



Home-based Working Committee

Corrected oral evidence

Monday 10 March 2025

3.20 pm

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Members present: Baroness Scott of Needham Market (The Chair); Lord Farmer; Baroness Featherstone; Lord Fink; Baroness Freeman of Steventon; Lord Fuller; Baroness Manzoor; Lord Monks; Baroness Nye; Lord Parker of Minsmere; Baroness Watkins of Tavistock.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 11 – 24

Witnesses

I: Amy Butterworth, Consultancy Director, Timewise; Dr Jess Elmore, Head of Employment and Better Work, Learning and Work Institute; Amy Price, Director and Head of Practice, Public First.



Examination of witnesses

Amy Butterworth, Dr Jess Elmore and Amy Price.

Q11 The Chair: Good afternoon and welcome to the Select committee on working from home. It is very good to see you, our second panel of witnesses for this afternoon. I am going to kick off with the first question. Please do not feel you all have to answer every question; go with where you are comfortable.

Where I really wanted to start is thinking about the experience of people working from home. What evidence do we have that that experience is in some way conditioned by various matters such as gender, age, or the circumstances in which you are living, thinking about the impact on social lives, caring responsibilities, and so on?

Amy Butterworth: Maybe if I talk about women to start, and on a related note, carers, because obviously the majority of unpaid carers in our country are women. In general, there is evidence to suggest that hybrid working seems to be an enabler of greater equality for women to access and progress in work. A study—a big survey of female workers—was released last week by the International Workplace Group, and 67% said they felt that.

But there are risks around those same elements of promotions and career advancement. While continuing to offer hybrid and remote work can enable women to stay in the workforce and potentially progress, if the main people using those policies are women, there is an othering and a stigma that becomes attached to that that could actually lead to a detriment to that same group. It is really about making sure it is inclusive, and if we can encourage organisations to make it acceptable for everybody—those in senior roles, men as well as women, carers as well as those without caring responsibilities—that is when you are really going to see the benefit for those groups.

Amy Price: I can probably segue quite nicely from that. I come from Public First, which conducted a large-scale hybrid work commission and did a series of public opinion polls, focus groups and some economic modelling looking at the impact of hybrid work on the UK economy. We also found it is very much a mixed blessing for parents—particularly women—because the flexibility allows them to balance work with those caring responsibilities, but it also adds to that mental load of that expectation of juggling. We found that 69% of parents with children under 18 said hybrid work made it easier to juggle their caring responsibilities; 71% of that cohort said it meant they could spend more time with their children, and just over 37% said it also reduced their childcare costs, which is quite significant in this economy.

When we dove into ONS microdata, we found that hybrid working has encouraged more women to move to full-time work. Overall, the proportion of women in employment in the UK who work full-time rose



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from 56.5% in 2019 to 58.7% in 2023. When you scale that, that is thousands of women entering full-time employment, and the trend would suggest that has been facilitated by the hybrid working options. The change was even more pronounced for those in finance, where the jump was actually 10%, so that was a sector that really stood out.

Speaking to the pressure of having it all, the qualitative elements of our research—our focus groups in particular—saw that women were quick to say they felt it quite hard to juggle and that their choice to work hybrid was detrimental to how they were perceived by other colleagues in the workplace. Lots of people would then be suspicious of their commitment to their job because there was also this recognition that they were balancing it with those childcare elements. I also have some thoughts on young people, but I do not know how much we want to stick with women and carers first, so I can come back on that.

The Chair: No, carry on.

Amy Price: I just want to say that it is a really mixed picture for young people, because we found that is the cohort who enjoy and want hybrid working the most. So 18 to 34-year-olds were most likely to say hybrid work was a good thing and that they would seek it out when looking for a job, and we also have some data on the salary sacrifice they would take with that, whereas those over 55 were the least likely to think hybrid work was a positive.

