

Select Committee on COVID-19

Corrected oral evidence: Living online

Thursday 28 January 2021

10 am

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Members present: Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho (The Chair); Lord Alderdice; Baroness Benjamin; Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen; Lord Elder; Lord Hain; Lord Harris of Haringey; Baroness Jay of Paddington; Baroness Morgan of Cotes; Lord Pickles.

Evidence Session No. 8

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 91 - 101

Witnesses

I: Professor Abigail Marks, Principal Investigator, Working@home Project, and Professor of the Future of Work, Newcastle University; Louise Marston, Director of Ventures, Resolution Foundation; Anna Thomas, Director, Institute for the Future of Work; James Taylor, Executive Director of Strategy, Impact and Social Change, Scope.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Abigail Marks, Louise Marston, Anna Thomas and James Taylor.

Q91 **The Chair:** Good morning, and welcome to the House of Lords Select Committee on Covid-19. I very much welcome all our witnesses to the inquiry this morning, some of whom I know—hello, it is lovely to see you all—and some of whom I do not, and my colleagues joining us this morning.

Our inquiry is looking at the rapid process of digitalisation that has happened over the last year and what that means for people's social and economic well-being. We are quite far into our inquiry, and at the moment we are specifically looking at well-being and work and digitalisation.

I ask witnesses to bear in mind that we have the somewhat complicated task of trying to tease out the long-term implications of all these things. It would be very easy to focus a lot on the here and now, and how people are feeling right now in the midst of another lockdown, but we are trying to think two to five years out, to come up with specific policy recommendations for Governments, or for other organisations, to help make sure that we have the most robust and resilient UK in the future.

We are looking at all of it through the lens of digitalisation, as I said. It would be immensely helpful for us to hear your views on well-being and work, which I know is your special subject, as well as equality of work and how that has been affected by some of these trends.

I remind everybody that the session is being broadcast and recorded. If you would like to speak, please raise your hand or use the very old-fashioned waving function and I will try to come to you. Colleagues, when you ask a question, it would be great to direct it to a specific witness. If you are not speaking, please remain on mute. I think I shall get a T-shirt that says, "You're still on mute". Hopefully, usage of the mute button will be good this morning.

I will quickly whizz round our witnesses so that they can introduce themselves. We do not need a long introduction; we have seen your submissions, so this is just so that everybody can put a name to a face. Could I start with you, James?

James Taylor: Good morning. I am the director of strategy for the disability equality charity, Scope.

The Chair: Thank you. Abigail?

Professor Abigail Marks: I am professor of the future of work, Newcastle University.

The Chair: Thank you. I hope you do not mind me using your first names.

Professor Abigail Marks: No.

The Chair: It would be a bit too formal on Zoom to be calling you Professor and Mr and Ms, so excuse my informality. Louise, it is lovely to see you.

Louise Marston: Hello. I am director of ventures at the Resolution Foundation, an independent think tank working on improving living standards for those on low and middle incomes.

The Chair: Thank you. Anna.

Anna Thomas: Good morning. I am director of the Institute for the Future of Work, a charitable organisation with a mission to shape a future of better work.

Q92 **The Chair:** Thank you very much. I will kick off with a broad landscape-setting question. What do you think the technological developments and impacts will be on our quality of work and the new types of work being created? Louise, would you like to kick off on that?

Louise Marston: Yes. I think others may have more detailed input. There is reason to be optimistic. There is potential for automation and digitalisation to improve productivity and people's prospects. We are particularly interested at the Resolution Foundation in the potential of technology to help people access better career information, better skills training, better understanding of their prospects of getting employment in different areas, and better matching of those things together, and better ways of organising people to understand the power they have as groups of workers. That is the work we are doing.

There are risks with all those things—in particular, the use of automation in things such as workplace surveillance monitoring and shift allocation. It risks engineering out the things that make work most rewarding and that contribute most to the qualities of good work, but I think we can keep those things in balance.

The Chair: It is interesting that you immediately mention workplace surveillance. My colleague, Lord Harris, has some interest in that, so we might come back to it.

Can I ask you about the impact of the pandemic? Our assumption is that we have fast forwarded through a rapid period of time. Would you give some reflections on the relationship between the pandemic and all these changes?

Louise Marston: Absolutely. We know that we have accelerated. Many of the witnesses you saw on Tuesday testified to the acceleration of the adoption and automation of digital in a number of different sectors. That has probably been brought forward.

There were some underlying issues with the labour market before the pandemic, and those have not necessarily gone away. There are issues of low pay and shortages of hours among the lowest paid workers. Lots of the people who were most affected by the pandemic might also be on the

front line of the technological changes. Even where they are not, the lowest paid, people in poor living conditions, and people who have accrued a lot of debt or have used up their savings will be very vulnerable in a labour market that is not as full of employment. They will have less power to change their occupation and switch industries and sectors, and to take on the cost of reskilling and retraining.

