the lower earnings limit. Clearly, that discriminates heavily against women in being able to claim it. On the other thing that Jill mentioned about the self-employed, we do not have pension or sick pay the same way we do for employees. Not only has that been giving no protection or health protection, it has also been giving an incentive to employers to place workers on to self-employment because it is cheaper to them. We have the Uber case coming up to decide that issue.

The whole good work agenda and the issues of the boundaries between self-employment and employment are key here. The pandemic has highlighted the need for minimum rights and minimum support, including sick pay, across that whole employee population.

**Q118 Angela Crawley:** Would you support the concept of a universal basic income, for example, as an alternative to the different benefits that are available at this moment in time?



**Dr Brown:** How long do you have? There is a whole range of issues with a universal basic income. I was just reading a review of the Finnish experiment with it, which does not seem to have produced tremendous benefits on any of the measures that have been monitored. That is another question, but this issue of a more realistic safety net that can support people to live while they are hopefully supported to get back into work is the conclusion we are all drawing.

**Professor Rubery:** Just to feed in on that comment by Duncan in a way, there is a big difference between the very low benefits we have at the moment and moving the whole welfare system to a basic income. We need decent basic levels of benefit for those who need it in particular contexts, at least as a starting point.

The UK is world-leading in the sense of being the lowest of 33 countries that I looked at yesterday on the OECD for compensation of sick pay as a share of average wages. Looking at the EU itself, something like 24 out of 28 countries have a compensation level over 50% or more of earnings, not 20%. We really are an outlier and this really needs to change. Obviously, we are not the same as Sweden or whatever, but most people would see some commonalities with Ireland, for example. It is notable that Ireland raised its sick pay from around €200 a week to €350 a week.

I do not think we did raise sick pay. We just changed the waiting time. We did not raise the level, but all we did was raise universal credit by £20. While the job retention scheme was very positive and generous, those people who ended up on sick pay or universal credit really were not treated with the same level of generosity. It is a divided system. I would certainly argue that something needs to be done about statutory sick pay. The £500 for self-isolating for 14 days is an indication that we should be moving at least towards those levels, even if we do not move towards a protection of earnings basis for statutory sick pay.

The other thing I would like to mention is that we are relying on voluntary provision of sick pay by employers for the middle classes. I worry that, in a crisis, employers may step away from that kind of support and provision. We have seen employers step away from providing top-up pensions. It would not surprise me to see employers stepping away from providing the sick pay that most of the middle classes in the public sector have got used to. We need to have a more universal system anyway. We cannot rely on the employers continuing with those benefits because we have seen that that is not necessarily something to be relied on in a crisis situation.

Q119 **Angela Crawley:** The final point from me is that the Scottish Government announced yesterday a £500 self-isolation grant, which, akin to what you were suggesting, would support people who have to self-isolate. The indications show that many people are going to work regardless because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave or go on statutory sick pay. Would you like to see the UK Government introduce



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that at a basic level as well?

**Professor Rubery:** Yes. There has been agreement; there will be £500. It should be available to parents who have to look after children who cannot go to school either.

Q120 **Chair:** Can I just go back on something Jill said about retraining opportunities? Have you given any thought to the announcement made a couple of weeks ago about those who had not done A-levels being able to go back to further education and whether there might be a gender differential there?

**Professor Rubery:** I was not clear, and I have not been able to find on the web, exactly how people would be supported. I was talking about whether or not you could claim universal credit and be supported through retraining. Any development of retraining opportunities, second chances, et cetera, is to be welcomed.

I do not know the specifics of the design of this system to know whether it would be more likely to be taken up by men rather than women, or the other way around, but we need to recognise, as Monica has pointed out, that people will be on this universal credit for long periods of time. We do not want them to just sit there and only be able to take up the most basic jobs over time.

We need to support people in retraining and I do not think we have our systems geared to that in the UK. We assume that, if you are claiming benefit on grounds of unemployment, you ought to be looking for a job and getting a job. If we are in a world in which those jobs are not available, we have to rethink that.

Q121 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Before I go on to lockdown and testing, I just want to quickly turn to the excluded, who potentially are not eligible for any of the support schemes. The Institute of Fiscal Studies shows that workers in sectors shut down by the pandemic are disproportionately female, and anecdotal evidence has shown that those most likely to be excluded from the government support schemes are probably women: newly self-employed, employees of not-for-profit companies, people on maternity leave, freelancers, zero-hours contractors and so many others. Was this gendered impact inevitable? Have you seen any evidence of this? I want to ask Jill first, if that is okay.