One thing that really bore out in our research for the 18 to 24-year-olds was that they found it much harder to connect and engage with their senior management and much more difficult to have conversations with senior management that were not face-to-face; 45% of them said they found it easier to talk to a manager in person, whereas the national average was 33%. So there is that 10% differential in the experience of engaging with their senior peers and colleagues. Anyway, I will not just spew endless stats at you.

Dr Jess Elmore: Our research had very similar findings to those mentioned. Across the research, people who work from home or hybridly will always report it is good for their well-being, physical health and mental health. When you are looking at self-reporting, the vast majority of people will say they think it is healthy for them. However, home working can be done well or it can be done badly. When it is not done well, it exacerbates inequalities; when it is done well, it lessens them.

The group we have not considered is disabled people. During the pandemic, many disabled people were able to work at home for the first time, which was a transformative experience; they were able to work in ways they had not been able to before. But for some disabled people, working at home can be a problem; it can be isolating, and we all know the endless Zoom meetings can be very hard. Technostress can be a real, serious issue, and that can be exacerbated for disabled people. It is not



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an either/or. If you do it well, it will lessen; if you do it worse, it will exacerbate.

Our findings on young people are very similar. Young people really want to work at home but are less likely to do so. It is quite hard to separate young workers from new workers. Obviously not all new workers are young but a lot of young workers are new workers, and there is evidence around weak ties and strong ties. Going into the pandemic, existing relationships were able to be maintained when people moved to home working, and it was much harder to form new relationships. When you are thinking about someone entering the workplace—whether they are young or not—you really have to think about how to maintain and build those relationships.

Amy Butterworth: Just to add to Jess's point, we should not assume that the only way of doing that is to spend time together in person. My organisation, Timewise, works directly with employers across a really wide range of sectors on hybrid work and other forms of flexible working. We did some work that is relevant here, for example, with a law firm where we were specifically looking at the experience of their trainees who had joined in a hybrid environment post Covid. They were generally younger, earlier in their career, and the organisation wanted to understand the experience in terms of challenges around joining the workforce and learning from more experienced colleagues, which I know you were talking about with the last group of speakers. We heard from those young people that, yes, they valued some time in the office but—for all the reasons that colleagues have said—the cost of travel, et cetera, was prohibitive.

The key thing was about recognising that those days in the office were not the only days when they could learn from older workers. They gave examples of things like being invited to join a client meeting. If you are sitting next to each other, I might say, "Oh, Amy, do you want to come with me to this meeting that I am going to?" It requires a bit more thought to do that if someone is working from home, but it is absolutely possible because you just dial in on Teams in the same way that your colleague is dialling in from their home office. It is useful to spend time in person for things like meeting sponsors, having buddies, et cetera, but they can also be done online.

To Jess's point about good hybrid working, organisations that are thoughtful and leaders that are willing to give a bit of attention to this can make that new joiner/younger worker experience really positive, so that they do not necessarily miss out on things simply because they are working in a hybrid way.

The Chair: Lord Fuller, I am not sure whether you can hear us all right, but if you can, perhaps you would like to ask your question.

Q12 **Lord Fuller:** I am afraid I have not been able to see the proceedings for some technical reason, which possibly is a lesson in and of itself for this



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committee. I was interested in the practical challenges for employers, not so much the employee. Can you identify the particular challenges—sector; location, rural or urban; cohorts, age or seniority; technological security; size, large companies, SMEs; or even type, public versus private—for employers that make working from home and hybrid working more difficult than it would be if we were all sitting together in the office?

Amy Butterworth: One challenge I would point to is for the 60% of employers in the UK who deliver some front-line services and are operating a mixed workforce—for example, retailers, healthcare, schools, utilities. The challenge they are navigating is that a proportion of their people can work in a hybrid or maybe fully remote way, but there will be a significant proportion of people who have to come on-site to deliver their services. Just last month, we released a report on the two-tier workforce, the real development of that, and the challenges it is presenting to employers.