It is worth bearing in mind that the very duality of the pandemic, and the very different impacts on different types of households, will carry through to the other side. People who come into the post-pandemic era with a lot of debt and a loss of financial resilience will be less well placed to make the changes needed as the labour market changes.

The Chair: Anna, do you have thoughts on both parts of that question: the technological change and then the pandemic's relationship to all the shifts?

Anna Thomas: I agree with what Louise said. We too are optimistic about the long-term prospects for technology to improve the quality of work, but there is often a time lag between the introduction of the technology and positive, or potentially positive, benefits. The road can be very bumpy, and the adverse effects, as this inquiry has begun to see, are not felt or spread evenly. You can see that in the way that digitalisation and the new technological revolution is affecting the nature, conditions and quality of work.

Although, in overall terms, we can be techno-optimistic, in the sense of positive factors in favour of technology adoption, such as innovation or public/private partnerships, outweighing the negative ones, such as greater financial restraint. Even within firms, we see that those effects are not felt evenly. Leading and larger firms are more likely to adopt technologies, capabilities and practices to be able to support their staff, and SMEs are less likely to do that.

The types of jobs and work have implications for job quality and occupations. We are seeing increasing segmentation of the labour market into good and bad jobs, and we think that trend will become more pronounced in the next two to five years. For example, in job creation, tech sectors and firms have done very well. In the UK, they are already growing six times faster than the rest of the economy, and there is a need for software development and IT workers and analysts, who have been in high demand through the pandemic. They may even be seen as 'pandemic proof'.

At the same time, at the sharper end of the tech industry, there is a glut of poor-quality jobs with poor conditions, characterised perhaps by jobs in Amazon warehouses, delivery and logistics. We know that the UK is already characterised by particularly high levels of precarious and low-paid work. We think that will become even more pronounced, as large firms in particular have been shown to be less likely to invest in their workforce after shocks.

We have a research fellow, Josh De LyonS, who has done some excellent research on that, which has just been published. At IFOW, our qualitative research is finding that algorithmic management, which shot up in the pandemic, appears to be driving that polarisation. It is often associated with a change of terms and conditions. It removes middle-paid jobs, which means that there are fewer options to progress, and reduces the skills requirements for workers. It is also associated with what is known as 'liquidisation' of the workforce, a shift to flexible scheduling that often comes with a change of contract terms that can be adverse.

I will say more about the sense of autonomy, dignity and well-being later, if I may.

The Chair: Of course. Thank you. That is very helpful. James, do you want to add anything on specific changes that might have affected, positively or negatively, the groups of more vulnerable people that you look after?

James Taylor: Yes, absolutely. I share a sense of optimism, but maybe with a bit of the realism that many disabled people in work, or looking for work, have experienced over the last 12 months or more.

To go to your second question first, even before the pandemic, 1 million disabled people were out of work; they wanted to work but could not find a job. In the disability employment space, we have a huge number of people who are very qualified and very skilled and want to find a job but, for many reasons, are not able to.

The increasing use of digital technology and the move to more flexible working that we have seen over the last 10 months has real potential to create opportunities for disabled people. Many we have spoken to have shared their frustration that it has taken a global pandemic for employers to realise the benefits of working from home, which, for a long, long time, many disabled people have been calling for, particularly those who might need to manage a condition on a day-to-day basis. Presence in an office is impossible at the moment, but that is helpfully showing that it is no longer necessary for somebody to be in every day. That is what many disabled people have been calling for. There is some optimism.

The realism is that much of the internet is still inaccessible to disabled people. Research from Ofcom two years ago found that just two-thirds of disabled people have internet access, compared with about 90% of non-disabled people. Within that, disabled people who are less well off are far more likely to be digitally excluded. They are precisely the people who have potentially the most to gain from the fourth industrial revolution, which is increasing technological jobs and working from home. That is why we at Scope think it is urgent that the Government proactively address the barriers that disabled people are facing in, first, getting online and, secondly, having crucial digital skills.

Disabled people are 40% less likely to have received digital skills support from their workplace. Just one in three has the skills needed for work,

compared to about half the UK average. We are optimistic that increasing flexible working is a positive. The realism is that there are a lot of disabled people who do not have access to the internet and might not have the digital skills necessary. We need to think about how we support them and bring them up.

The Chair: Thank you. Abigail, is there anything you would like to add?

Professor Abigail Marks: I generally support what the previous witnesses said. I would like to comment on two things. The first is the opportunity for home working that digitalisation and the pandemic have provided. While it has provided opportunities for many, and obviously has allowed business continuity, it has disadvantaged quite a lot of people. I worry that it will be deemed a big success but that, if it continues, women in particular, and those in lower socioeconomic groups who have got by, may end up struggling.

We have often found that women are working on the dining-room table or on ironing boards in the garage, while men have the dedicated office space. There are issues about accessible broadband for all, and the technology and basic office equipment provided by organisations. We found that about 60% or 70% of people have musculoskeletal problems from sitting at improper workspaces. If we go down the route of, "Yes, it's been a success so everybody can now work from home", which I think is a great thing if the infrastructure is in place and people want to do it, I worry that it will further disadvantage people.

