HOUSE OF COMMONS

Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: DWP's preparations for changes in the world of work, HC 358

Wednesday 25 November 2020

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Stephen Timms (Chair); Debbie Abrahams; Shaun Bailey; Siobhan Baillie; Neil Coyle; Steve McCabe; Nigel Mills; Selaine Saxby; Dr Ben Spencer; Chris Stephens; Sir Desmond Swayne.

Questions 118 - 149

Witnesses

I: Hector Minto, Senior Technology Evangelist for Accessibility, Microsoft; Kim Chaplain, Associate Director of Work, Centre for Ageing Better; and James Taylor, Executive Director for Strategy, Impact and Social Change, Scope.

II: Carys Roberts, Executive Director, Institute for Public Policy Research; Julia Waltham, Head of Policy and Influencing, Working Families; and Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director, Women's Budget Group.

Written evidence from witnesses:

PCW0013 Scope

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Hector Minto, Kim Chaplain and James Taylor.

Q118 **Chair:** Welcome to this meeting of the Work and Pensions Select Committee. A particular welcome to our three witnesses joining us for this first panel. I am going to ask if you would each introduce yourselves, very briefly tell us your name and the organisation that you are from and then I will start with a question to you. Mr Minto first.

Hector Minto: Good morning. I am Hector Minto. I am the accessibility lead for Microsoft in Europe. My role is essentially to educate our workforce internally on the benefits of accessible technology and disability inclusion and also engage with communities around Europe to promote the investments we are making in disability inclusion.

James Taylor: Good morning. I am James Taylor, Executive Director for Strategy at the disability charity Scope. We campaign for the rights of Britain's 14 million disabled people.

Kim Chaplain: Good morning. I am Kim Chaplain from the Centre for Ageing Better. I am the Associate Director responsible for the fulfilling work priority goal. Our aspiration is to see more older workers in the labour market. Prior to Covid we had a target to see 1 million more older workers in the labour market by 2022.

Q119 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for joining us. There is a longstanding, substantial and well-known disability employment gap, which has barely fallen at all over the last decade. Ms Chaplain, I think older people in the workplace often feel disadvantaged as well. We are expecting large-scale automation over the next few years. Do you think this is going to make the problems better or worse? Can I start with Mr Minto?

Hector Minto: Largely we would say that the use of technology in employment, in jobs, is going to be a large benefit to people with disabilities. Of course, as with any automation, it is generally people at the lower end of the employment status who are most impacted. That would include routinely across the world many more people with disabilities.

There is work to be done on ensuring not just the employment of people with disabilities, but also the promotion, workplace mobility and lifelong learning—which I think we will come on to later—made available to employees with disabilities so that they can move up within an organisation, creating gaps for them in those entry-level roles. I absolutely say that there are benefits to accessible technologies in the workplace that will make employment better for people with disabilities, but at the same time we cannot ignore the real risk to people unless they are invested in and are able to progress within the workplace. I think both apply.

James Taylor: I totally agree. In this country disabled people have faced longstanding barriers to finding and staying in work. The employment gap, as you have talked about, has barely shifted at all over the last decade. It seems to be stuck at around 30 percentage points. I think the digital full revolution, if you like, has the potential to create lots of opportunities for this group who are out of work. There are lots of low cost or free technologies now available to support disabled people and to support employers to make the world of work much more accessible.

We have seen over the last few months much more focus on flexible working and other working patterns, but as we have just heard, disabled workers are typically congregated in lower-paid sectors, which tend to have temporary contracts and zero-hour contracts. Disabled people tend to be also overrepresented in areas like wholesale and retail, which have been hugely impacted by Covid.

We have quite an underrepresentation of disabled people in areas where I guess working remotely in technology is perhaps a bit easier to do: the finance sector, legal sector, insurance and professional sectors. I think there are some opportunities, but there are also lots of barriers and a recognition that we need job creation and job retention programmes to have a specific focus on disability.

Chair: Ms Chaplain, do you think automation is going to make things better or worse for older people?

Kim Chaplain: The first thing to say is we need to be careful not to confuse older people with people with disabilities. One in four older workers have some sort of health impairment that affects the way they work, but clearly as you get older the chances of having some health impairment increases. What we have found is that older workers tend to adapt quite well to technology and digital changes where they are supported, but often older workers do not get access to the training they need. We are recommending that employers are more proactive with older workers and we are testing out things like midlife MOTs to make sure that we see the take-up that we need to see. Definitely when people leave the labour market and want to get back in technology, digital skills and confidence with digital skills is an issue.

Q120 **Chair:** Can I make a couple of points specifically to you, Mr Taylor? Automation is going to require lots of people to retrain and acquire new skills. What do you think the Department for Work and Pensions needs to do to make sure that the training that will be needed is accessible for disabled people?

James Taylor: The most present thing is we have a Government commitment to get 1 million more disabled people in work. There is a huge risk that sectors that are most likely to be automated or have technological change are the sectors where disabled people work. We need to recognise that and we need to make sure that the Government recognises that.

There is work that Government could be doing with technology companies and with employers to make sure that jobs are accessible, to make sure that technology training on how to use that tech, equipment and software is made available and is made free. I think also that Government should aim to support young disabled people to gain experience of new sectors and new roles.

The disability employment gap, as we have heard, is around 30 percentage points, but that masks some quite significant differences among impairment groups. For example, people with a learning disability are far more likely to be out of work, and for young disabled people as well that figure is higher. I think it is a focus on young people, a focus on working with the technology sector and the tech sector and making those products available, and also a focus on working with Departments like BEIS and DCMS on providing digital skills to the disabled community.

Q121 **Chair:** We have seen evidence from the Office for National Statistics that suggests that internet use—this was within 2017—is significantly lower among disabled people than it is among the population as a whole. What do you think the reason for that is and what should be done about it?

James Taylor: Some of it probably comes down to cost. Sometimes it is quite a prohibitive price to get online and that is something that is experienced by many groups in society.

The second part comes down to education and training and support for young people on digital skills. We know from a recent survey that the Lloyds Banking Group put together that just 38% of disabled people have the digital skills needed for work compared to over half of the UK average. There is something there that we need to focus on in the education and further education world in supporting disabled people to get those skills. Even when they have those skills, recent research also found that around 97% or 96% of homepages from 1 million websites failed to meet the minimum standards of accessibility. There is something missing there around greater regulation of how the internet is made accessible to disabled people. I think we need to come from two angles, from upskilling people, but also from increasing accessibility of sites and pages when people can use them.

Q122 **Chair:** Mr Minto, what is your view about making the internet more accessible for disabled people?

Hector Minto: This is a long-held challenge across the world. One thing to recognise is that the number of people with disabilities using technology and living with technology is increasing globally. People's reliance on technology within society for education, for Government services, for retail, for all aspects of life, has massively changed over the last number of years. It has almost put a renewed focus on accessibility.

Whenever we talk about accessibility in this discussion, I would be careful to make sure that we understand access to technology, but also this

digital skill of building accessible technologies. This is a critical next generation skill that the UK has to get its head around. It is no longer acceptable to just build a website without it being usable by everyone in society. That onus has to be put on the builders of technology, the tech industry, people building websites, but also the people buying technology need to start putting accessibility much further up the list of priorities. Accessibility does not happen by accident. It is a deliberate action, so if you do not know if your website is accessible, it is not. It is as simple as that. In the same way that we make choices on the technology that we provide, we need to be listening to people with disabilities proactively about their digital experiences to then start putting the focus back on the people who build the technology.

At Microsoft we are looking at the part we play in that, the operating system, the browser, the productivity tools in the workplace, but we need to start influencing the tech industry at large to see this as a deliverable, not as a diversity and inclusion issue, not as a nice to have, but as frankly something that will slow down digital transformation. We will not be able to move to a digital-only service or an increasingly digital-only service unless it is accessible because a proportion of the public will simply not be able to use it and will stick with the old ways.

We have to start talking much more positively about accessibility as being an exciting deliverable for a next generation society as opposed to this strange burden conversation where we have honestly been for the last 20 years. I have worked with assistive technology in the UK for 20 years and the onus has always been put on people with disabilities to fix it for themselves, to make it work for them. The onus has to come back on all of us, not just the tech industry, but every organisation is a tech industry now, even Parliament. It is delivering digitally.