There is a growing potential for resentment within organisations because there is a group of employees who are benefiting from some greater autonomy over their working week and a group of employees who are required to be on site and do not necessarily feel they have the same opportunities. Clearly, the challenge for those employers is what we can do that is not hybrid working, because you need to be on-site to deliver those roles. That is where hybrid and remote working has to be looked at as one part of an overall picture of flexibility. There will be things that those employers can do, but it is a challenge when there is such a fixation on making hybrid work; we also need to find ways to build autonomy and input for those people who cannot work in a hybrid way. That is something that a lot of employers in those front-line sectors—both large and small—are now grappling with.

Amy Price: I have a positive, but it has an underside that reflects on some of that. Overall, we found that businesses see that offering hybrid work is really helpful for recruitment and retention, which in turn has an economic benefit to them. Eighty-one per cent of employers said flexibility has helped retain and attract staff, and we estimate that between £7 billion and £10 billion is saved each year in that recruitment retention facilitated through hybrid work. On the flip side, that makes it very challenging for businesses that are not able to offer hybrid work when it is now such an important part of many people's wish list for their future career, particularly those front-line workers or roles that are necessarily in person and front-facing roles.

People's expectations of their workplace are also evolving. We have very much seen what was described to me as the hotel-ification of lots of workplaces and office spaces, so this new modern office that is still evolving, has a barista, is a nice place to work and has different types of functional spaces. Indeed, hybrid work necessitates different types of spaces so that one person can be on a call but other people can be in an open plan, et cetera. If you are working for an entity that cannot necessarily make that investment in your workspace or it is not



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appropriate for your business, again, it is another consideration that businesses are having to manage as to how to invest in those physical places that their staff then operate in.

Dr Jess Elmore: I would identify two particular groups: very small employers and the self-employed. As we have already established, working at home or working hybrid requires different ways of working. You need a different style of line management—whether that is buddy systems or mentoring—different technologies, different health and safety and risk assessments. Everything has to be done differently. We found in our research that the self-employed were the group who did not know where to go to get help, so if they were working at home, they did not know how to get advice about how to work safely or the technology they could use. It feels like they are really left behind if we are looking at home working and small employers.

We know things will always be hard for small employers; they do not have an HR department to help them develop policies and it is just a very small number of people, so managing to put things in place to protect their workers but also to make sure people are working effectively will always be a challenge. It is difficult for Government to help that group because they are very busy people who have a lot of information all the time. Being able to find that information in the right place, digest it and then apply it is just one more thing on a very long list to do. That is the real challenging group.

Q13 **Lord Fuller:** In the previous session, we heard the phrase “happy medium”. With some of these dilemmas, are we going to see the end of the London weighting purely because of the businesses based in London, or is it going to be more functionally appropriate for those people who physically commute and incur the cost rather than those who are sitting there? Secondly, if we are to have flexibility and this happy medium, to what extent do you think businesses can force people to come in on the Friday, not just the Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday? Where do these balances lie?

Dr Jess Elmore: On the second point about forcing people to come in, all the evidence shows that where people have autonomy over their jobs—they are able to choose where they work and when they work—they have much better well-being and productivity, so it is about working with individuals to ensure that they choose to come in on a Friday.

In terms of the London weighting, it is that point again about moving to a new world of flexible work. It is not just about home working and hybrid working; it is about compressed hours, part-time, job share; a full range of flexible working, of which home and hybrid working are just one part.

Amy Butterworth: On that specific point, a lot also depends on whether you are talking about hybrid work with a couple of days a week in the office or where you are really based at home and visiting the office once a month, say. Naturally, employers would seek to remunerate for that



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accordingly in terms of things like London weighting or cost of travel or that sort of thing.