The other issue, broadly, on digitalisation, skills and how they are exploited is that in the UK we romanticise, I think, how great we are as a knowledge economy and how advanced we are. The reality is somewhat different. We have a big data science agenda, yet we do not know how to implement it within organisations. It is quite ineffective.

At the lower end, we see that people are being disadvantaged because we are moving towards a digital economy. The infrastructure, the technological education for younger people—school leavers who do not go to university—is really poor. This has been said again and again by many people. We need to look at countries like Germany and Switzerland, which have really effective education systems in technological skills for those who go along an academic route and those who do not. If we added that to a better agenda for lower-skilled work—for example, redeveloping manufacturing with enhanced digital technology—we would fare much better.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have a supplementary question, and then I will pass to my colleague, Lord Hain.

I want to be crystal clear that we capture this early on. What are the risks to people's well-being through this massive shift to digitalisation and working from home and to quality of work, risks that perhaps the Government, or other organisations, should be mitigating? Can you give me a couple of sentences on what you see as the biggest risks that we

should be aware of? I know that you see some positives, but I am also interested in what you perceive as the risks to well-being.

Professor Abigail Marks: There are big risks of inequality, both socioeconomic inequality and gender inequality. There are big risks to people's physical health and mental health.

I have been interviewing 80 people across the UK. We are on our third phase of interviews since the start of the pandemic. They are all home working, and most of them are at crisis point; their mental health is suffering. That is not entirely a product of home working. It is clearly due to the pandemic and other factors, but being isolated at home is not helping people who feel that they have no choice. For a lot of people who have choice, it is a great opportunity, but the one-size-fits-all approach will damage people's mental health.

Louise Marston: A group that I do not think we have mentioned is young people. They are more affected by overcrowding and damp conditions at home, so working from home is sometimes not possible. They are also more disadvantaged by not being able to get tacit learning in the workplace, the workplace experience and working alongside people that I think you heard a bit about on Tuesday.

Those groups are already going to struggle in the labour market, as we know from previous recessions, in getting exposure to jobs, and first steps into them, particularly when the sectors that have traditionally provided lots of first jobs have been very badly hit. Their career trajectories are potentially going to be severely affected.

The Chair: My colleague, Lord Pickles, will pick up some of those points in a subsequent question.

Q93 **Lord Hain:** Good morning, everybody. I want to ask about reports that some employers, including Unilever and Microsoft, as well as smaller employers, may have shifted to a four-day week, some to compensate for reduced pay and others because of home working. Are there any general trends to that effect?

Anna Thomas: There is a trend to think afresh about it and to experiment with it. That is quite right as a way of responding to both the immediate shock of the pandemic and longer trends in what we call the new technological revolution.

Lord Hain: Louise, do you see any of that?

Louise Marston: We have not seen that, looking particularly at the lower-paid sectors. Those are mostly areas where people do not really have the choice or desire to work from home, and do not have that flexibility. I think it has been happening at more senior levels, but I have no particular evidence.

Anna Thomas: I agree. It is seen as a more discrete issue than perhaps it should be.

Lord Hain: Rather than a general trend?

Anna Thomas: Yes.

Professor Abigail Marks: There is a lot of talk about the four-day week, and it comes from two incompatible perspectives. One is quality of working life: we will get everybody to do five days' work in four days and pay them the same. The other is trying to ensure that people retain jobs and making them work four days for four days' pay. The two things are incompatible.

Again, it is mostly focused on professional workers. You do not see people in Amazon being offered a four-day week at full pay. I think it is rhetoric rather than reality at the moment. It is a nice story. It is nice talk, but it is lacking in substance and thought.

Lord Hain: James, do you have anything to add from a disability perspective?

James Taylor: Nothing in particular; just an assumption that for some people, possibly working four days rather than five might be beneficial for their condition, if they need to manage it, and potentially for their mental health. I personally work four days a week and have found it a lot better for my well-being than five days.

Q94 **Lord Alderdice:** Thank you for what you have been saying. I want to dig a bit more into the question of remote working and its impact on different groups of people. I have three questions and my colleague, Lord Harris, has a further question in this area.

We are trying to look to the medium to long term. We obviously have some things that are happening immediately; remote working, for example, basically means working from home. In the medium term, it need not necessarily mean working from home. Could you say a little about the question of how remote working may develop and impact on job satisfaction and well-being? James was talking about his own well-being. Do you have any thoughts about how remote working, which of course for the moment is at home, but may not necessarily be in the future, impacts, plus or minus, on job satisfaction and well-being?

Professor Abigail Marks: It is an interesting one. Somebody pointed out yesterday that remote working is not a helpful term because it makes people sound as if they are a distance from the organisation. Since yesterday, I am now using the term "distributed working".