**Professor Rubery:** In some sense, Monica is likely to be able to give you a more up-to-date perspective on the data, because I am aware that I am not talking as somebody who is collecting new data.

One of the problems we have is that it is not just women who might be suffering from these things; it is also young people. Sometimes when we say, "There is a probably for women", people say, "If you look at the gender breakdown, it is not so evident". This is partly because young men are often subject to similar problems around insecure jobs. If we look at people in mid-life, it is maybe more likely to be women who face



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these problems of insecure employment. It is not a simple gender story. If you look at who holds temporary jobs, it is overwhelmingly young people, but when you look at people over 25 or 30, it is more likely to be women. The problem for women is it goes on all through their working lives rather than necessarily being focused on the early stages. That is what I would say in terms of whether there is evidence on this. It is complicated to identify the evidence.

There was work by Abi Adams-Prassl and others showing that women were more likely to be furloughed or lose their jobs if they were on zero-hours contracts. There is some other evidence from Understanding Society that those who are on zero-hours contracts were less likely to be in employment in the early stages of lockdown, so there is that evidence. As I say, it is young people and women; it is not just women.

**Monica Costa Dias:** If I can pick up on the point Jill just made, that is exactly what we find. It is young people who are being mostly affected. They are, as Jill mentioned, more likely to be working on these new types of jobs that were created in huge numbers during this period of expansion of employment. That created jobs that were not really the most productive jobs, so they are low paid and offer low progression. That affects both women and men of younger ages.

What we have seen—this was first for men but now it is for women as well—is that younger generations are not only starting lower in terms of their earnings; they are also progressing slower. They are losing at all stages when compared to the previous generations who were born in the 60s and the 70s. This is very worrying. Combined with this shock, even the not very good jobs they used to have prior to the pandemic have also vanished; many of them have vanished. They lost their stepping-in jobs that would eventually hopefully allow them to progress and to move to something better. To be fair, again, we do not really see that progression has been going in the right direction lately before the pandemic, but we are worried that it is going to be even worse now. Yes, that is one of the main worries.

**Dr Brown:** UN Women has just produced a very interesting document in the last week of September. The UN have launched some analysis over 200 countries of measuring responses to the pandemic. They are looking at three areas: violence against women, social support and employment and economic security. Their conclusion is that, particularly job schemes, have been “largely blind to women’s needs”. Despite the gendered impact of the crisis, women and girls have largely been left behind. They do not score the UK in any of those three categories. Only 25 countries are assessed as having taken action to support gender equality in the three categories.

I would also relate back to the Chair’s initial point about training. My concern is more that, when gender is not put on the agenda of some of these new schemes, it is not taken account off. The Kickstart scheme is a



great scheme, very much needed to support young people, but, while the assessments of the equivalent scheme that was launched after the last recession in 2009 have been generally very good in terms of the ROI, if you look at the breakdown of apprentices, for example, in higher-paying engineering and technical apprenticeships, it reinforced the existing heavily male-skewed gender distribution.

My sense would be that there needs to be much clearer guidance given to the people who will implement these schemes to at least make sure the unequal impact is not reinforced. The money for these schemes could also possibly be used to have a positive impact and get more women into these areas.

**Q122 Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Monica, as we know, there was a clear delay in allowing sectors that are female-dominated to reopen. Even when they were eventually allowed to reopen, there were even further restrictions on the services they could provide. The clearest example was beauty salons. Barbers, which were fully allowed to reopen on 4 July, were okay, but beauty salons were only permitted to reopen on 13 July and were not able to provide their full services until almost a month later. What advice would you give to the Government about sector shutdowns in the event that we face any further lockdowns? From a gender perspective, would you advise them to consider or do things differently this time?

**Monica Costa Dias:** There are obviously specificities in the sectors that may allow safer opening earlier or later, which obviously I am not going to comment on and which, to be honest, are outside of my expertise.

What I can say with respect to sectors and allowing women to work is that it is not only that the sector they work needs to open or needs to opening at a certain time; the conditions have to be there for them to be able to go back to work. It is crucial that we understand that if, in particular, women have children or parents who need to be taken care of and there is no support for them to provide that care, they will not be able to go back to work. To some extent, that can be more damaging than not being able to go back to work because your firm is closed for a temporary period.

If they do not go back to work when other workers go back in to work, then they are, as has been mentioned here already, seen as potentially less reliable, less capable of progressing in their careers or as a worker who does not produce to the same extent that the other workers do. Therefore, they may be placed in a situation where they are losing and they are potentially the one being singled out for being dismissed later on, if need be, because of the lack of possibilities of participating in work in the normal way.