Amy Price: Just to echo on the recruitment and retention point: obviously it is within a company's gift to decide its own policies a lot of the time, unless there is a governmental intervention, but lots of businesses will find that they will have to make decisions based on the domino effect of what that then means for the retention of their existing workforce who might be currently enjoying a specific balance. I suppose it then comes down to the balance of other factors that might retain their staff and how they balance those different factors accordingly.

Q14 **Lord Fink:** First, can I declare a couple of conflicts in that I have investments in technology companies that benefit from providing televised videoconferencing, and in some companies that rent out office space, so I stand conflicted on all sides in this. I was wondering how employer perceptions of the productivity of remote and hybrid working differ. We have seen some very strong statements from JP Morgan, et cetera. What effect can they have on UK businesses?

Amy Price: This was one of my favourite tensions of our research because I thought it was quite telling. Overall, employees think they are more productive at home: 67% of those who can work from home say they get more done at home, particularly when it comes to deep working, and just 12% disagree. Generally speaking, our workforce population who can participate in hybrid work think they get more done on the days they are at home.

There are mixed feelings among employers: a third say their teams are more productive at home, a third say they are not sure or it is the same, and a third say people are more productive in the office. There is causation and correlation here in that the businesses that practise hybrid working well are more likely to say it functions, and those that have a full return to office are the most sceptical. It is chicken and egg there as to how those behaviours have evolved.

Above all else, no matter what a senior decision-maker might think about their workforce, the majority say that they are productive wherever they work. There is a small—or large—irony that leadership are very confident in their own abilities to manage their productivity but are sometimes quite sceptical of their own employees.

That perception gap is actually one of the major challenges. As much as I make a joke, the reality is if you have a sceptical member of senior management who then does not invest in the appropriate training, infrastructure and rollout of good hybrid work or remote working, they are setting their organisation up to fail in terms of employing those practices. The more that can be done to evidence the possibilities of being productive at home for that mixed model, which is probably where our research also falls as a mixed model, that will make a really big difference on that perceived productivity at those highest levels.



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The final thing I would say is that the workforce we spoke to in our qualitative method—focus groups—were keenly aware that their bosses did not believe they were working hard at home and were keenly aware of that perception gap, but they also were not that convinced that their own employers were working that hard. They said, “It’s easy for them; they flit in and out. Their day-to-day looks very different to mine. How can they assess my day-to-day?” Again, that is qualitative, not quantitative, but that feeling and sentiment was very present in the conversations we had with different types of workers.

Amy Butterworth: I would point to some international research as well. Nick Bloom at Stanford has looked at productivity impact and found that employees who are allowed to work from home two or three days a week are just as productive and likely to be promoted as their colleagues who are working from the office every day, so there is experimental control evidence there.

This is about two things. First, it is about how organisations measure productivity and performance, and secondly, it is about line manager capability, which we have not mentioned yet. As you say, the drive from some organisations to bring everyone back into the office does not particularly seem to chime with the research we are hearing about, possibly driven by proximity bias or a lack of trust.

The way to make some change here is really to invest in our managers. The University of Birmingham released some data showing—I think—only 43% of managers in the UK have had any training at all about how to lead a team in a hybrid or distributed way. There is a significant majority of our managers who have not really been encouraged to stop and think about this or about their skill-set in doing so. Combined with that and maybe not necessarily output-based performance measures, there is a long way to go in driving up capability and practice here.

We know training can make a difference. At Timewise, we have done some work with the CMI—the Chartered Management Institute—with a pilot group of 30 employers, and we saw big leaps through a training programme in terms of people’s confidence in managing performance when people are not working co-located. But we know the majority of UK businesses are not investing in that sort of training at the moment.

Q15 **Lord Fink:** I have heard anecdotally that some companies that have gone for hybrid or largely working at home have shed a lot of office space, so when people do come into the office, they are hot-desking and not necessarily sitting near the people they are working with. The feedback I have had is that people feel less productive when they go in because they can no longer sit with the people they want to sit with, and it is actually easier to reach them from home than in the office. How you plan the days in work must be important in getting this balance right.