It is a really good point. In Wales, they are talking about 30% of the population being distributed, and they are working towards community hubs that will allow people who do not have the infrastructure at home to work in a distributed and manageable way away from the organisation. Not working from home, but being away from the organisation, is a really interesting point.

From a personal perspective, I work from home maybe two or three days a week, but I do not actually work from home. In normal circumstances, I work in the café at the gym, where lots of other people are doing the same thing. I am just as productive.

Not being in the organisation is very different from the current working from home situation. If you give people agency and control about where they work, there is a much more positive impact on mental health than having a very narrow working from home agenda. Community hubs are potentially a good idea because you get a lot of cross-fertilisation of ideas between different sectors and different people. People feel part of a bigger community.

In general, there needs to be a degree of flexibility. People should be offered the opportunity to be in the office when they want, or when it is feasible, and to work remotely, or distributedly, on other occasions. It is a fine balance between organisational needs and the needs and best interests of employees. It is a big agenda, and it will be challenging to balance what organisations need and want with what employees want.

Lord Alderdice: Would any of the other witnesses like to come in on this?

Anna Thomas: Our work supports to a large extent what has been said about the risks and benefits of remote working, including well-being falling asymmetrically - not just between socioeconomic groups but between workers with care responsibilities, new workers and new joiners. It is often the very young and the very old, and developing staff in some sectors can be particularly challenging.

We have focused on a couple of things in remote working. We have focused on the uneven geographical spread of remote working, both in potential, owing to sectoral share variations across regions, and in adoption, reflecting current business practices and investments. For example, 57.2% of people in London worked from home during the April lockdown compared to just 35% in the West Midlands.

We are trying to situate the remote work debate in a conversation about the wider impacts, rather than limiting it very precisely to immediate impacts. Remote workers are gaining overall shares of employment during the crisis. They are taking on a greater share of hours worked, so it is having all sorts of knock-on effects. Of course, some tasks can be carried out remotely, but tasks such as farming, fishing and forestry cannot. 47% of the population were remote working at the peak of the crisis last March, but on average those earning less than 20% could only do 30% of their tasks at home.

Something else we focused on was consultation. It seems that there is huge variation across both individuals and firms. For success, a lot depends on the levels of consultation and engagement with employees and workers. We have done our own polling, and there have been some excellent recent surveys from both Prospect and the TUC that suggest

well over 60% think that employee consultation before introducing technology, or while introducing remote working or embedding it, would be more effective, and would support people better and improve well-being.

Lord Alderdice: Can we take the question about different groups and tease it out a little further. Could each of you say a bit about the experience that differs from group to group? Perhaps we could take it even further; for example, a whole lot of people are bunched into black and ethnic minority, as though that was one group, whereas it is lots and lots of different groups of people with different perspectives. The same is true of disability, James, as though disability was a group of people; in fact, it is all sorts of different things. Of course, even within a subgroup, individual people respond differently to the same circumstances or the same change. There was a lot of talk in the early stages of the internet about how individual differences would be able to be addressed and celebrated.

Could you say a little bit about how the experience has differed for different groups and different individuals? Looking forward, how might it look for different groups and different individuals? James, perhaps we could start with you, because you particularly represent a number of groups.

James Taylor: Absolutely. The first thing to say is that there are around 40 million people in this country who identify as disabled, but when I talk about disability I am not necessarily talking about all those groups, as you say.

There are many disabled people for whom remote working has not been an issue—for example, people like me, who have a physical disability. For others, perhaps those who might be deaf or have a visual impairment, accessibility of tech can be difficult, but when it is right it can be empowering. What we are hearing, particularly from those two groups, is that it can be pot luck in how you are supported.

People report to us that there is often a lack of information from their employer about what technology might be available. Microsoft Teams and Outlook, and some of the other programmes we now use to communicate and interact with each other daily, had accessibility features built in from the very get-go. You can enable closed captioning on Microsoft Teams just by pressing a button. You can check the accessibility of a Word document before you send it. Sometimes, you need people to have that information to impart to others before it can be used properly.

As regards what we would like to see both now and in the future, there is a big opportunity across government, with the national disability strategy coming out in the spring, to promote to employers, and get them skilled up on, the range of tools, many of which are free, that are available and can greatly enhance the working life of disabled people, and all people. Accessibility can benefit all of us, not just disabled people.

The second point is about the government programme, Access to Work, which provides funding for employers and disabled people to get kit and equipment. Back in September, the Government made a welcome announcement that the programme would be expanded to include support, technology and equipment for people working from home, but there are still far too many people who do not know about Access to Work as a scheme, the benefits it can provide and what it can fund. There is a need for promotion of the scheme.

Finally, we hear from particular groups, particularly those who might be deaf, hard of hearing or have a visual impairment, that sometimes when they interact with the scheme the assessors who are assessing their needs are not always up to speed with the latest technology, the latest support or the latest assistive tech that could benefit that person in the workplace. There is a need to promote the scheme better to employers and people, but, once you are in the scheme, we need to upskill assessors on exactly what technology is out there so that people are not landed with something that is 10 years behind the times and unusable.