We have choices. We have choices as to whether we deliver that inclusively or not. It is not enough to put it on the tech supplier. It has to be at the procurement stage. It has to be in the design of the service that we are putting together. Whether we are a retailer, a bank, a Government, we say, "Right, where is the accessibility? How are we deliberately including people with disabilities?" That is also a personal value. Whenever you create anything, a document, an e-mail, you have a choice to make it accessible or not. Increasingly we have to put awareness out there to all organisations and all stakeholders that inclusion is a personal choice.

Automation may help some of that, but a lot of this is down to education and, frankly, awareness. I guarantee there are people listening today who do not know how a blind person reads an e-mail. Honestly, if you do not know how somebody does that, then how can you design around it? There is work to be done on empathy, awareness, digital skill and procurement here to make sure we are moving in the right direction.

Q123 **Debbie Abrahams:** Good morning, everyone. I am very heartened by

what Mr Minto has just said. I could not agree more. One of the things that Covid has exposed are the structural inequalities, including in relation to disabled people, that we as a country have.

My question was more broadly about what we can do to recognise that in the support that we give to disabled people. For example, we know that the Access to Work programme is currently only supporting about 32,000 out of the 4.5 million or so working-age disabled people. We recognise that eight out of 10 disabilities are acquired. Most people become disabled, so in order to ensure that people can stay in work, what do we need to do to make sure that can happen?

Chair: Who wants to start? All three witnesses are indicating, so let us start with Mr Taylor.

James Taylor: That is a very good question. I think you are completely right about Access to Work. At the moment that access is about 1% of working disabled people, which seems quite ridiculous. There must be far more than that who could benefit from the support that the programme provides. At Scope we want to see Access to Work reformed so that it can be used to purchase assistive tech and also modern technology. Currently we hear from disabled people that the scheme often precludes the purchase of modern equipment, which is designed with accessibility in mind, things like iPads and tablets and other equipment and tech like that.

We think that changing the guidelines so that it can be used to buy more modern equipment with accessibility features would give disabled people probably more of a chance to succeed in their job and move into more senior roles, rather than having to rely on quite outdated equipment and also having to wait for quite a long time to get that equipment in the first place.

Hector Minto: A couple of comments. Access to Work is an amazing service. In many regards we should look at other countries and what they do here. Honestly, the UK does a very good job. However, I think James touched on something very important. There is stigma associated with asking for support. There is a burden on the employer, a perceived administrative burden, I would say, to go through the process and all of these things just lead to the concept that employing people with disabilities is extra work and more of a challenge. We have to move beyond that.

The acquired disability point that you bring up, Debbie, is important. We have to make it much easier to find tools that support people with disabilities in the workplace. It should not be surprising when we can turn on captions in a video call like this. It should not be surprising if somebody is losing their vision that they learn how to magnify on their basic device. These are skills that need to be known by HR professionals, manager training. All of that I would say comes best when delivered by people with disabilities in the workplace themselves. It's about developing

a strong voice of disability in the workplace, and employee resource groups—I do not find it so worrying that people with disabilities are not accessing Access to Work as long as they are finding the tools to do their job. I think there are more people who could apply to get support from Access to Work, since we have to look at the administrative burden, but my gut feeling about this, especially when I see the numbers of people getting support from Access to Work and the type of technologies that have been supplied over the last 10 years, we are starting to see that the modern design of technology is routinely more inclusive and therefore there is less need to turn to Access to Work.

One thing we need to think about here is what role Access to Work is playing in taking a lead role about guiding employers about what is routinely available, as well as supplying specialist equipment. It is stronger on supplying specialist equipment than it is on giving people routine basic guidance on the tech that they may already have within the workforce that would make it accessible to that employee with a disability.

Kim Chaplain: We concentrate on the age group of 50 to 70 and what we see is a lot of people that acquire a health issue at that age. The most common reason for people leaving the labour market is because of a health issue. We would like to see more flexibility and we are encouraged by working practices that are happening around Covid. There needs to be some capacity and capability building within employment for employers to review job design and flexibility and to look at how that person fulfils their work at that point in their career. We also know that a planned retirement over a phased time is enjoyed by more people than cliff-edge retirement or somebody leaving employment very suddenly.

It is very important to consider the technology and the digital aspects of the work and the support needed, but also the design of the job and where it takes place. There is a lot to do in terms of reflecting on some of the best practices that we have learned going through our working patterns at the moment.

Chair: Debbie, happy with that one? Thank you very much. Steve McCabe.

Q124 **Steve McCabe:** Good morning. I want to ask a couple of questions about people's mental health. I wanted to ask first what impact the recent shift to more remote working has had on people's mental health. Looking a bit further ahead with the combination of more automation and some of the fallout from the pandemic, what do you think is going to be the impact on people's mental health in the months ahead?

Hector Minto: I can come in from a digital design perspective, if that is helpful. We have heard the message loud and clear from global employers and remember a lot of work with Microsoft is with major organisations working in multiple countries. Mental health has risen up the agenda, more so than any other disability, I would say, in this time

because people feel that they are not performing to their jobs, they are feeling insecure about their roles and they are almost self-managing themselves much more than they have ever been doing before. This idea that we can all become suddenly independent digital workers on a screen working from home, it is unrealistic that we were ever going to be able to do that without any side effects.

What that has led to, just to give you some feedback in terms of how we are thinking, is much more representation of that experience in the design of our systems, things like within your Teams environment you can now change the view so that you feel like you are part of a meeting room. You are not just flashing up different faces on the screen; you feel like you are in the room. We are working on Outlook so that it is monitoring your work patterns and giving you personal guidance about creating focus time, creating a virtual commute, creating that thinking time that we all need to be able to do our jobs properly.

It does push back to this concept of education again. How do we signpost people to best practices for remote working when considering people's mental health? It takes time then to go and learn how to work differently. As Microsoft would tend to do, we come at it from a problem-solving digital mentality and design ourselves out of the challenge. The challenge of getting information out to people and people taking some of those steps for good mental health practice in this new workplace I would say is a bigger challenge.

James Taylor: To add a point there, as we alluded to at the beginning of this session, for some disabled people—who are often in those low-paid sectors that have been hardest hit—working from home is not necessarily an option. We have heard from disabled people who are very worried about protecting their health from coronavirus, but also feeling like they are forced to go to work. That is inevitably having a knock-on effect on their own mental health and wellbeing in thinking about how they can deal with things like shielding, how they can deal financially with things like statutory sick pay when they are in a job where they cannot work from home that easily.

Q125 **Chair:** Presumably for some people, James, the opportunity to work at home is a boon for disabled people. Have we seen much of that being realised in the pandemic?

James Taylor: Absolutely. I think flexible working and remote working is something that lots of disabled people have asked for for a long time. The ability to be at home or come into an office, if you have one, for a set number of hours to manage your condition, being able to have this freedom and this flexibility at the moment is quite empowering. As we have heard from Hector, suddenly we have lots of employers who are very worried about how they are keeping in touch with their workforce, what technology they can use to make sure their employees are keeping safe, keeping well, and we have a greater focus on these products that many of us have been talking about and wanting to see for a long time.

Chair: Sorry, I interrupted. Steve, did you want to come back on that before I come back to Mr Minto?

Steve McCabe: I wonder if Kim had anything she wanted to add to that.

Kim Chaplain: I think the two other witnesses have covered that quite well. Some of the conversations I am hearing now, I think we are seeing things that are very good but there are the odd instances of people feeling bullied. I think that is in that environment where they have been asked to go back into the workplace, having performed quite well at home. There is some interesting dynamics that we will probably take a closer look at as time rolls on.

Q126 **Steve McCabe:** One of the other effects is going to be that people are going to lose their job or lose hours. Do you think there is any significant change we should make in the benefit structure to offset the mental health consequences of this?

Kim Chaplain: My background is DWP. I worked in DWP for 30 years. It is quite an interesting question you ask. We used to pay benefit on a daily rate and we moved away from that. We used to support people in a different way and we had a term that was called "temporary stop" where we recognised part-engagement. Now you are either employed or you are not. I do think we need to work through that. Universal Credit is supposed to adapt to that, but it is very punitive and it is very much designed for a tight labour market where there are lots of jobs. It is difficult for people's mental health.

We need to look again at that system in a labour market that has high unemployment and how that support works I think is quite critical. You cannot just ask people to look for work for seven hours a week under threat of not receiving their benefit when the job market might not be able to respond. I think there is a danger there.

Chair: Hector, you wanted to pick up a point earlier, I think.