This is a different point, but the fact that the sectors are staggered in the way they are brought into action again and reopened will obviously affect the sectors somehow. If beauty salons and other sectors are open much later, their financial ability to remain open may be affected, in which case in the shorter term or medium term we will see many more of those



closing down, potentially permanently, which obviously will affect jobs in these sectors in particular. If these jobs are overwhelmingly performed by women, then women are going to be more affected.

In terms of bringing back the training scheme, there is a real need to think carefully about what sectors are likely to be growing the most in the near future, which we should be investing in, particularly in investing in creating the skills these sectors need. We have seen from research that we have done before that training is not always super-productive. When we look at women in work who are training, because they decide, together with an employer, to do some training on the job, this training is very valuable. Understanding what sorts of skills workers need, focusing our energies on identifying sectors that have the potential to grow and that need these skills, and developing training programmes that actually allow workers to develop these skills is crucial. We also need to be able to move some of the workers who are in jobs that are potentially not viable in the medium term towards these other opportunities.

Q123 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** I want to ask Duncan about the guidance on working from home. It has changed several times during the course of the pandemic, particularly for office-based staff. Some workers have returned to working full-time in the office and others have done so on a flexible basis. Others might have decided to work full-time from home for health or childcare reasons. The chief executive of the Chartered Management Institute expressed concerns that this might result in a tier system, whereby those who work from home are overlooked for promotions. What can employers do to ensure fair treatment between those working from home and those who have already returned to the office?

**Dr Brown:** Generally, the survey suggests that employers have reacted very well in terms of the shift to heavy home working and providing greater support for that. If there is a silver lining, particularly for women with children, the ability to use that support is positive. A lot of employer surveys are suggesting that.

There are two things coming out from permanent home working. First, there is some evidence that the health concerns are differentially affecting women, and therefore the need for employers to provide health support, particularly mental health support, to women who are home working is very important.

Many employers are going for a blended system. I heard the chief executive of BP say they would not be returning to the heavy office focus and it would be a blended system. A lot of employers are seeing that. As you say, there is definitely a risk of people spending more time there and then permanent home workers being left out of the career ladder. Therefore, in areas such as management training, clear consideration of the differences will hopefully see more men similarly working in this sort of balance, which should support that trend, hopefully.

**Professor Rubery:** It is important to recognise that we have had a very artificial sort of experiment with people working from home. Almost



entirely, people are working from home with people they have already met in a face-to-face office environment. The notion that you can have permanent home workers that will be as productive as working from home has been in this context is a mistake. It is very hard to integrate new starters, et cetera. The notion of people permanently and only working from home has been exaggerated. I want to emphasise that we do need this blended model.

I also wanted to bring up the fact that there is research that suggests that individuals—this crosses gender boundaries—have different preferences as to whether they want to integrate work and life or separate work and life, and the latter group will only work productively if they can separate out work from their other responsibilities. We do desperately need to give women the right to leave home and go to work, if that is what they want to do. Likewise, people who can work productively from home should have more flexibility to do so. The same applies to men.

**Monica Costa Dias:** On this issue of working from home—Abi did quite a lot of work on this as well—what we have seen during the pandemic is that working from home for women is not the same thing as working from home for men. Although they may be in similar jobs and doing similar jobs, we see women working from home—again, this is families with children—being constantly interrupted. The number of hours they have of uninterrupted work is minimal, while the fathers are much less likely to be interrupted. This is just a result of a status quo, where the child is more attached potentially to the mother in terms of support and being the main caregiver and just knocks on the door of where the mother is working to ask a question or for help with their homework or whatever issue they need to ask.

This has potentially important consequences for the activity of the woman and interferes with their working life in a way that may be damaging for her career prospects. Continuing to work from home offers a risk that this type of pattern continues and it offers a less professional image of working mothers than working fathers.

Q124 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Following on from that, I want to ask your views about the Flexible Working Regulations 2014. In their current form, are they helping or hindering gender equality?

**Monica Costa Dias:** I cannot comment on that because my research did not focus on that.

**Professor Rubery:** I have been looking at this across different countries in Europe as well as here. Most countries require people to work for an employer for a certain period of time—and that also applies in the UK—before they can request flexible working. This pandemic has revealed how unnecessary that is. If employers are able to allow some people to work flexibly both in hours and flexibly from home and the office, I cannot see any real reason why people at the point of hiring cannot be given that opportunity.