Lord Alderdice: Thank you very much, James. Abigail, would you like to pick up on this?

Professor Abigail Marks: I am not going to offer an opinion on all groups because I do not have the data or the information at the moment. I would like to respond on two criteria.

What we are seeing at the moment is potentially somewhat different from what we will see in the longer term. The people who are really suffering at the moment are parents of under-10s and single parents. Those groups will potentially be more advantaged in the longer term, because at the moment their flexibility is limited by childcare and overcrowding in the house. That is where we are seeing the real problems. That is not to say that it is unimportant; it is very important, and it will have a long-standing effect.

As has been said, younger people and people starting off in their careers are suffering from household overcrowding, either by living with parents or in shared accommodation, and not getting socialisation with other young people or within organisations. In the longer term, that may have a significant impact on their progression and on their mental health.

Overall, we found big socioeconomic differences. Obviously, if you are working at home and have your own room to work in, with good broadband access and a comfortable workspace, that is a big advantage. People can be supported by organisations even if they do not have additional space. If the organisation provides a good desk and chair, a laptop and support for broadband, as well as financial support, it makes a big difference.

The other groups where we see a difference are urban and rural. People living in rural environments, excluding potential issues of internet access,

are faring much better than people in urban environments because they have the benefit of external, outdoor space.

Lord Alderdice: Thank you very much. Louise, both Abigail and James have indicated some things that could be helpful. Could you point out not just the differences but what might improve the circumstances for the well-being of people in work?

Louise Marston: I think you are right that distributed working, as Abigail calls it, or working from places other than home will help in a lot of cases. It is also partly a resourcing issue. Having affordable spaces will be really important for lots of people; we talked about overcrowded and potentially damp conditions at home, with other things going on in the home at the same time that can restrict them.

There is a version where people with the most resources and in senior roles want to work from home, and they retreat from the workplace, while those with the least resources are in the workplace, but without the same leadership and management in place, without people to learn from and without the kind of tacit support whereby people learn by observing what is going on in more senior roles in the organisation. That reverse role, where the people in the workplace are not those who are able to access the same sorts of learning and progression, is definitely a risk. It is something that senior management should think carefully about when they are planning what would be hybrid working from home policies. Everyone working from home or everyone in the office is, in some ways, simpler for them to organise than having everybody doing something some of the time.

In a professional context, that is one part of the risk. There are all sorts of things that can help with that, such as bearing it in mind in planning and management. One of the risks is that people try to bridge that management gap with technological tools, by observing what people are doing and trying to monitor productivity remotely, trying to track what people are working on and how many things they are doing, in quite an instrumental, transactional way that does not necessarily capture the quality. I suspect that the lower down the income spectrum, the bigger that risk.

The increasing adoption of automation and digital tools, combined with the historical lack of management skills in this country that has contributed to productivity problems, creates a risk that by implementing blunt instruments of management for remote working we exacerbate problems and create issues that are then hard to observe. If you are not observing people every day, face to face, it is harder to pick up when problems arise.

There are good ways of using those tools. Throughout this crisis, lots of firms have been learning, testing and adapting as we go as to what works well and what does not. Using very blunt tools, especially on a mass scale, and not just at lower incomes—we saw Microsoft slightly accidentally introduce some surveillance tools to its 365 software last

year, which it has now retracted—and very well-meaning attempts at managing people can actually involve quite problematic collection of data and invasion of privacy.

Lord Alderdice: Thank you. There are some colleagues who would like to explore that further. Before they do that, perhaps I could invite Anna to say something on different groups with different outcomes, and what can be done to improve conditions.

Anna Thomas: I agree with what Louise said. I have a couple of points to add. First of all, when we think about technology to support remote working or automated management technology, it is important that we do not limit our thinking simply to remote work—people working in their homes. For example, we have found that there is a boom in types of automated management technology for key workers and people supporting key workers. The technology, and its wider implications, is not a discrete issue for people who are allowed to work, or work, four days only. That is the first point.

The second point is that today we have launched, in honour of your inquiry, the Good Work Monitor, which explores the relationship between work quality and health and well-being across the country. That is a slight broadening-out from remote work per se, but I would situate it in the wider trends of the technological revolution and the way in which technology is increasingly agreed to be a key driver of the wider trends that we have seen and explored in the monitor.

That piece of research shows sharp and growing inequalities in both work and health. The very close relationship between the two plays out across the country. I guess we have taken a spatial inequality perspective with that piece of work. Perhaps it is seen most strikingly in the relationship between work quality and Covid mortalities - and deaths of despair. Areas of low availability of good work, such as Hull, Blackpool or Stoke, are suffering twice as many deaths of despair as the ones at the top, such as Wokingham or Bracknell.