Hector Minto: I wanted to pick up on another issue that we have recognised a lot with employers, which is this concept of covering. Many people with disabilities in the existing workplace are already covering their disability on a daily basis, particularly those with acquired disability through ageing. One of the learnings through Covid is that they have had to uncover. As they have all been forced to work in a particular way, specifically through things like video-conferencing tools, whereas they may have been able to cover for a loss of hearing previously, they have suddenly realised that they have to tell their employer that they do have a disability.

What that has led to is a lot of employers coming to us. We have a global disability answer desk leveraged by employers around the world to get support for their employees. What that has led to is a doubling of numbers using our global disability answer desk. Suddenly employers are recognising that they have 10 deaf employees that they did not know

they had previously and now that they have had to redesign that working experience they suddenly have to work out how to deliver that in a more accessible way and retain that talent within their organisation. I wanted to make that point that covering of disability is also a major issue.

Chair: James, any points on the benefit system?

James Taylor: Broadly I would echo what Kim has just talked about. The other thing that perhaps is relevant to this around Universal Credit is that it is digital by default. We have been hearing that there are groups of people, whether they have a disability or they are older, where accessing the internet and having those vital digital skills are sometimes limited. I am worried that if you have a benefit system that is set up to be digital by default that by its very nature it is there to support the groups of people that do not have digital skills, something needs to change. That is the only thing I would say about that.

I would highlight the work that the Disability Benefits Consortium have done, which found around over half of disabled people that they spoke to found claiming Universal Credit online difficult. While talking about online and digital worlds of work we need to recognise that there are groups of people who are analogue and who need support to get those skills and access these things like benefits.

Q127 **Chris Stephens:** Picking up on Steve's last question, the question I have is basically around the role of the DWP and its services. I will ask the panel what recommendations it would have for the Department to ensure that disabled people or people with mental health problems are not left behind. I am thinking particularly around how the Department could adapt its services so that they are inclusive to all claimants. Maybe we could start with James first.

James Taylor: Picking up what I have previously said, many of these services are now moving to digital by default. I think that there are a couple of things that we at Scope think the DWP could do. One of them we have heard about in a previous question, which is putting the voice of disabled people into the design of those programmes, creating almost like a user panel of disabled people to understand what is working and what is not.

Secondly, we think there is a way that the DWP could work with claimants and individuals to understand their assistive tech needs or their support needs at the point of claiming and make sure that process is followed through. Using that information, the DWP could develop almost an offer of digital tech support to help any disabled person as they go through that claimant process. Finally, going forward the DWP must make sure that any services it runs for disabled people are fully modernised so that they are not left behind, as mentioned.

Kim Chaplain: We very much mention the announcement we think we are going to hear today about a focus on 50-plus. A third of the working

population is over 50 and we would like to see a response more tailored to that group and therefore penetrating through to tackle digital confidence.

The other thing about DWP that it seems to have lost in the last few years is its relationship with employers. You used to be able to manage vacancies. Not only did you deliver a service to employers, but it was a recruitment service at the point of delivery. An upshot of that was that every local Jobcentre had a relationship with the employer and could discuss how that employer could fill their vacancy and refer them to sector skills, pathways et cetera. We have lost that or DWP has lost that. I think in one of the last inquiries somebody recommended that work coaches should be in a relationship with employers. I firmly believe that employers need a dedicated service that enables and helps jobseekers with a route back into work and also supports the employer when they take somebody on that has needs in the workplace.

Chris Stephens: Hector, is there anything you want to add at this stage?

Hector Minto: As I said earlier, the knowledge of the technology that empowers people with disabilities to access education, employment and knowledge of assistive technology is extremely low. Being deliberate about the training offered to people working at the front end with people with disabilities to understand the role that technology plays in that—and I am saying the tools that are routinely available—I think is going to be a major issue we need to address.

I sit on the business leaders' group for Disability Confident and what is interesting across all of those business leader groups is again a severe lack of knowledge of the role that technology plays in the employment of people with disabilities. When you sign up to be a disability confident company, level 1, 2 and 3, at no point is there any requirement on an employer who claims to be disability confident to understand the role of technology in the employment of people with disabilities.

There is something there in terms of the training and the resources available to disability confident employers, making sure that they proactively understand the role that technology will play. That is going to be a major thing, especially as we consider what society is going to look like in 10, 15 or 20 years' time.

Chair: Chris, can I butt in? We have a couple of extra points. I will come back to you in a minute, if I may. Siobhan Baillie wanted to raise a point and then Debbie Abrahams afterwards.

Siobhan Baillie: I wanted to touch on what Kim has said, because I think you are spot on about the relationship with local employers. In Stroud, because we are doing so much work on the Kickstart programme, those relationships with the work coaches and the LEP have been built, and of course we also have a Growth Hub. We are trying to build all that in and will be able to spot areas and help people with disabilities. I think

that is something that the Committee needs to run with and see how we can build once the Kickstart programme has ended and keep those relationships going. Thank you for that, Kim.

Q128 **Debbie Abrahams:** Thank you. I wanted to ask the panel if there are any lessons that we have learned from previous programmes, for example, Work Choice, the Intensive Personalised Employment Support programme, the Personal Support Package and the disability employment advisers and the Work and Health Programme. What can we learn? Some of these have been disbanded and moved on, but what can we learn from the ones that have not done well as we move forward?

Kim Chaplain: First, I think everybody feels quite strongly in the world of training provision that we should not tolerate the performance that we have seen so far for 50-plus. It has been not so good. There is not a lot of data that underpins why it is not so good. We are dealing with a very big project with Greater Manchester to look at best practice. In the meantime, what we have been doing is looking at programmes that have perhaps done better for older workers. When you look at ESF projects, the old European Social Fund projects that were tailored just to a particular client group, it seemed to get a better response. We are quite interested in having specialist work coaches for different client groups instead of having this generic response.

There are two drivers for that. The first is the volume of work coaches that will be needed because of the number of people that are going to need support. It is going to be huge, so to ask everybody to be good at everything very quickly is going to be quite challenging and it might be better to have some specialism in that.

We would like to see a skillset or a cohort of work coaches that follows different routes. The other thing that is quite worrying is that by the time we get to March next year there will be people that have been furloughed for 12 months. In the old labour market world we would have them sign on and wait for another 12 months until they got on to something like the Work Programme. I think there is something that we need to do about day one eligibility for certain groups, because they have been so far away from the labour market for so long, albeit supported by the furlough scheme.

Chair: Do James or Hector have anything to add on that, on Debbie's point?

James Taylor: To echo what we have just heard, that specialist approach is a good one. You only have to look at the benefits assessment process to see that often a generalist approach does not work in understanding disability and understanding people's challenges or opportunities. I think that is about a personalised relationship with an individual, a disabled person, having time to spend with that individual to talk to them, to understand their hopes and what they want to be doing in the workplace. That means greater investment in job coaches, better

training for those coaches around disability, but also bringing in more disability advisers and disability employment advisers. The overarching thing that Scope would say about all of these programmes is they have some form of mandation or sanction attached to them.

Our own programmes that we run are completely voluntary. They have very good job outcomes. We have seen little evidence that sanctions get people closer to work. If anything, it moves them further away from work. I think if there is one learning from all of those programmes it would be the sanctions and mandation part of it. Secondly, it is that personalised, tailored approach and having time to spend with an individual jobseeker.

Kim Chaplain: Can I come back on that? I think we need to be very careful about conditionality versus sanctions. If we take groups out of conditionality because of the way that the DWP and Jobcentre work there is a huge risk that they will be parked. When you look at the introduction of lone parents and some groups that were previously not subject to conditionality, they did better when they were brought into the fold in terms of job outcomes.

It is how that process is administered. It is back to my point about if the labour market cannot respond and the vacancies are not there, then a sanctions regime is not quite right. I am not sure how the Work Programme is going to work in this sort of labour market. I would be very careful about moving people out of conditionality just because I think they will get parked.

Q129 **Chris Stephens:** My final question is around claimants with mental health issues. We know that from studies about three-quarters of them can struggle with things like face-to-face appointments or telephone appointments and things like that. Should the Department look at adopting the Mental Health Accessible programme, for example, which the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute has put together? Are these the sorts of things that the DWP should be taking on to help claimants with mental health problems? Hector.

Hector Minto: I always come back to offering choice of access for people with disability more generically. If people find face-to-face meetings difficult, if people want to do things on their own terms and want to access services in their preferred way, that all comes down into that early design process. If you think about that level 100 information that somebody needs, we should be able to find that through bot technology, through accessible chatbot technology, to get people on the right track. It is then about that triage process afterwards.