This is vital, because at the moment flexible working arrangements trap women into working for the employer with whom they have negotiated a reasonable working arrangement. They cannot, if you like, port that right to another employer. They may be in a job that is okay for a period of time, but then there are no progression opportunities. It is very difficult for them to change jobs because they may have to accept a full-time job with rigid hours and a rigid location for six months before they can apply for a more flexible job. This is an opportunity to revisit that. Timewise, the charity, has been promoting that. It has its finger on the pulse there: that is a really important change that we should be pushing for.

**Q125 Theo Clarke:** I have a question first to Monica and then to Duncan. In terms of the package of measures aimed at young people—I am thinking particularly of Kickstart, scaling up training and apprenticeships—how optimistic are you about improving young people’s future prospects, including pay and progression? I am interested in how the Government can ensure that both young men and young women are equally benefiting from those measures.

**Monica Costa Dias:** At this stage, it is crucial to think very deeply and seriously about how to train young people, in particular young people who leave education early, so those who leave at 16 or even those who leave at 18 with A-levels. We have seen over the past few years that their opportunities have really deteriorated. They are starting lower and lower in the job ladder, and they are not progressing as they used to. That partly may be due to the effects of the gig economy having been growing and the sorts of jobs that have been created. They can actually trap some workers in these types of jobs, which really offer no prospects for better opportunities later on. Training is crucial.

However, the evidence we have on the effects of training is not conclusive. Whether training has good returns or not really depends on the type of training we are thinking about. This goes to my earlier comments. If we look at the programmes of training similar to the ones that are typically made available, say, to unemployed individuals, sometimes they are classroom training but they are often not linked to a specific set of tasks that employers are interested in. Generally, we have not found that this training is very beneficial at all for the people receiving it. When you look at training where employers are involved, where they set the rules and they define what types of skills they need their workers to have, this type of training has been found to be much more productive and much more beneficial to the workers receiving it. In designing these programmes, the Government really need to talk with different sectors and different firms to understand what they need so the investment is focused on the skills we want to develop.

In terms of gender, as we mentioned before, we need to make sure that both women and men have access to training on different areas. We need to avoid compartmentalising the opportunities by saying, “For care you have women and in technology you have men”. This is, again, potentially



going to direct men and women to different professions and crystallise some of the differences we are already seeing.

**Dr Brown:** As I said before, the Kickstart scheme is very much to be welcomed alongside the additional money the Government have announced for coaching and support to get people into work. I saw those as very positive initiatives. The real question is about the scale of what we are facing in terms of both numbers of young people already out of work and those who are likely to be made redundant in the next six months. There is a huge question about whether there is going to be enough support and whether enough money is being devoted to that.

Picking up Monica's point on the training, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has a very interesting proposal involving the resources and focus from the announcements about the national retraining scheme and the national skills fund that we heard about earlier in the year. If you put those together, it estimates this is about £7 billion. Its proposal is to focus that on investing in low-paid workers, which, as we know, is predominantly a female workforce, and to target men with upskilling and reskilling into growth areas of the economy. That would be a very positive development. Our conclusion would be that these are very welcome schemes, but we would question whether the scale is significant enough.

Could I also comment on the previous question about flexible working? Reinforcing Jill's point, we have seen the Government's good work plan, and we are waiting to see an Employment Bill hopefully emerging soon with key aspects of that included in it. There has already been a consultation to shift the right to request flexible working to an actual right, so the burden of proof would be on the employer to show why someone could not work flexibly rather than, at the moment, an employee having the right to request but an employer can just turn them down. That is already in the parliamentary domain, if we get that Employment Bill and the Good Work Plan implemented. It is two years old now.

Q126 **Theo Clarke:** My final question is for all of you. Perhaps, Jill, you could answer first. What impact has the lack of attention to the childcare sector in the summer and winter economic announcements had on both men and women?

**Professor Rubery:** I am aware of the concerns about the childcare sector. I am not really aware that we have up-to-date information about what has happened to the availability of childcare. I know the IFS data suggests that, in lockdown, only 250,000 children under four were in childcare compared to 1.4 million beforehand. It had only risen a little bit before the schools broke up. The strong likelihood is that many of those childcare businesses that relied on private fees have closed down, raised their fees or done something. This is a major concern, but I am saying it is partly an empirical issue as to whether or not people are finding that they do not have childcare.



One of the problems in providing childcare is having it available when you get a job. Even under what may now look like the fairly rosy period before Covid, there was a major problem with the 30 hours of childcare, et cetera. If you did not have a job, you could not access it. Once you did get a job, you were in a waiting list to get it and so you could not start work. It is likely to create bottlenecks of women getting back to work, because they cannot afford to pay for it when they do not have a job but, if they get a job, they cannot find a place, if the infrastructure has collapsed.