It makes the points that you have explored, but perhaps in a very striking and worrying way. It shows that work quality or good work is a matter of life and death, remembering in particular that deaths of despair come from behavioural-related medical conditions that increase in groups of people with particularly bleak social and economic outlooks. It is something that we have seen in the United States; Angus Deaton has done a lot of work on that. It often signals wider problems, and problems that play out faster than other health and well-being impacts.

On Covid deaths, the Good Work Monitor results correlate very strongly with age-standardised mortality; for example, Middlesbrough is the worst and Wokingham the best. I should be very happy to give more information on that if you are interested.

Lord Alderdice: I am very pleased, as a psychiatrist, that you have raised what one might call the psychosomatic impact. How people are

physically in their health is massively impacted by how they are mentally and emotionally. Thank you very much indeed for that. Baroness Benjamin has a question.

Q95 Baroness Benjamin: Picking up on some of the points that have been made, black, Asian and minority people are in a high-risk category of suffering from mental problems. A lot of the issues we are talking about this morning affect them.

Have you done any research connected with black, Asian and minority groups, and how they are likely to be affected as we move forward? Are you planning any research? James, it was great to hear you speak about disability. I know that black, Asian and minority people in that category will be served well, so that is one good thing. How do we address the issues, and how do we consider this group of people?

Lord Alderdice: Who would like to pick that up?

Louise Marston: I can come in briefly on remote work. We have done quite a lot of work on housing, looking at living standards and conditions and how they relate to people's capability for working from home.

On average, the usable space in people's homes is less for people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and that gap expands for older age groups. In general, the young have less usable space, so overcrowding is an issue for all young people, but as the age groups increase there is 30% less usable space for black and minority ethnic families when people are aged over 55. There is the dual impact of housing and usable space, and age in the workplace. They are all linked to location. There is greater representation in urban areas than in rural areas. We have talked about the differentials there.

Post pandemic, building on the conversation we had earlier, people's financial resilience and ability to make good choices in the workplace will be relevant. There is a very big wealth gap between different ethnic groups in the UK, and it has been widening in real terms. We have published a bit of research on that. That will be an underlying factor in people's ability to choose good work in the future.

Professor Abigail Marks: We have minority groups represented in our research, but I think it would be naive to make general assumptions. In the next phase of our survey, which is of 1,500 people, we hope we will be able to get better representation and give more meaningful advice based on that.

Lord Alderdice: Please confirm this or otherwise, but it sounds to me as though actually there has not been a great deal of focus on the problem either of black and ethnic minority groups as a whole or indeed the differences between black and ethnic minority groups. Would that be true, or are you aware of work that has been done or is going on?

Anna Thomas: There certainly needs to be a lot more research. It is great that the ONS has started tracking it. Michael Marmot did some

important work last year, and we would like to do another level of work on it following on from the Good Work Monitor.

On a different point, very specifically on technology, given your inquiry, we have looked at the equality impacts of data-driven technology on different communities. We suggested as a specific policy proposal that companies and employers introducing data-driven technology always did an equality impact assessment at the outset, through design, implementation and integration of their systems. That is only one component. It must be addressed in a multidimensional policy way. Something very specific we could do is to require employers and companies, and in the meantime encourage them, to take equality impacts very seriously, and when they identify adverse or disparate impacts to make adjustments to remedy them.

Baroness Benjamin: James, at Scope do you find that black, Asian and minority people are targeting you and coming to you for support? What sort of support do you give them when they come to you?

James Taylor: Not as many as I would like. I am really keen for Scope to do far more research into the experiences of black and minority ethnic people who have a disability. There is definitely a double disadvantage and a double discrimination phase.

There might be some parallels along the lines of both being minority groups. Certainly, from my own experience, a lot of the attitudes that people experience in the workplace are formed very early. You are perceived to be born with an inequality. In the playground, you are looked down on. When you go to job interviews, you often find that people want to hire in their image.

Societal attitudinal problems lie behind some of the barriers that disabled people face, and I wonder whether there might be similarities for other minority groups. I could not speak without seeing evidence, but I assume that it might be the case. If we are to get more disabled people into work, and into good work, we need to address some of those quite outdated attitudes. They start very young.

I was talking at the beginning about the huge digital skills gap because of lack of education and investment in a young disabled person's time. Perhaps they are written off very early on: "You won't do very much in your career because you are disabled". It is those sorts of attitudes that we need to address. There might be similarities for other minority groups, but it is certainly something that we want to investigate, research and look into a lot more.

Lord Alderdice: You are bringing forward very helpful material, but it sounds as though on the question of black and minority ethnic groups there is a lot more to be done. If you are able to identify any ongoing work, I wonder if we could appeal to you, over the next few weeks, to draw it to our attention because we are very keen to pick up on that.

Lord Harris wants to pick up on a question that has already been adverted to a little bit.