There is also this signposting conversation or confidence of the DWP to say that it is empathetic to mental health challenges, that it has an understanding, that it wants people to be confident enough to come to them to share the challenges they have to get the service they want. Some of that is sometimes missing. I think it is that mix of getting people

up to level 100 and 101 information through automation, through good design, with the input of people with disabilities through that process, then the second thing is about sharing positive culture about engaging on the topic of mental health.

Kim Chaplain: It is interesting that you asked the question about whether DWP should deliver that service. I wonder whether it should commission that service and signpost to it, rather than trying to build that capability and capacity internally. It is a big ask.

James Taylor: Nothing much to add, except that it is important that the individual here is the centre of it. Whatever their preferred method of communication is, whether that is face-to-face or telephone—or even potentially in the future online chat—the DWP should be using that to guide how it interacts with that claimant. I appreciate we are probably quite a way off from that, but to us it feels like that should be the guiding principle for any design or redesign of the welfare system or Access to Work or any way that individuals interact with the DWP and Government services.

Q130 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** One of the most dispiriting experiences is to be told by someone that they have been made redundant and because they are in their 50s they are unlikely to find another job or will find it very difficult to find another job. They put that down, in my experience, to the attitude of employers. To what extent are they right or do they genuinely lack employable skills?

Kim Chaplain: There is definitely some bias, probably subconscious. We have a project at the moment that we are looking at, we call it the GROW project, which is looking at recruitment and bias in recruitment. Recruitment processes could be better and that needs to be tackled. There is also an issue about older workers and whether they need to change sectors. Quite often when somebody has reached that 50-plus age they have dropped out of training in their own organisation, so their skillset might not be as up-to-date as it needs to be. There needs to be better practice in existing employment. Employers need to change with the people that they employ and we need to see greater take-up of skills.

We need to move quicker with 50-plus people to move them into jobs as well. There needs to be a better assessment of their fit with the labour market and what they need to do through the Career Development Service. I had a conversation with the Career Development Service yesterday in the West Midlands and at the moment that service has been concentrating on young people and the advice that young people need to have in this labour market. That organisation is still funded for the old labour market, so I think it gets something like £45 to help somebody that is 50-plus moving out of a redundancy situation.

We need to address that. We need to look at that because we are going to get a lot of those people moving around. Whether employers are biased or not, the fact of the matter is our workforce is older. One-third

of our workforce is over 50, so we need these people to fill these skills gaps. Prior to Covid, our strong argument with employers was, "You need to get your act together because post-Brexit when the freedom of labour movement changes reskilling this group of employees is going to be very important to the national economy".

Q131 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** On that skills question, to what extent should we be relying on the Department for Work and Pensions to come up with schemes and programmes or are we doing enough in our expectations that people will raise their game throughout their working lives in investing in their own skills and keeping up-to-date?

Kim Chaplain: We need to do both. I think the adult learning change was very welcome, but if you are 50 and you now do not have access to free training, if you have a qualification above A-level—quite frankly, I did my A-levels and my degree in 1970 and they are irrelevant to the current labour market. I should have immediate access to the training I need to move in the labour market that is the present labour market. I still think there are some barriers to making the system work for everybody. We need to have a look at that and join up the system better than it is at the moment. The adult learning route is not smooth enough for 50-plus people.

Hector Minto: In-work learning is a huge trend that is happening across major enterprises across the world. It is not just about offering it, it is about mandating it, creating specific days for learning, creating mandated training and mandated training beyond just the core training of the job in terms of things like digital skills and all those other things. The rise of the chief learning officer, I cannot tell you how many chief learning officers I meet on a regular basis now. This is happening across enterprise.

The challenge is going to be democratising that to small and medium-sized companies to make sure that they can also leverage high-quality training. We published a report yesterday on the digital skills gap. That is where we are focused, on digital. We want to democratise that training. We know there is a shortage of people to do the jobs that we need for digital transformation across the world. We absolutely need the over-50s included here. The aim is to democratise availability to that training. How we source the mandated and the measuring of that training is something I think the Government need to take a look at below that level of major enterprise.

One other thing, of course that training must be accessible. There is no point in having that training unless it is accessible to people with disabilities, just to roll it full circle.

Q132 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** We have a huge shortage of labour in the care sector. Unless Hector can tell us something quite surprising, technology is not going to be the answer. What is the answer?

Hector Minto: Technology may be the answer.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Tell us how.

Hector Minto: Let me explain. First line workers are some of the least invested-in professionals across the globe. One thing that Covid has done has shone a light on the reliance we have on people working at the front end. That skilling is equally available to first line workers. We live in a world where first line workers have their smart phones—not all, and I do not want to be presumptuous about this—and people have access to technology themselves in their personal lives. This is what I mean by democratising some of that training. We need to be saying to some of our social care workers, "Engaging with your clients with disabilities in the community, part of that role will be to work on their digital skills. Part of your role is to work on your digital skills. We want you to access training, to see your client more holistically, not just in terms of the care, but in terms of their inclusion in society and their access to services". There is lots of work we can do with technology and technology will have a major role to play in the skilling and the digital inclusion of that much larger population in that future digital society.

Q133 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** Still, physical bodies are required to clean, cook and toilet their clients. There is a shortage of those physical bodies. What is the answer other than the blindingly obvious one of the normal market mechanism of making that work more attractive by raising the price that is paid for it?

Hector Minto: One thing I would absolutely bring up here is access to further investment in you, as a human. You, as an employee taking on that first line worker or social care role, it has to be more than just that functioning role. There needs to be that investment in people taking on first line roles. As I say, Covid has taught us that we need to be able to rely on people in those jobs to be doing so much more than just that simple functioning role, but we are only going to create an attraction to those roles if we feel there is something else in it for people, which might be an investment in themselves.

Q134 **Chair:** That concludes the questions that we wanted to put to you. Let me ask each of you whether there is anything else you would like to say to us before we conclude this session. James, anything further from you?

James Taylor: Not at this stage, Chair.

Kim Chaplain: Thank you for the opportunity. It has been most interesting.

Hector Minto: I will add one thing. I think culture has a big role to play here. We proactively offer disability training to every UK employee at Microsoft and over 40% of our employees have organically opted to take that training. People want to do the right thing. This generation coming through particularly wants to be inclusive and see the inclusion of people with disabilities almost as a social justice issue that they want to buy into. We need to grasp this. We need to give people the opportunity to be

more digitally inclusive, to be more empathetic of the experiences of people with disabilities.

I may be overoptimistic, but I genuinely think there is a generation coming through who genuinely care about these issues and want to do something about it. I would say that the design of accessible systems in society is going to be a future job skill that we need and is something that I think people will want to deliver on, but only if we, as a society, proactively go after it, building that digital aspect of society to be more inclusive of everybody.

Q135 **Chair:** What was your 40% statistic?

Hector Minto: In the UK we offer something called the Accessibility in Action badge. There is an interesting thing here. It is a qualification in disability awareness and digital disability awareness. Now, 40% of the UK workforce has taken that training without it being mandated, because they are getting good leadership messages from the top saying, "Disability inclusion is a value at Microsoft". From the very top, in Redmond in the US, we are hearing this all the time and we see great modelling of disability. All of our company events have sign language and captions. We talk about disability a lot. There is just this piece here about if we offer this as a qualification to people, accessibility as a qualification, people will go after it because it is one of those skills we are going to need moving forward.

Chair: Very interesting. Thank you all very much indeed for giving us a very interesting and useful session and thank you for joining us. That concludes our first panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Carys Roberts, Julia Waltham and Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson.

Q136 **Chair:** We welcome our second panel. Thank you all very much for being with us. I think you have been listening to the first panel session as well. Can I open by asking each of you, as I did at the start of the first panel, to tell us very briefly who you are and the organisation that you are from, starting with Carys Roberts?

Carys Roberts: Thank you very much for the invitation to be here. I am Carys Roberts and I am Executive Director at the think tank IPPR.

Dr Stephenson: Good morning. Thank you very much for inviting me. My name is Mary-Ann Stephenson. I am Director of the UK Women's Budget Group.

Julia Waltham: Good morning. Thanks so much for having me. I am Julia Waltham, Head of Policy and Influencing at Working Families, which is a charity about breaking down the barriers to parents and carers progressing in and getting into work.