Amy Price: We had a lot of conversations through our research, both in terms of the training and how the workplace needs to evolve to better



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respond to hybrid work. I touched earlier on appropriate spaces to take calls or be in person, and there is nothing more galling than perhaps trekking in from Sheffield to find that none of your London-based colleagues is in the office that day, so there is guidance there that can be issued. The only flag I would say is that that is also true of some organisations that are fully back in the office but have moved to a hot-desking model, so that is about the individual corporate decisions that are being made as they balance costs, et cetera.

Q16 Lord Farmer: Can I just ask about confidentiality? It has been raised that somebody said, "Who else is in the room?", maybe at law firms or accountancy firms, if you are giving the results of a company and it is sensitive stock market stuff. Has that arisen in your research? Have you found any answers to how a law firm would require their working-from-home employee to be totally confidential, that there would not be somebody looking over their shoulder? I am not sure whether it has even arisen in your thoughts.

Amy Price: It did not arise specifically in our research, no. We have talked a little—as did the previous session—about what is a new challenge for hybrid work or what existing challenges have been magnified by the rise of hybrid work. For many years, we have been balancing conference calls, which would have the same risk factor, but we have now exponentially grown the number of workers working in a hybrid way. You are right to flag that as a risk, and you would hope that companies would be taking that risk quite seriously.

Q17 Baroness Featherstone: I just wondered if you had encountered employers who think it is their right to dictate what their employees do or insist that they are in or not, and what effect that had. Were there droves of people who left them because they wanted to go and be able to work from home, or did employers feel they would lose productivity? I am just trying to find out where the battle is, if there is a battle.

Amy Butterworth: We have definitely had conversations with employers who are grappling with that. How much do we mandate? You might mandate a proportion of a week or month. You might then say, "Well, actually, there are certain days we need you in to gain some benefit of being co-located". As Jess mentioned earlier, people like to feel they have more autonomy and control, and that is one of the major levers we have with this way of working. You can be offering hybrid, but if you are doing it in a very mandated and restricted way, you may not be actually reaping the benefits in terms of health and well-being and people's sense of control. We obviously see organisations mandating five days back in the office, and we hear about people voting with their feet and leaving. There is a choice then, is there not? It is really important and maybe something to be thinking about in terms of the Employment Rights Bill: when we look at advertising vacancies, how clear are employers being about what the offer is?



At Timewise, we run an annual flexible jobs index where we look at all the vacancies that have been advertised across a year and proportionally how many of them are advertised with different forms of flex. For hybrid, it has plateaued the last couple of years at 12%, which is quite low compared to how many people are actually working in a hybrid way, and that tells us that employers are not necessarily being up front about the mandate—if they have one—or their approach. That would make a huge amount of difference for jobseekers, particularly those groups we have talked about who really need to work in a hybrid or remote way: people with health conditions, carers, et cetera. There is talk about people voting with their feet. Obviously, as the labour market changes, that ebbs and flows, but there would be real practical value in encouraging employers to genuinely do more from day one in terms of advertising their stall.

Q18 Lord Parker of Minsmere: Just developing that a tiny bit further, let me ask a question by painting a horrible caricature, just to provoke an answer. The horrible caricature is that the research you have all done tells us pretty clearly that the preference of the individual worker—where it is possible in the role they do—is some form of hybrid working; human preference goes that way. In your research and the data, you will be conscious of the heuristics and biases that therefore apply when they say, “I’m more productive at home when I’m hybrid working”.

From the employer point of view, some—not just one or two—of the perhaps higher-paying big City firms are doing more mandating, and are able to because they can employ who they want because they pay a lot. What do you say about why they do that? It would be too easy to dismiss them, saying, “Oh, well, they just haven’t looked at the data. Oh, they don’t know”. They do know; they run successful firms that exist to make money, they are very good at it and know what works best for that.