This is not empirical evidence; it is just extrapolating from the situation before and pointing to the problem here. You really need excess capacity in your childcare system to enable women to get back to work. Otherwise, they are not going to be able to access childcare when they need it.

**Monica Costa Dias:** The other issue is the amount of time the childcare covers. For instance, when only 15 hours per week of subsidised childcare were available, we saw that this did not impact on the employment of women. When it was extended to 30 hours per week, women started to be more likely to be in work, if they were mothers of children of the ages being subsidised. Giving enough time for the mother to commute to work, work and come back to get the child is important. Otherwise, it really does not help. This is critical at this stage as well. From what I have seen—this is mostly from the data but also from my own experience—schools reopen and childcare provision is also again being given, but not to the same extent of time as it was before the crisis. It is extremely important that a wider range of hours are offered at this stage to allow women to go back into their full-time work or into the normal hours of work they had before.

**Dr Brown:** As Jill says, most of the evidence is circumstantial at the moment, but I saw one survey showing that one in four nurseries or childcare facilities either had closed or feared they would close in the next six months. Certainly, I have worked with two employers that provide workplace nurseries, and they have not been able to open theirs since the pandemic struck. There is a real question about the future viability of those. Particularly in the local lockdown areas, the support for the nursery and childcare sector itself is important.

Going back to the question earlier on conditionality for universal credit, there is an exemption for the principal carer on the application for universal credit so that they can only be considered for term-time working. In fact, a CIPD survey showed that a third of employers have introduced new flexible working regimes, including term-time working, so that is positive. In any of the local lockdowns, if schools are closed or if we see that nurseries and childcare facilities remain closed, there should be an automatic exemption.

Q127 **Chair:** If you talk to campaign groups like Mums on a Mission, they will



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always make the point that one of the big factors with regards to childcare is the upfront costs and the challenge that presents. Do any of you have any comment you would like to make on that? Have you given that any consideration?

**Professor Rubery:** My only comment would be that we have some of the most expensive childcare in Europe, so it is more of an issue in the UK. The 30 hours has obviously helped. There have been improvements, but I worry that the cost of childcare will go up more as a result of the pandemic. That is an issue.

**Monica Costa Dias:** In addition to that, the 30 hours is available for children of the ages of three or four, depending on the timing. That is already a big gap since the birth of the child. If mothers are not going back to work during these very early years—zero, one and two—they will miss out; they will leave their job. They will then go back to looking for a new job and starting again at the bottom of their careers. That is a big cost. Thinking about childcare provision in a way that is much more comprehensive is important to avoid the breaks in the careers of mothers.

Q128 **Elliot Colburn:** If I could pick up from Theo's comments about the winter economic plan and look at this in more detail, could I start by asking all the panellists a question? Was there anything missing, particularly in this discussion about the gendered impact of Covid, from that plan that would be helpful?

**Monica Costa Dias:** Again, when we think about gender, the main focus is going to be childcare. Having a proper policy on how to build up more care and more affordable care for parents is crucial to allowing women to work in a more uninterrupted way through a longer period of their working lives.

The other aspect that really needs to be at the centre of the focus of policy is how to create new jobs. When we look at the data on vacancies, it is scary. There are no new jobs being posted. If there are many jobs that are now going to be lost, maybe because the furlough scheme is now not as generous as it used to be or because firms are stretched too much to be able to continue operating, then we are in dire conditions for the near future.

Q129 **Elliot Colburn:** Jill, could I move on to you? Is there anything missing from the winter economic plan?

**Professor Rubery:** Yes, I will go briefly over the things I have already mentioned. First of all, there is no protection for parents or support for parents who have to look after children during school or class closures. Childcare has already been mentioned. There is a lack of a minimum floor to the job support scheme. For people on minimum wage, it is not really possible to live on 67% of their income very easily. We need to learn from Europe that you can actually bring in a minimum wage as a minimum floor. Most importantly, the apparent short-time work scheme



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that was brought in in the job support scheme actually encourages employers to keep on full-timers and not part-timers. That is a major gap in the system. That is a major problem.

I am not certain whether this is included in the winter economic plan, but, while the work coaches are very welcome, they have to be employed in a context in which we rethink the conditionality issues and provide more holistic support for people who are suffering these major and totally unexpected career changes in terms of how they might reorient their lives either temporarily but also over the long term.

We saw the rather crass advert about how a ballet dancer could work in cyber, as if that was an improvement. What I want to know is how people are going to get back to being ballet dancers in the future, even if they are willing to be a Tesco shelf-stacker in the short term. I do not want to see them forced into remaining as Tesco shelf-stackers if they have talents, experience and skills that they should take somewhere else. We need to rethink the role of work coaches entirely.