Chair: Thank you all for being willing to talk to us this morning. The first question is from Siobhan Baillie.

Q137 **Siobhan Baillie:** Thank you for joining us. It has been very pleasing to see an almost continuous rise for women in employment over the last 40 years. Can you comment on that and tell us what you think might happen to the level of women's employment in the medium to long term? I will go to Julia first.

Julia Waltham: Others might be better placed to talk about maternal employment than me, but I suppose my observation is that there has been a big rise in the availability of part-time work, so there are more options for women with care and responsibilities, for young people who might want to combine work with studying, for example, but these jobs tend to be lower-paid. Research shows that for salaries below £20,000 full-time equivalent, 73% of those jobs are part-time and for jobs paid over £80,000 full-time equivalent just over a quarter are advertised as part-time. These jobs are often pay-as-you-go type contracts, so over two-thirds of people on zero-hour contracts work part-time, compared with a quarter of people who are in more secure employment.

I can go on to talk about this, but pay-as-you-go type contracts do not work for parents, who need to plan their childcare around their work pattern. We would like an effective ban on those types of contracts and for more jobs to be advertised part-time and flexibly as the norm.

Chair: Do either of the other witnesses want to comment on the prospect for women's employment?

Dr Stephenson: It is absolutely right that we have seen a steady increase in women's employment levels and the number of women who are economically active, not a term that we particularly like, because we do not like the description of women who are doing unpaid care as economically inactive, which implies that they are not doing anything within the economy. However, that is the terminology we have.

Prior to Covid, just under 75% of women of working age were economically active compared to just under 84% of men. What has been very significant over the last 10 years has been the increase in the employment rate for mothers, which has gone up from just over 66% in 2010 to over 75% now. The employment rate for mothers is higher than for women in general, probably because women are tending to have children later in life, which means they have greater attachment to the labour market when they have children and are in a better position to sustain paid work.

It is important to recognise that for a lot of women paid work means part-time work. Over 40% of women in paid work are working part-time, but also in work that is characterised by low pay and low earnings, more likely to be in insecure employment on zero-hour contracts, more likely to be involuntarily part-time when they would prefer increased working hours, and more likely to be in what you would see as bogus self-

employment, so people who would legally meet the criteria for work but have been told by their employer that they have to be self-employed, which means that they have fewer protections in the labour market.

This is particularly true for working-class women and black and minority ethnic women and younger women. We can see this playing out in terms of women's income. There was some research done by the RSA last year showing 38% of women said their job did not provide them sufficient income for a decent standard of living, for example. That compares to 24% of men. That is a very significant gap, and 43% of women said that they would struggle with an unexpected bill compared to 30% of men.

We have some particular barriers to women progressing in the labour market, specifically women's unpaid work, which Julia will have more to say about, but women do 60% more unpaid work than men. That has a knock-on impact on their ability to participate in the labour market. Particularly for low earners, the structure of Universal Credit creates disincentives for second earners, which are usually women, to increase their working hours and increase the rate of pay because of the taper rate and the amount that they would lose. When you trade that off against childcare costs and commuting costs and so on, they would be no better off in the short term.

Carys Roberts: I will not repeat what the other witnesses have already said. I understand we will get on to this in more detail through the session, but I do think there are some headwinds that could present a risk to the progress that has been made in recent years, in particular the fact that lots of the sectors that might be long term affected by Covid employ a large number of women, but also the challenges that the childcare sector is facing. In particular with lost income as a result of children not necessarily still going, that presents a serious systemic risk to the childcare sector. If appropriate support is not offered, that could hold back women and parents—but as we know, predominantly women—from finding the care that they need to keep them in work.

Julia Waltham: I realise I did not answer the second half of your question, which is about how Covid would impact on maternal employment.

Q138 **Siobhan Baillie:** I was going to come to that, so don't worry, I will bring you back in. I want to start with Carys. I know the campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed has done an awful lot of work to understand the impact of coronavirus on women and its findings about childcare, particularly to your point, and redundancies have been quite stark. I am very worried about the Government returning to pre-pandemic funding for nurseries in the New Year. I am interested to know from all of you, but starting with Carys, expanding on the impact of coronavirus generally on women in work and also about childcare issues keeping women out of work. Then I will come to you, Julia. Sorry to cut you off in your prime.

Carys Roberts: The others may be able to expand on this in greater detail, but essentially what we would call for is an injection of cash into the sector to make sure that it can keep going so that we do not lose that capacity because the sector has fewer children coming into it right now. That is what we would call for there. The evidence is clear that women do need access to childcare facilities in order to be able to take jobs and to stay in them. That is critical in terms of thinking through the long-term impacts.

In terms of your broader question, it remains to be seen. It is quite hard to look into the crystal ball and see what is going to happen, particularly now that we have the vaccine news, with the Job Retention Scheme and so on. I think that will protect quite a few sectors within the economy and it is good news. However, particularly in parts of the economy where we have insecure work, potentially off-book work, I think there are real risks there in terms of those jobs being retained. The problem with that is not just that people will go into unemployment, but that they might lose their attachment to the labour market. We know from the evidence that once people have been out of work for a substantial period of time it becomes much harder for them to re-enter. That is a particular concern of ours.

There has been quite a lot of welcome focus on young people in particular, but we should also be looking at older age groups, particularly as they are more likely to be working in part-time roles. I think there could be all kinds of knock-on impacts from this pandemic and from the Covid restrictions that could affect older workers as well. It is quite hard to assess overall, but I do think there are some particular areas that need to be looked at, including that picture of insecure work that might not be served by some of the schemes that have been put in place.

Julia Waltham: I wanted to say a little bit about Covid and what we see its impact being on maternal employment. As Mary-Ann said, women take on the majority of unpaid care and when schools and childcare settings closed it became very difficult for working parents, particularly working mothers, to keep working, especially if they could not work from home. This sort of conflation of working from home and flexible working was touched on in the last session and I am quite interested in trying to bottom that out, if possible. They could not work from home perhaps because it was just impossible in that role. Women are overrepresented in pay-as-you-go type contracts and in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, such as hospitality, leisure and retail.

They have more easily lost their jobs because of the nature of their contract, so they have no right not to be unfairly dismissed and very often their work has disappeared, which arguably was the point of those contracts. It just goes to show how brutal they are. I think the pandemic has shown that. They are less likely to have been furloughed. They also might not have been able to work from home because their childcare responsibilities were too great to do that. They may have been a single

parent with very young children working full-time. Furlough, when it was introduced, has always been and still is at the employer's discretion.

The point I am trying to make is because women have taken on the majority of care they have been less visible. On the Women's Budget Group—I am sure Mary-Ann will talk about this—there is evidence that shows women have been furloughed at a higher rate than men. As Carys said, they are out of the workplace and it becomes gradually harder for them to re-enter. We are worried because women have been less visible. They are first in line for redundancy.

Squaring the circle, I do not know if the Committee wants to touch on or look at trying to address women taking on the majority of care. For me, that is the basis of the problem. The DWP administers Maternity Allowance, and to get my little policy call in this, no equivalent of paternity allowance for fathers and partners. Men have been increasingly transitioning in the labour market because of how volatile it is and has been during Covid. We would like to see an introduction of an equivalent of paternity allowance for fathers and partners who might not have been in their job long enough to qualify for paternity leave and pay or because they have become self-employed because of the pandemic and so on.

Dr Stephenson: We are very concerned about the impact that Covid is having and will continue to have on women's employment. We know that women overall have been more likely to be furloughed than men. Our analysis of the HMRC data shows that in 75% of constituencies across the UK the majority of those furloughed have been women. We have done work with Tracey Warren at the University of Nottingham. She has been looking at the impact of Covid on working-class women and that showed that in April 43% of working-class women did no hours of paid work at all. Either they had been furloughed or they were on zero-hour contracts and had not been given shifts. That was the biggest demographic group.

As Carys said, those sectors that have been completely locked down, particularly high street retail, hospitality, travel and tourism and so on, the majority are female employees. Women are about 58% of retail workers, but that includes people working in warehousing, for example, who are more likely to be men. I know we are coming on to automation later on, but there is that combination particularly that the lockdown has increased the speed of a move to online from high street. That is likely to lead to an increase in jobs in some parts of retail, particularly the online elements of retail, warehousing and delivery, for example. Those jobs tend to be more likely to be held by men, at the expense of work on the high street, which is more likely to be held by women.