This far into this grand workplace social experiment—we are a few years into it—some are coming to that conclusion: “It is actually better for our business to have everybody in”. Even though it obviously costs them more because they have to provide a workplace, et cetera, it is better for their businesses; they have that view. What is your reaction to that—sorry—deliberate provocation?

Amy Price: Drawing on our research, our conclusion was very much that when any company or business is deciding how to operate, they make a series of trade-offs every day about what best suits their culture and bottom line. What hybrid is now offering in a very meaningful way is options as part of that set of trade-offs that have to be made. We have talked about some, such as access to the workplace for different members of society and access to talent that is more regionally based. As you set out, there will be some organisations that look at their set of trade-offs and make a particular set of choices that then work for them.

Perhaps without too much prejudice, I mentioned earlier that we did a little of the salary sacrifice modelling of what an individual might be willing to sacrifice. Hybrid working definitely has a monetary equivalence;



we think it is worth about £13.5 billion to hybrid workers annually, which is about £1,600 a year based on individual hybrid workers, or 5.3% of a median salary. Obviously, as we look at the different businesses with different salary pay scales, that trade-off then becomes a different decision for different people entering the workplace and deciding how to vote with their feet. That is very much my conclusion to the provocation: different companies will make different trade-offs and will be in a different position to make those trade-offs.

Q19 **Baroness Watkins of Tavistock:** I would quite like to come back, if I may. I have already declared my interests, but I am involved with the NHS, and we have quite a lot of public services that do not have that freedom for trade-off; people actually have to come to work. I use nurses as an example versus perhaps a clerk who can make out-patient appointments online from home now, which they did not used to be able to do. Do you see that as a conundrum? Do you see a solution?

Amy Price: I definitely do, although I know Amy has some good views on this.

Amy Butterworth: Yes, thank you. We have done and continue to do a lot of work in the NHS. The NHS has flexible working in its broadest sense as an element within their "people promise", and that tension has arisen particularly post Covid. It is a conundrum. Take nursing, for example, where there is a real retention challenge, but there are things that can be done.

I was advocating earlier about looking at hybrid as one form of flexibility, but also looking at giving people more input and control into their pattern of shifts, for example. As a nurse, clearly you have to be on the ward if you are hospital-based, but we are seeing really good practice in terms of things like self-rostering and team-based rostering, where you can still involve people in some element of design of their working week, for example.

What has been really good to see from a hybrid perspective is that there are clinical roles where there are elements that are now being done at home. It was in part forced through Covid, but it has continued. Regarding the point you made about confidentiality with lawyers, you could say the same thing with medics or other clinicians, and we are seeing practices where people are running clinics from home, for example, as appropriate and with the right confidential space. There is a conundrum there and a tension.

What the NHS is doing well is not ignoring that, recognising that that is not to say people who can work hybrid should not, but it is also about looking at other opportunities for people who need to be site-based. The opportunities are there, but they are not necessarily practically easy to implement and can require some investment in systems for things like scheduling and rostering. They are worth their weight in terms of impact



on well-being, retention, bringing registered nurses back into the profession, et cetera.

- Q20 **Baroness Manzoor:** Thank you very much for providing evidence today. This is primarily a question for Dr Elmore, if I may, and you have covered this in different answers you have given, but just for completeness, could you say what has been the impact of remote and hybrid working on the day-one right to request flexible working? You have mentioned flexible working on a number of occasions. Should there be any further legislation? You have mentioned that we have the Bill going through the Commons at the moment. Should anything be added to it from the perspective of people from hybrid working, flexible working, and of course from the perspective of employers?

Dr Jess Elmore: At this stage, it is too early to tell the impact. It was introduced in April 2024. At the moment, awareness remains fairly limited. We did some research with carers in the autumn and the carers we spoke to did not know about that change. Some had been informed by their employers. As we know, the latest ONS survey has shown a very slight drop in hybrid working. The level of home working has remained consistent but clearly has not led to a rise, and I would suggest that is around that lack of awareness piece. People do not know about it; employers do not know about it, so we have not seen that come through in a rise in flexible working, and that is all forms of flexible working, not just home and hybrid working.