Q96 Lord Harris of Haringey: I think Louise Marston first raised this. It is about workforce surveillance, and it has been referred to again. I am conscious that every week I get an email from a parliamentary MS Teams thing telling me how productive I have been. It may well be shared with the parliamentary authorities. Frankly, I am not bothered and, since I prefer Zoom to Teams, it does not tell you very much. Similarly, I get a message every week from my iPad and my iPhone telling me how much screen time I have had. They do not aggregate them, interestingly, but I suppose I could take notice of it.

Workplace surveillance has always taken place, but as people move more online there are potentially easier ways of doing it than there were in the past. In the old days, if you walked purposefully around the office waving a piece of paper, people assumed you were doing something productive. It is now harder to operate in the same way. Starting with Louise, I would be interested to know if you are seeing trends that it is increasing. Secondly, do you see it as something that has been accelerated in the last year?

Louise Marston: Anna may have more data on this than I do. With the adoption of remote working it has perhaps become more visible, and has crept higher up the income spectrum, but it has been in place for quite some time. Call centres have had very close monitoring in place, whether you were at home or in the call centre. Lots of surveillance tools have been developed over the last few years and used in warehouses and call centres, and even for care workers moving between jobs and driving between houses. They have already been monitored for some time and have not had the power to make any objection. They have had to bear the costs of being monitored very closely and, in some cases, unfairly penalised for minor infractions from what was seen as the necessary amount of productivity.

Those tools are now being used in more professional workplaces. The Microsoft Teams tool aims to be helpful, and somewhat paper clip-like, in its support of your productivity. Microsoft has had to reiterate that it is for organisational and not individual productivity, ideally. Without proper consultation and discussion with staff about which data is being used, and how it should be used to support people, it can be a very blunt tool and can cause people considerable anxiety about whether it is monitoring things that are actually relevant.

The same is true of a lot of such tools. When you measure the thing that is easy to measure, you may not be measuring the most important thing, and it quickly becomes a worthless target. It is increasing. A survey that was done this year suggests that one in five firms has already implemented such software or is considering it. About 45% have not yet considered it, but that does not mean that they will not look at it in the future as it becomes more prevalent. I think it is increasing, and it is becoming more discussed just because it now affects those earning more

money, whereas previously it mainly affected people who had a lot less money and a lot less power.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Anna, do you want to follow on from that, and comment on whether it can be beneficial as opposed to being entirely negative if you are an employee?

Anna Thomas: There is a trend of introducing 'surveillance' technologies at work. It has always existed in some form, but it is picking up, and we think its use and spread of use hiked significantly last year. To the extent that there is research, that has been backed up by both union and business surveys, although more research is needed.

There is not enough guidance about the application of data protection regimes. We wrote, with Prospect and others, to the ICO requesting that employer guidance be updated with that in mind, Lord Harris. Our analysis of the law and how it applies is that there are real gaps in protection, so we ought to have a wider conversation about how we can deal with the challenges that you have responded to. It is not just understanding and applying existing rights under the data protection regime, but perhaps boosting rights for explanation or involvement in the process.

That answers your last question. If there is a higher level of collaboration and involvement in using the equipment, and it is done well, that is when we can move on to accessing the potential of technology to improve well-being.

Professor Abigail Marks: There is a related issue. Employees are increasingly aware, as you pointed out, of the emails or messages telling you how long you have been online. In our research, we have found a related issue of e-presenteeism. Because people perceive that they are being monitored, they are spending more time online, particularly now that they are working from home. They are responding to emails and undertaking work in their own time. We have found an increase of between 20% and 25% in people's working hours, very much in response to the perception of being online and showing e-presenteeism.

It is not just the technology being there. People's perceptions of the use of the technology and how they respond to that are a big issue for them.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Louise, do you want to add something?

Louise Marston: Very briefly, on the potential benefits. It is partly about who is collecting the data and who has access to it. Where people can collect data on what they are working on and evidence that, it can contribute to better and fairer decisions about who progresses in the workplace and how work is allocated. That can be a considerable benefit, but often the way the data is collected is very opaque and most workers do not get individual access to it. It is only accessed by senior managers. There is potential, but it has to be carefully managed.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Lord Pickles will pick up some of the themes you have just started to talk about and ask about good work.

Q97 **Lord Pickles:** This has been fascinating. I want to build on the evidence you have just given. Bearing in mind that we are trying to project forward maybe five years, I have three questions. The first naturally follows what we have just been saying. How could technology be used to enable more people to experience good work?

Louise Marston: There are some important ways to do it. The key ways that we have been looking at are investing in social enterprises that might put it in place. Changing the power relationships between workers and employers—as I said, who is collecting the data and how they use that information—is really important, as is changing the relationships between employer agencies and supply chains.

Often, agencies are middlemen holding information about workers in a flexible role and employers. If agencies can be made more efficient, and people can have more visibility about the work they are signing up to and what is involved in it, and if employers can have more transparency about the types of employees they are taking on, it can improve things. In construction, for example, the top contractor is very interested in the well-being and safety of the workers on the front line, but there are a lot of layers in between and a lot of different people in the chain.