**Q130 Elliot Colburn:** Duncan, in bringing you into this, could I perhaps add on a question about the coronavirus job retention scheme and the earlier schemes? Given what we know about them, are there risks from a gender equality perspective in these job support schemes? If so, how can they be mitigated or resolved?

**Dr Brown:** I word-searched the winter economic plan and the summer economic plan and the Chancellor's speeches associated with them. There was no mention of gender, equality or inequality, and the only reference I could find to children was in regard to the Eat Out to Help Out scheme; children were eligible for that.

Stepping back a little, there is a real question here. If we are not regarding that as a significant agenda item, and if we are doing things like suspending gender-pay reporting because of the economic and health impact of the pandemic, that says to me that these are pushed as secondary issues. Even if there is no deliberate discrimination in the schemes, the risk that they are going to have a gendered impact is quite significant.

The UN had a special meeting on 1 October—it presumably has as many things on its agenda as our Government—focused on the gender impact. The Secretary-General said that we need a higher level of ambition to make the necessary changes on gender. My understanding is that the Scottish and Welsh Governments are having regular meetings with equality bodies and the major charities involved to ensure that any problems around these equality issues and specifically gender issues are at least avoided and hopefully baked into the proposals. We really need to see that agenda prioritised across the piece in terms of the risk of these policies having a discriminatory impact on women.



Specifically on the furlough scheme, as a number of folk have said already, it is early days yet on the research, really, but the fact is that we are seeing large numbers of largely women falling out of the workforce. The supposition, or hypothesis at least, that this is because of the challenges of managing their other responsibilities alongside of work in the current climate highlights to me that a greater level of support is needed in some of the ways both Jill and Monica have mentioned.

**Q131 Elliot Colburn:** Duncan, you mentioned the suspension of reporting on the gender pay gap. To expand on that a bit, as well as reintroducing that requirement, would you say there should be a requirement to report redundancies by sex and other protected characteristics? If so, is there any other data that we need to establish which groups, gendered or otherwise, are being most impacted by the recession?

**Dr Brown:** Yes, definitely. Again, there are already proposals being made in Parliament for that to be done. Employers rightly have to give advance notification of redundancies, and so at IES we have been examining that information. It would be relatively straightforward to get a gender breakdown, and possibly an ethnicity breakdown as well, into that information so at least we would have the data to examine it. At the moment, we just do not know and we are constantly struggling to get the data and look into it. The ONS has done a great job, particularly with some of their new immediate statistics, but that would be a huge step forward.

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

*On resuming—*

**Q132 Kim Johnson:** Good afternoon, panel. I have three questions to all of the panel members, and they are on the longer-term policy. What are the most urgent objectives or policy changes that the Government need to focus on to ensure a gender-equal economic recovery from Covid-19? Can you focus on short-term issues first? We will come on to long-term issues later.

**Monica Costa Dias:** To some extent, we already mentioned this. The main priority needs to be childcare and the provision of childcare in a more comprehensive way than has been done up to now, or at least recovering the same level of provision we had prior to the crisis. This is really crucial to ensure that mothers can continue to work during this period. In particular, in the event of further lockdowns or further social distancing measures being needed, the attention should be on keeping schools and childcare provision open as much as possible. That must be the first priority when it comes to gender differences.

Again, in the short term, as well, this is an opportunity to invest in areas that can create new jobs and redirect people towards careers that are more promising. That applies to women in particular, but also more generally to all workers. We need to make investments in sectors that are more promising or in infrastructure that is needed. If people need to work



from home, we need to make sure they are capable of working from home. Do we have the technology available, for instance in terms of communications, for everyone to be able to do so if they need to? There were issues before; we saw them ourselves at IFS, and I am sure other organisations did as well. We have moved a long way forward during the crisis, but there might be some chances for improvement there. In particular, these investments will be important if they have the potential to create new jobs, as I mentioned before.

**Q133 Kim Johnson:** What are the main challenges to achieving this, Monica?

**Monica Costa Dias:** In terms of childcare, schools and childcare places are limited in terms of space. If social distancing measures are required, one needs to think very carefully about how to do this in a safe way. Having enough people providing the care and having enough space for the care to be provided in a relatively safe way is a big challenge that schools, nurseries and other agencies have been facing.

How do we deal with it when cases of the disease emerge? If there is a focus on Covid, we need to detect it very early and be able to act locally instead of having to act in a more extended way. That is an issue that the Government need to work around to be able to keep things running.