There is a challenge around legislation and a real need to raise awareness. I do not think that is a piece for legislation, but a wider work of Government; we need to make sure people know about their rights, both employers and individuals. Amy mentioned whether you could encourage more flexibility in the job design and job advert stage. If jobs were advertised saying, "This could be done flexibly; this could be done from home; this could be done hybrid", that could potentially make much more of a difference than a change to an Employment Rights Bill that no one is going to look at or read. Building into that job advert test stage could be really useful. I am not an expert on legislation and I do not know how you would put that into practice.

The loss of the right to disconnect is a real loss from that Bill. I know it can be very challenging to implement and enforce, but there are people working at home who are at real risk of poor health. If you think about people who work in a call centre from home, those rights to take breaks and not to be monitored should be enforced. Putting those back into the Employment Rights Bill would be a real success from my perspective.

Amy Butterworth: I would agree.

- Q21 **Baroness Manzoor:** Just in terms of raising awareness, looking at your data across different groups—not just gender-based but ethnicity as well—are there any differences coming out or is it very evident?

Dr Jess Elmore: I do not have that evidence to draw on.



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Amy Price: I do not have that evidence in front of me. I am sorry.

Baroness Manzoor: Do you think there is a gap there and we need to do more? If you are raising awareness to a particular community or sector of workers, that in itself can compound the problem if we are trying to enlarge the population, particularly for young women or other women—ethnic-minority women, for instance—coming into the workforce.

Amy Butterworth: I do not have any large-scale data, but anecdotally, we know the idea of what an ideal worker is varies culturally. It makes sense that, when we are talking about raising awareness, we need to bring people on the journey with us. To be an ideal worker, the Government are very committed to offering flexibility from day one as a default right, so our cultural perception of what an ideal worker is needs to change.

From some work we have done—focus groups and listening activities that we do with our clients—we know there are some differences between people from different cultural backgrounds. I do not have a dataset to point to, I am afraid, but what you are saying is very right and should be considered when we are thinking about raising awareness and the routes to doing that.

Q22 **Baroness Manzoor:** Just in terms of childcare—because we are raising awareness—somebody said earlier there are obviously advantages for women working from home because of the cost of childcare. As part of the legislation coming through, do you think Governments of any colour can do more to actually promote childcare and offer those services elsewhere as well?

Dr Jess Elmore: It is really important that home working is not seen as a substitute for childcare or carer's leave, because you see people in that situation then have a double burden placed upon them; they are trying to care at the same time as work, and that is not sustainable. It is really important when you are considering it that if the carer is working at home, they can also claim carer's leave and support with their care, and the same for childcare. It is really important that you build in those other forms of support as well. Home working will not be the solution by itself.

Q23 **Baroness Featherstone:** Jess, you touched on this in your introduction. Based on the available data, can remote and hybrid working be used to encourage people such as those with disabilities, long-term health conditions or neurodivergence into employment, and if so how? What are the impacts on the employers on both sides? It could be wonderful or terrible, as far as I can see. I would like for you in particular to elucidate, but obviously the other two to contribute.

Dr Jess Elmore: This is very much a “yes, but”, kind of question. We have been the research partner for the Commission for Healthier Working Lives that launched today, making recommendations about how to support people in work. There is evidence about getting people back into



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work and keeping people in work; stopping people from leaving the labour market is equally important to getting people back into work. We know once someone with a health condition has left work, they are—I think—14 times less likely to return to the labour force, so there is a critical need to make sure you keep people in the labour market. Obviously, there are those people you can support back into the labour market with both these groups, and home working has the potential to do that.