Obviously with the vaccine we are hoping at some point next year things will go back to normal, but there will be large numbers of businesses who have failed and women who have lost their jobs and may have been out of the labour market for some time and getting those women back into

paid work, particularly at a time when we are also dealing with the economic impacts of Brexit, is going to be particularly worrying.

On the issue with childcare, 69% of childcare providers anticipate that they will be running at a loss for the rest of the year and 25% of childcare providers think they are going to close in the next year. We are talking a serious loss of childcare provision and that is going to have a major impact on working parents. It is women in particular, because we know women's work is much more vulnerable to availability of childcare than men's. When nurseries and schools were closed men did more unpaid childcare than they have ever done before, but women did significantly more than that. The impact that that first lockdown had on women's ability to work was quite severe.

When we are thinking about ways of boosting the economy and tackling the unemployment that we are going to be facing, it is important to think about the sorts of people who have lost their jobs and the sorts of jobs that have gone and the sort of sectors where we can re-boost jobs, which is why we have called for a care-led recovery and a significant investment in social care. Picking up on some of the questions in the last session, in recognition of the fact that the same amount of money invested in care would create 2.7 times as many jobs as that money invested in construction, rather than build, build, build, we ought to be focusing on care, care, care.

Q139 **Siobhan Baillie:** Carys, I know IPPR has said that automation presents an opportunity to narrow gender inequalities. How can the Government capitalise on this? Also, how can DWP support women into emerging jobs post changes with automation?

Carys Roberts: We have done some work looking at how technological change is reshaping the economy and the impact that this is likely to have on women. There are different technologies that we need to consider here, so that includes automation, which is not just robots, but might be robotic process automation, machine learning and so on. It includes the rise of artificial intelligence and data and how our economy operates and it includes the rise of digital platforms. These different types of technology are all quite related. For instance, automation and machine learning relies on having data that could be, for instance, governed by platforms.

I say that by way of introduction, but these changes we know will affect men and women differently, because men and women tend to have different jobs in the UK labour market. Our analysis shows that twice as many women as men work in occupations that have been deemed by researchers to have a high potential for automation, so about 9% compared to 4%. We also know that migrants and lone parents, who are typically women, are more likely to hold jobs with high automation potential and there are some quite interesting age interactions. Young workers are most likely to be at risk of automation, but the gap between

men and women is quite high in older age groups. That comes back to that point about older women being more likely to work in part-time jobs.

It is quite complex to assess what is going to happen because there are economic factors in play as well. When you consider the incentive to invest in productivity-raising technology, McKinsey estimated that slightly fewer of women's jobs than men's would be automated. The evidence looks like the gap might go the other way in the next decade as manual tasks are increasingly automated. It is quite a complex picture. We think that it is something that the Government need to look at. We do see automation as an opportunity because it is through investment in technologies that we can increase productivity and wages.

However, there are some big caveats to that. One is that it should be done in a way with workers and their voices being heard about which technologies are going to help them do their job better, rather than increase output by as much as possible. Also we should be making sure that the gains of automation are shared. In the past when you have seen big increases in the use of technology, for instance, the Industrial Revolution, you see also an increase in inequality, in large part because the people who own businesses and the capital behind those businesses are the ones benefiting. We see it as essential that those benefits are shared, for instance, by ensuring that we spread capital ownership and driving up wages. We also think it is thinking quite creatively and being forward-looking about how we might use the benefits for a more prosperous and productive economy, for instance, by reducing working time.

I appreciate that is all quite theoretical. I do think when we look at these big trends, we need to think about level. We do also make some recommendations around making sure that jobs in the future are accessible to everybody, which I can talk about now or, if you would rather get on to that later, we also can do that. I think the key here is that we know that particularly in the high-paid jobs that are going to be created, for instance, in AI at the moment only one-fifth of AI workers are women, so there are some big issues in terms of access.

Coming back to a point that the others have made, there is always going to be a small minority of jobs for quite a highly educated group. To think more broadly about how automation could change and benefit our society we need to be looking at where there is going to be big job growth in the future. One of those sectors is care, so making sure that is a well-paid occupation and a good job would be one of the priorities. I can go into more detail on any of that, but those are our top-line findings.

Q140 **Siobhan Baillie:** I do like care, care, care. I might be nicking that. You might be seeing that coming up in the Committee.

Julia, I am conscious of time: your thoughts on how DWP can support women into emerging jobs post-automation. Also I would like you to expand on what you were saying about flexible roles. There are some

amazing campaigns like Flex Appeal. How can the DWP encourage employers and get more employment as flexible roles going forward?

Julia Waltham: The pandemic has shown how vulnerable women's jobs are in particular and in our view they need to be future-proofed. That means tackling insecure and low-paid jobs that do not leave you with any options if your childcare breaks down and so on. I try not to talk about flexible working without talking about insecure work at the same time, because otherwise I end up talking about flexible working for one swathe of workers and leaving another swathe of workers in more insecure work behind. It is important predictability around hours and wages is built into the system to make sure that all workers are benefiting from interventions to make sure they are getting more genuinely flexible working injected into their jobs.

Just to talk about flexible working and accessibility. There is an ongoing mismatch between the number of people who need to work part-time and flexibly and the low supply of decent flexible—including part-time—jobs and this often drives parents, particularly mothers, into low-paid insecure work because they are so desperate to get something that fits round them looking after their children. The Government committed to a flexible by default labour market in the Queen's Speech and we would like the Government to require employers to advertise jobs part-time and flexibly as the norm.

Obviously one of the benefits of that will be to support women back into work, but there are lots of things that flexible working could help solve. For example, on in-work progression in Universal Credit, you were talking in the previous session about the jobs market needing to be able to respond to people working two or three extra hours. This addiction that employers have to all jobs being 37.5 hours a week needs to be addressed and the Government intervening around flexible working at this point will help ensure that the pandemic's legacy is not just more working from home for the people that are able to, but something that engenders flexibility in all its different forms being unlocked in more roles so that people across the labour market can enjoy more flexible ways of working.

Earlier on Debbie was talking about this cliff-edge that women can go into in retirement, so flexible and part-time working is obviously a way of staggering ultimately retiring. It is also a way that fluctuating conditions can be managed. There are lots of different things that it could help solve so we are keen that the Government delivers something meaningful around flexible working and it is not just tinkering around the edges with the right to request flexible working, which is about retrofitting flexibility to the person as opposed to looking organisationally and strategically about employers designing jobs flexibly from the beginning.

Chair: Dr Stephenson, do you want to comment on the point about automation?

Dr Stephenson: A couple of things about automation and AI. I do not disagree with both Julia and Carys's points. On AI, one of the things that we need to look at is the way in which algorithms, particularly recruitment, can serve to disadvantage women and also members of minority ethnic groups. If you have this kind of machine learning, which is based on the idea that what you do is recruit the sort of people who have done well in an organisation in the past and that is done via an algorithm, you can end up with systems where women are excluded because the machine has learnt that women do not do as well in the organisational hierarchy as men. That has happened. For example, we know that Amazon had to scrap a hiring algorithm in 2018 because of the way it served to disadvantage women and we have seen that that also served to disadvantage people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The second thing about automation, particularly in the care sector, because automation is sometimes presented as a solution to crisis in recruitment in social care, is that we have to recognise that care is a relational service. It is not just a series of individual tasks that need to be performed. While automation might help with something like the scheduling of shifts, technologies can help with that. If you are talking about the care that people need, when somebody is having food delivered to them, for example, they are not just having the food delivered, they are also having human contact, which is vital for their mental health with somebody who can spot if there has been a deterioration in their physical or mental health and take action. That requires that human relationship.

When we are thinking about automation, we also need to think about not just the labour market but what sort of society we want to have. What sort of services do we want to receive? I noticed this in lockdown in my local supermarket where there are the automatic tills and massively long queues, particularly from older people wanting to use the tills that had people on them because that was the only person they got to speak to all week. We have to recognise that there is also something significant going on in a lot of jobs, not about the delivery of the particular service—in this case processing goods to be ordered through the till—but about that human interaction. That is something that is important to very many people.

Q141 **Chair:** Carys, can I just pick you up on one point? You said that McKinsey had suggested that because of automation the gap might move the other way. I was not quite sure which gap you were referring to there. What was that point?

Carys Roberts: It was the point about how women's jobs will be affected. If you look at the pure estimates of whether the tasks within jobs could be done by technology within the next 10 years or so, it comes up quite strongly that more women's jobs than men's jobs could technically be automated. That potential is there. However, we know that is not the only factor that determines whether automation takes place. Instead what matters is the economic choice that the company is facing.