**Professor Rubery:** The short term has to build on opportunities that have emerged to make things better in the long term. We need to build on the sharing of childcare that is occurring amongst parents, and we also need to build on this public support for improving the conditions for key workers, particularly care workers. The problems of the short term and the long term need to be integrated.

Let me say again: we need to protect jobs for parents. We need to both protect the jobs and provide income support for those who have to provide care. You also maybe have to invest in new childcare facilities if some have closed. They have to be provided ahead of the parents—the mothers in particular—getting their jobs back. You have to provide some support and retraining for people to enter care. Those are all important things. We also need decent sick pay for all.

**Q134 Kim Johnson:** Forgive me if I am asking a question that has already been asked; I was unable to make the beginning of the meeting. One issue with childcare that parents have at the moment is around the cost of the childcare. If you are a woman on a low income, trying to pay for childcare can be out of your reach sometimes. I do not know whether that was discussed earlier on in the meeting.

**Professor Rubery:** I certainly mentioned that we have one of the highest costs of childcare. Even when you have access to relatively low-cost or free childcare, the problem is that you cannot get it if you do not have a job. If you get a job, you have to join a waiting list to get the care. We need to solve that capacity problem to enable women who have lost their jobs to get back to work. It is putting those things together. That is why I am saying you have to invest in the childcare and maybe



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provide some short-term support for childcare so it is available when you need it.

Q135 **Kim Johnson:** I worked in the childcare sector in 1997 when the Labour Party invested a lot of money into the early-years childcare sector. Part of that was about building and developing childminder networks. Is that a way to go forward, Jill?

**Professor Rubery:** We certainly need to move beyond the “build, build, build” rhetoric, where we are only concerned with physical structure. What we are concerned with here is the potential collapse of the already relatively weak childcare structure in the UK. I am not an expert on the relative merits of childcare systems, so I do not want to comment on childminders versus nurseries, et cetera, but we do need to focus on that. Women are not going to be able to get back to work if there is no childcare available.

**Dr Brown:** When I wrote down my long-term aims and priorities, I was surprised to find out how much of it is already in the parliamentary domain and potentially not that far from implementation. Obviously, there is restoring gender-pay reporting, and I would like to see that extended not just in terms of the urgent need of redundancy breakdowns but also to ethnicity. Parliament has obviously had a petition about this, which very quickly garnered many votes.

I would also like to see consideration given to the ban on discussion of current pay in recruitment discussions. Many of the US states have this. Initial research on it is very positive in terms of its impact on the gender pay gap.

Your former Chair has introduced a Bill on maternity and pregnancy redundancy protection, which we have highlighted a couple of times as something that is really important. I would like to see that passed by Parliament. Baroness Prosser introduced in January in the House of Lords an Equal Pay Bill, which would significantly improve women’s ability to claim equal pay and progress claims, which is extremely difficult at the moment.

Finally, there is the good work plan, which was the Government’s response to Matthew Taylor’s report looking at exploitation in the gig economy. We obviously saw the Leicester case, in which lots of suppliers were allegedly paying well below the legal minimum wage in supplying Boohoo. As part of the good work plan, the Government accepted key aspects around strengthening labour market enforcement, a right to flexible working, a right to request stable hours and reform of the self-employment status. Those are in that plan.

My understanding is that the Government accepted those. We are supposed to be seeing a single labour market enforcement body strengthened. We are supposed to be seeing those in an Employment Bill



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at some stage. I would just say that it is really urgent to get those in. The pandemic is making them more urgent, not less urgent.

**Q136 Kim Johnson:** Moving on to my next question, what additional data, evidence or research do the Government need to achieve a gender-equal economy? How effective is the private sector in recording and collating data? Public-sector organisations are covered by the Equality Act and the public sector equality duty.

**Professor Rubery:** I am not an expert on the extent of data recording, and I would question whether public-sector organisations have necessarily done as much as they could do in terms of those recording duties. You want to know what the priorities are.

**Q137 Kim Johnson:** What evidence or research do the Government need to achieve a gender-equal economy?

**Professor Rubery:** First of all, we need to know more about what has happened to women in the current pandemic. There are very good initiatives, such as Understanding Society, which has been publishing a survey on a phased monthly basis to provide more data. It is very early days,. It is quite striking. I was asked to comment on why the unemployment rate had gone down in the north-west in August, but it had not: it was April to June, and it was an average over a quarter. This is really no good in this real-time economy. We need immediate information, not the quarter that ended a few months ago, to comment on.

I found it very frustrating. I rely on a few very good surveys, and some of the people who produce those are sitting here. It is actually very difficult to say what is really happening to women at the moment. The data is not necessarily there. We need more gender breakdown in what is being collected and we need more around the care issues. As we have already mentioned, it is vital to get more data on redundancies. I am not certain I am really answering your question; I do not have a huge amount to say on it.