There was some really interesting research by the University of Sheffield recently where it looked at where the disability employment gap was lower, so where more disabled people were in work. It found that there were areas where there were more elementary jobs and where there were more knowledge- or information-based jobs. Those are the jobs that are likely to have more flexibilities attached to them, so that suggests that, for some disabled people, working at home will enable them to access the labour force. That comes with a problem in that disabled people can sometimes not have the same access to qualifications, so it is harder for them to get those more professional, managerial jobs. You need to think about upskilling people, not just saying, “There’s a job; go and do it”; you also need to think about wider employment support. I realise that is not the focus of this committee, so I will keep away from that one. Yes, it can do a lot, but it has to come with a lot of wider considerations.

Baroness Featherstone: Is there any statistical basis on what financial input would be needed to get the output of people being able to work from home successfully and no costs associated with it?

Dr Jess Elmore: I can look. So would you be looking at the cost of providing wraparound employment support? What support and training would they need to access work?

Baroness Featherstone: In the Netherlands, my friend’s husband’s entire job was working with people to get them back into employment, either after long-term employment, with disability, or psychological deficits of some sort. The advantage was in getting them back into employment and if that meant they could work from home, that would make it easier, so I would have thought there would be a financial advantage in that, ultimately.

Dr Jess Elmore: There are. I could share those costs with you after this meeting; I do not have them to hand.

Baroness Featherstone: Employers are really interested in costs.

Dr Jess Elmore: The question about whether that cost sits with the employer or with the Government is another consideration.

Baroness Featherstone: I do not know if it applies to either of you two in the work you have done.



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Amy Price: I would not have data on the projected costs of that.

Baroness Featherstone: Not costs; I meant more in general.

Amy Price: This is self-reporting at this point. Forty-four per cent of those who self-reported as having a long-term health condition wished they had more flexibility at work, and that was 10% higher than the population at large. The underlying data suggests there is a demand across this cohort for that flexibility. We have discussed what that flexibility looks like across this session. On the flip side, just under half of employers said hybrid work had made it easier for them to hire someone with a disability, so not 100% but a really meaningful minority. I do not have the longitudinal data of the retention attached to that sentiment, but it is worth keeping in mind.

Baroness Featherstone: When I was reading the brief, it said people who are neurodivergent or have sensory issues and cannot work in an office because it is deleterious to their well-being would be better off at home, and I just wondered if any of you covered that as well.

Amy Butterworth: What we have come across in some of the work design that we have supported employers with is that one size does not fit all when it comes to neurodiversity. Individuals who identify as neurodiverse can really benefit when they have been given some choice. Some people can choose their work location, and that might be working from home to suit their sensory needs. For others, there is actually a preference to coming into the office because they find the virtual engagement via a screen very difficult, so it is probably not one size fits all. There is definite evidence of the benefits of hybrid working for individuals who identify as neurodiverse and giving them that choice and autonomy over where they are going to base themselves. It can vary during the week depending on the type of work you have to do, as it can for us all.

Q24 **The Chair:** Just to finish off, could I ask—maybe unfairly—each of you to come up with one thing that you would like to see as a recommendation in our report? If not, you can always write to us.

Amy Price: Rather than a strict recommendation to Government, very much what came out of our research was the need to adequately train and equip both middle and senior leaders in how to properly manage a hybrid workforce. We think there is an economic benefit to doing that and ensuring that hybrid work does work in a productive way, so anything that fits that mould would be greatly appreciated.

Amy Butterworth: I strongly concur with that, and the other thing I have mentioned is consider requiring organisations to stipulate—from the point of designing a role onwards—what flexibility is truly available within that role.

Dr Jess Elmore: I would like to see guidance set out for different kinds of employers and sectors about what different kinds of flexible working—



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including home and hybrid working—could look like for them. A lot of employers want to support their workers but do not know how to, and a sector-based approach could be a really supportive way of doing that.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for coming to talk to us today and giving us your thoughts. It is really helpful as we embark on this journey. I will bring this evidence session to a close.