Once you take that into account—to put it bluntly, because with women's jobs, there are plentiful workers willing to do them at quite low wages—the estimates shift a bit and it looks like it is quite similar numbers or proportions of jobs done by men and women that will be automated because there is less of an incentive to automate women's roles.

Q142 **Dr Spencer:** I would like to go back on a previously made point to explore it a bit more. My understanding is that the general direction of travel in terms of childcare responsibilities has been men have taken on more of these responsibilities as time has gone on. You pointed out that in response to the pandemic that has increased, but overall demands of childcare responsibilities on women have also increased as well. Could you unpack that a bit for me in terms of has it been essentially the direction of travel has gone backwards as a result of the pandemic? How do you see that going forward and what do you think we should be doing more to support men in terms of childcare responsibilities and sharing that out?

Dr Stephenson: One of the problems with this is unpicking exactly what is going on. You have a number of different surveys, some of which are straightforward opinion polls and some of which are looking at new studies. The IFS did a big study looking at 5,000 heterosexual couples. The pattern of who is doing what varies slightly depending on exactly what questions you ask. For example, one of the things that IFS asked was not just how much childcare parents were doing, but how much uninterrupted worktime both parents had. What that showed—this is couples who were able to work from home and had children at home during the first lockdown—was that over 70% of men's worktime was uninterrupted whereas about 50% of women's worktime was uninterrupted.

If you are asking who does childcare in a day, you will see the amount of childcare done by men has gone up significantly. If you start to break it down to whose time is being interrupted, who is working at the kitchen table and home educating their kids and who is able to shut themselves in the study, then women are more likely to have uninterrupted worktime.

In terms of shifting that, we know that there is strong public desire for that to happen. We did some polling for our commission on a gender equal economy that showed the majority of men, as well as women, wanted support from Government to allow them to play a bigger role in looking after children. The key thing is leave provision when children are born because that sets a framework about who is responsible.

If you have a situation where men have two weeks paternity leave and women have a year's maternity leave, even though some of that is transferable, the way transferable maternity leave has been set up we know is not effective in terms of encouraging men to take more leave. We also know that those countries that have developed a model where there is a dedicated significant period of leave for fathers, a daddy

month, a daddy three months on a use it or lose it basis that is paid at a reasonable level, men's involvement in childcare when they have a very small baby goes up significantly.

That does set the pattern later on in life because if you are involved from the beginning and you are involved as an equal partner rather than an assistant who fits in round the edges, then you are more likely to carry on staying involved. Scandinavian countries have also shown that if relationships break down, fathers who took leave when they had new babies were more likely to stay involved in their children's lives than fathers who did not. It has a lifelong impact over the children's life course.

Julia Waltham: I am so happy you asked that question. We did some research a couple of years ago that showed that fathers are increasingly downshifting at work, they are not taking promotions because they have an appetite to share care more equally within their families. What we wanted to show when we talked about that research is that there is a danger that the same thing will happen with fathers as has happened with mothers around the motherhood penalty. There is evidence that fathers are doing more childcare during Covid. Women are still doing the most and they are also more likely to have had their hours disrupted, to flex their hours around their work during Covid to look after children. I am happy to send that evidence I have around fathers doing more to the Committee.

The other thing to say is Working Families runs a legal advice service for parents and carers on a low income and to support them if they have any issues at work. What we have seen anecdotally is an assumption among employers that women are doing most of the childcare too. What that means is that men are not being supported to do that.

Just to echo what Mary-Ann said, we have a system of leave and pay in this country that does not support fathers and partners' aspirations. Shared parental leave is a brilliant opportunity for fathers and partners to be able to do that, but very often issues around ineligibility and it being poorly paid preclude fathers and partners from using it. Given that fathers are doing more childcare since the onset of the pandemic, the case for better leave entitlements for them has never been stronger. We are calling for a reformed and properly paid parental leave and paid framework that includes 12 weeks of non-transferable leave for fathers and partners as a way of resetting that journey that mothers have towards being the unpaid carers and fathers and partners being the breadwinners. Again, I am happy to share more detail of that with the Committee.

The DWP administers maternity allowance. A quick win for this Government could be to introduce an equivalent of paternity allowance so that fathers whose employment has been affected by Covid still have some chance of taking some leave in their baby's first year. There is no

equivalent of maternity allowance for self-employed fathers or fathers that have just started a new job. The model was already there so that would be my urgent call.

Q143 **Dr Spencer:** Thank you, that is helpful. I look forward to the further evidence that you have offered to send through. A similar but slightly different topic: what about people who have broader caring responsibilities and the impact of working from home? Has that been helping people? Has it been problematic? How has that happened and how do you see the future going there?

Julia Waltham: It is not rocket science, but the main ways that parents and carers have been working and have obviously adapted to the pandemic is that lots of them have had the opportunity to work from home. But it is being less widely reported that a lot of parents, particularly mothers, have had the autonomy and the opportunity to flex their hours around looking after their children, which sounds great, but if you think about it in the context of schools and childcare settings closing has often been not particularly enjoyable for working parents at home that have been required to home school as well as deliver on work projects and so on. A lot of the wellbeing benefits that you would expect to see from being able to work more remotely and enjoying more autonomy around your hours have been negated by the fact that it has been stressful, particularly during the first lockdown for a lot of parents and carers.

Another thing I wanted to mention is that when we have spoken to parents and carers a lot have mentioned that because they have been attending meetings remotely—and everyone is doing that during the pandemic—they found it has helped level the playing field for them. One parent said to us, "It is the first time I have ever felt equal at work because everyone else is remote as well". There have been some benefits. Again, it is important to note that parents that we have spoken to, the majority do not want to see a shift to working entirely from home.

What they have enjoyed during the pandemic is the autonomy to be able to do that and the autonomy to be able to flex their hours as well. The other thing to say is that remote working has helped a lot of working parents be able to keep the show on the road. But as I talked about at the beginning, a lot of others that have not been able to do that because of their childcare responsibilities or because their job simply did not allow it, that is where those parents' work arrangements have unravelled. It is important when we talk about flexible working going forward that we are not just talking about home working. We are talking about all the different kinds of flexibility that can be unlocked in all different kinds of roles.

Dr Stephenson: One of the things that is important to recognise is that large numbers of people have not been able to work at home during the pandemic and particularly lower-paid workers have been less likely to be able to work at home during the pandemic. That affects not just parents

but other carers, people who have care and responsibilities for an older or disabled relative, for example. At the same time, particularly people who were combining supporting and caring for another relative with some homecare coming in during the pandemic, they may have decided that they did not want to take the risk of carers coming into the home because obviously you have carers moving between multiple homes and that is a vector of infection. They may not have been able to get the support they needed because carers were off sick or shielding.

The level of demand for care on unpaid carers has gone up significantly. While home working and flexible working has helped for some, there are a lot of jobs where home working is not possible. Some of those people have been furloughed and other people have been key workers so have been under immense pressure of both key workers in front-line roles and providing unpaid care.

The concerns that I mentioned earlier about potential closures in the childcare sector also apply to the adult social care sector, where we have seen similar warnings of potential failures of social care providers. We have already seen prior to Covid some failures of some big social care change. The structure of the sector is unsustainable. It depends on people who are paying privately for care cross-subsidising those people whose care is publicly provided because the level of payment that is attached to public provision is not sufficient to meet the costs of that care, which means that, for example, families are deciding or individuals are deciding not to go into care homes because—understandably at the moment—they are seen as a risky situation. There is also the fear that you would not be able to see a loved one for months on end. That means that the occupancy of care homes is going down, which means that those care homes are in danger of failing. Again, that will have a significant impact obviously on those needing care and workers in the sector, but also on unpaid carers who are combining a bit of care around support.

Chair: We are going to need to speed up a bit to get through the remaining points.

Q144 **Shaun Bailey:** To pick up a bit further on this point around additional carers, as we know, about 6,000 people a day are taking on additional care and responsibilities and often this starts with something quite small, or what would be seen as quite small, and escalates quite quickly. I am wondering, particularly in terms of employers offering that flexibility, where that threshold needs to sit. Certainly from the feedback I am finding, these things seem to snowball in terms of the responsibilities people are taking on and in terms of the support that employees might try to seek.