**Dr Brown:** In gender-pay reporting, although a lot of employers were predicting that this would be really hard and really expensive, we saw that—guess what?—we have really good information now and our understanding of what is actually driving gender pay gaps and how to address them has improved massively.

As I said, we already have the petition in support of ethnicity pay reporting. Again, the Government consulted on that more than 18 months ago and have not responded yet, although they have now promised to respond by yearend. We need employers to report a much clearer set of human-capital statistics. The CIPD has quite a simple framework of recommendations on that, covering not just gender and ethnicity pay and pay ratios, which quoted companies now have to report on, but also numbers on things like zero-hours contracts, supply chains,



absenteeism and sickness rates, all of which we know will help our understanding of women in low-paid work and how we might best progress them out of that.

**Monica Costa Dias:** I would just like to add something here. Gender inequalities are a bit subtle, in the sense that you do not see them coming up very much at the beginning of life. When workers start to work, what men and women earn is slightly different but it is not that different. It is really a progression that does not happen for women as much as it does for men. Understanding why women do not progress in their careers is fundamental to understanding what is deterring them from getting to the same levels as men. This happens at all levels of education for all groups. It always happens.

To understand what is deterring women from progressing, we need data that follows them. We have a lot of very good data, for instance from Understanding Society's research, which was already mentioned here, but this data is always limited, because we never have data on the side of the firms. We do not know what happens in the firms, how these women compare with men who are working at the same firms and why they are not progressing.

Having data that really allows us to link the worker and the firm is fundamental. We have some, but it is not great quality. The thing that would really entice me would be if in the UK, like in many other countries in Europe, and the US as well, we could get a hand on this data that links employers and employees in a way that means we can follow employees over time and we can see what employers do and how they treat differently men and women or employees from different backgrounds or whatever other characteristics we want to look at.

For instance, in the UK, if we were able to link PAYE data with data from the firms' side, we would be able to look at many questions we have not been able to explore up to now, essentially because the information is not there. That is one resource that Governments should really be looking to making available for researchers.

Q138 **Kim Johnson:** That might come into the final question I have for you all, which is around the long-term future. Again, you might have touched on some on this already. What specific recommendations would you make to the Government—you have just mentioned one in terms of collecting data in terms of PAYE—in terms of achieving a gender-equal economic recovery post Covid-19?

**Dr Brown:** I almost answered this in the question before. My priority would be fixing social care, which is fixing the social care employment model as much as anything, as Jill said. As I said, we also need to progress and implement the good work plan, and specifically better labour market enforcement. It is predominantly women who are losing out there. 25% of cases lost in employment tribunals are never paid.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Professor Rubery:** One thing that has not been mentioned that I would like to see us building on is moving towards a more equal sharing of waged work and unpaid work. There is now a unique opportunity to build on people's experience of lockdown and everything to motivate people around the notion of a four-day working week or a 30-hour working week for people who have been expected to work very excessive hours and not to be able to contribute to care. Likewise, those people who end up with very short-hours jobs could extend their hours because they can get more support from their partners. I know this may sound utopian, but there is an opportunity to start that debate. In the context of new technologies, et cetera, it is important that we start thinking about how to avoid long-term mass unemployment and have a better life that is also more gender-equal.

We have not talked so much about care, because I know you have already had questions about care, but there is a timebomb there. This is not just in terms of the problems in domiciliary care, but the problem as to whether care homes will ever recover from what has happened and whether people will be unwilling to go into care homes or families will be unwilling to put people into care homes. Therefore, we need to rethink the model of domiciliary care so it is much more professional and extended. Otherwise, women are going to face another huge timebomb of having more care to do on the elderly side.

We definitely need to improve the pay, status and probably also the professionalism of care workers so they can deal with more people with higher needs because of this possible problem with care homes. That is another thing. We certainly need to invest in these sectors. As I said, the language of "build, build, build" has been very negative. Coupled with pubs and professional sport, the language of recent date around getting back to normal is very gendered language.

Finally but no less importantly, we need to go back to this issue of a better floor of income protection and job protection for people in the UK. The pandemic has exposed how weak our welfare system has been. That is why we have had to invent all of these other ways to avoid people having to go on to universal credit, because universal credit was designed to incentivise people to get off benefits and into work. As work is now in doubt, it is no longer fit for purpose, if it ever was.

**Chair:** Can I take this opportunity to thank all of the panel for their contributions? They have been enormously interesting.