Sometimes the difficulty is getting the employer to recognise the severity of the effect of that additional care responsibility. What ways can we ensure that people with additional care responsibilities are not parked out of the way and we get more recognition for the fact that this is not just, boom, something happens, but is a gradual process that develops over

time?

Carys Roberts: I would have a brief comment, which is possibly the way to approach this is to think about flexible working as needing to be the norm. At the moment we have a norm of fixed hours and it does not offer that flexibility for where, as you say, there might be a small amount of care and responsibilities that then increases with time. It is not just about trying to achieve a more gender-equal split of care and responsibilities, but flexible working as default and making that a requirement of jobs advertised could also enable more employees to be able to use their time flexibly and combine both care and responsibilities with work.

Dr Stephenson: That is important. What we need is a recognition that not just do we all need care at some point in our lives, but most of us will end up providing care, whether it is for children or for a partner or an elderly relative. Therefore we need to have a model of worker carers rather than separating out primary earners and primary carers to recognise that we all probably have to do a bit of both at different points and that we need a workplace culture that recognises that and, as Carys says, has flexible by default built in.

Q145 **Shaun Bailey:** In regards to home working, in my constituency we certainly noticed during the pandemic that there is a massive digital divide that has impacted particularly the most vulnerable and those in areas like mine with massive levels of deprivation. Clearly home working has been a tool to allow that flexibility. It is not the only one that is there, clearly. But if there is an attempt to try to roll that out a bit more, what more can the Government do in that employment space to ensure that digital divide is conquered to allow more access to home working? Notwithstanding job-specific requirements that allow people that, there is clearly a wider issue here about access to digital and to internet access and so on.

Carys Roberts: That is an important point and it also interacts with the care and responsibilities because if, for instance, you have three children and they all need to be logging into lessons because they are self-isolating and you only have one computer, can you do your work? For some people that is going to be extremely challenging. I do not have the details in front of me, but I believe some countries are looking at—it might be Spain—requirements on employers to provide equipment and faster broadband speeds. I would look at the requirements pushing employers to enable their staff to do their job in terms of narrowing that digital access divide.

Briefly, on another issue that we have not talked about much, when we looked at this issue through our automation work and we spoke with people with carer responsibilities, they saw remote working as a double-edged sword, as boundaries between work and non-working life can become blurred and lead to an "always on" culture. The other provision, the other side of this, is looking at when the employee has the right to switch off and the right to push back. For instance, potentially looking at

what has been happening in France in terms of the provisions against sending and requiring responses to e-mails after working hours would be another aspect to look at.

Julia Waltham: Following on from Carys's point about the right to switch off, one thing that has always been a significant problem for working parents has been their job has been completely unwieldy and not being human-sized enough to be able to be done in 35 hours a week or 21 hours a week. Our policy around advertising for part-time and flexible by default would we think engender a culture among employees where they are thinking about the ways that jobs are designed. Designing them properly to be done in the hours allocated to them will go some way towards mitigating that and also perhaps some way towards unlocking more jobs for more people.

Dr Stephenson: One of the reasons why there is some resistance from employers to part-time working is because they know that part-time workers will probably want to work the hours that they are paid for whereas there is an expectation on full-time workers that they work very many more than the hours that they pay for. That long-hours culture is something that needs to be challenged.

In terms of not having to respond to e-mails out of office hours, that makes sense. Sending e-mails out of office hours acts against flexibility. I know plenty of us that end up working early in the morning or late in the evening around home schooling. You just have to have a message in your e-mail signature that says, "I do not expect you to respond to this outside your working hours, but sometimes I do have to send e-mails late at night because I have small children".

Q146 **Nigel Mills:** Can I take us back to the issue of automation and the impact it might have? The data show that young people are likely to be most heavily affected if their role is subject to automation or at least their first job perhaps is automated. Any thoughts on the scale of that problem and what we ought to do about it?

Carys Roberts: If you look directly at the data, it is certainly true that young people face a much higher risk of automation in their jobs. That is because they are doing the kinds of occupations that come up with a score that suggests they are likely to be automated. To give you an indication of the kind of jobs that is, and to illustrate my point that they will not necessarily be automated, it includes things like retail workers, hospitality workers, kitchen and catering staff and bar staff. I do believe some of that will be automated, but so long as there are lots of young people looking for jobs and they are willing to take insecure jobs, it is not necessarily that that is going to happen extremely quickly.

What is critical—particularly at the moment, given that we know that we could have over 600,000 young people unemployed in the coming months—is that we make sure that no young person is left out of the labour market or education for a long time, but instead that we have a

guarantee that they can have either a job or they can study. That will set them on a path to get good work in future and not necessarily stay in those kind of insecure more casual jobs, but to get a career path on the go.

Dr Stephenson: I agree with Carys.

Chair: That is the brevity we are after.

Julia Waltham: Just to wave my flexible working flag, obviously if employers are thinking in a more strategic way about where work can be done from, it can help with that levelling up and creating nationwide opportunities for young people, jobs that can be done other than in London.

Q147 **Nigel Mills:** The challenge then is to try to spot who might have a problem before they have it and get them the training or support they need before they get totally disillusioned. Is that a fair summary of what the DWP should be trying to do?

Carys Roberts: If I can just come back on that because it is an important point. The design of the schemes for young people so far in the Kickstart Scheme is to wait for them to be unemployed for a certain amount of time before they get the support. For me, that is the wrong way round. We know that young people are going to be facing challenges, we know there will not be enough jobs for them and we need to be stepping in much sooner before they have that long period of unemployment.

The other thing that we have proposed and want to see is a training scheme while people are on furlough or out of work. If they cannot currently do their job could we use that time to put them in training through a job training scheme, which means that they could then go on to something else if that job does not come back. Those are the sorts of things that we need to be looking at.

Dr Stephenson: Briefly, the Young Women's Trust has done some interesting work on barriers to the labour market, particularly for young women. This was obviously pre-Covid. Childcare was one of the issues, but also access to transport was another big issue. One of the issues with the move from high street retail to online retail is that the jobs available connected with online retail in warehousing jobs are often out of town and not necessarily accessible by public transport. That can be a major barrier for people being able to take up those jobs.

Q148 **Chris Stephens:** Carys has answered my question somewhat. Is there any more that DWP can do? I am conscious of the fact that companies will pay off younger people for financial reasons. For example, redundancy payments for young people, particularly under 21, are a lot less than it is for older workers. Obviously young people are primarily employed in hospitality and the gig economy. Carys has given us a good answer about early intervention. Is there any more that you think DWP

could do that we could recommend to the Department?

Dr Stephenson: One of the things the Department has to do is ensure that any scheme for young people is properly gendered, that it recognises that the majority of the young people who are likely to be losing jobs are young women and that there are particular barriers to their employment that need to be recognised when you are devising a scheme to support them. Quite often you have a scheme for young people here and then maybe a scheme for lone parents that will take into account the fact that they are parents, but a lot of young workers are also parents or carers for older people. All of those things need to be taken into account.

Q149 **Chris Stephens:** Is there something specifically, Dr Stephenson? I am thinking about young BAME workers as well.

Dr Stephenson: Absolutely. One of the things is recognising who is more vulnerable in terms of job losses and we know that black, Asian and minority ethnic people are more likely to be working in some of the sectors where there are likely to be job losses, but also to recognise racism in the labour market and racism in education systems for some communities means lower levels of qualifications. To have specific training as part of that would be very important.

Julia Waltham: It was touched on in the earlier session, that sort of partnership between Jobcentre Plus and the local economy and local employers. That is an opportunity for the DWP, so that dialogue between the local Jobcentre Plus and local employers in terms of creating those opportunities and those part-time quality permanent jobs and part-time and flexible job opportunities could be something the DWP could do. I know there are issues around childcare payments in Universal Credit and deposits required for nurseries. There are lots of things to do particularly to enable young parents to be able to progress in work.

Carys Roberts: Very briefly, we have quite detailed recommendations on how to support young people, which I can forward on to the Committee. It does include the DWP requirements for benefit claimants, making sure that we reduce some of that conditionality or shape it in such a way that young people do see education as an option as well because I do not think we will create enough jobs to fill the gap that Covid has created. It would be sensible for those young people to be investing in their futures through training and education, not just necessarily a work-first approach.

Chair: That concludes the questions we wanted to put to you this morning. Thank you all very much. You have given us a very interesting session and lots to think about. If there are some other things—and you have mentioned some things that you will send through to us—please do send those through. We will be very interested to see those. Thank you all very much for joining us.