We can give people better information about careers, and how to move from where they are to a job they want to be in, which skills they need, what training they need and examples of what sort of work is involved. We can open up workplaces so that it is easier to see what is involved and get experience before taking on roles. We need to give people choices and better information, particularly at the lower end of the labour market. Some of that information has been available for professional roles for quite a long time.

Lord Pickles: Could I pull you back a little bit? Could technology itself be used to create a good work experience?

Louise Marston: It could be. It is a tool, but lots of the things that make a good work experience are human things. It is our social connections and our autonomy. Certainly, technology can be used as a tool to enable those aspects. It could equally be used as a tool to close those things down. When it is used on very basic measures, on the more quantitative aspects of work, you risk taking out the qualitative pieces.

Lord Pickles: Forgive me for being picky, but what we are trying to do is get some recommendations. Can you think of ways in which technology can be used in a good way, maybe offering terms of protection?

Louise Marston: Absolutely. An application was developed with the unions to help people track their time, to understand where their time is being used and to compare that with their job conditions and their earnings. That would help people and give them more power over the

sorts of jobs they are undertaking and whether their conditions match the job they are doing.

We are backing a start-up called Breakroom that helps people in hourly jobs to look for new jobs that have better conditions: "Here's the job you're doing. This employer is rated better by other employees. They are less likely to cancel shifts at the last minute. They have a better satisfaction rating". It has those kinds of tools. Although the technology is not very sophisticated, the information sharing is novel and we know that those are the kinds of things that technology platforms do particularly well.

There are marketplaces for helping better matching of people in the workplace with people needing work. Over the next three to five years, we are likely to see much more demand for flexibility in work and much more use of it. That flexibility needs to be balanced so that it serves people's needs for a better balanced life and can benefit employers where they need flexible workforces. At the moment, we sometimes see there being a very one-sided flexible workforce in the UK. There are plenty of ways in which we can use technology to even up the power of those marketplaces.

Lord Pickles: I think that is right. Anna?

Anna Thomas: Technology will only be used to promote work quality in the way you have asked if it is designed and introduced in a human-centred way. That means thinking about the implications for job quality and good-quality work right from the outset, and right through the innovation cycle and the process of implementation.

An example is something else that is happening today. The EUu Robotics Association has introduced a Charter of Good Work, requiring its engineers and members to think about the implications for work quality as they design it. In a big picture sense, it means repositioning good work and quality work. It means putting thinking big at the centre of the levelling-up and recovery debates, and initiating a good work strategy. Perhaps I should finish there.

Lord Pickles: We are hanging on every word you say. I suppose what we are saying is this. Evidence has been given about people being very worried about the amount of time they are spending online, and they want to demonstrate to their boss that they are doing really well. Should it come to a point where the technology says, "Whoa there, over the last few weeks you've been working too hard"? Do you think there should be something technological that looks at well-being?

Anna Thomas: Yes, I think that could happen, but there would have to be a step change in priorities, right the way through the innovation cycle and supply chain, before it could happen and be meaningfully acted on, which is why it needs to be a wide, cross-department initiative centred on work quality, rather than thinking that a particular type of technology will be the answer in isolation.

Similarly, good work standards should become the new norm. National and local government should use all their policy levers to embed good work standards, in the sense of raising both the floor and the bar. The health and the economic case for good work should be promoted through official channels. There is a bunch of other recommendations in the report but, given the time, I shall not continue.

The Chair: Anna, we will come to that in our last set of questions. You will have plenty of time to give us some specific policy thoughts. Thank you.

Lord Pickles: James, how could technology be used to remove barriers to work to ensure that the current experience of disabled people is improved?

James Taylor: This may be slightly different from the position of some of the other witnesses on the panel. Technology for some groups of disabled people can play a huge role in supporting them to have a better experience at work. On one of the previous questions, I talked about the government scheme Access to Work. Not many people, whether employee or employer, know about it, but it provides that very technology to disabled people and supports them so that they have a better experience of work.

As specific tangible recommendations, first, there is a need for DWP and the Government to promote that scheme better and to promote what is available both to individuals and employers. Secondly, there is a great need to raise awareness, and increase the level of confidence managers and employers have about the technology that is available.

On the specifics, technology can be really beneficial for those who are deaf or hard of hearing. On some platforms, you can have captions automatically. There are now apps for smartphones that you can speak into. You might have a deaf colleague next to you. If you speak, and they have their app open, they can read what you say instantly. Many of those apps are free. That is a powerful example of how technology is increasing the experience of disabled people in the workplace.

To go back slightly, there are many technologies, platforms, apps and websites that are inaccessible, and have not been designed inclusively from the outset. There is a bigger point about how we bring inclusive design into the tech space so that as many people as possible can benefit from it. How do you make sure that every user can benefit from it, not just a certain segment? Technology can really help disabled people in work.

Q98 **Lord Pickles:** My final question has been touched on briefly in other segments of the evidence. I want to look at the barriers to the adoption of the use of technology.

Louise Marston: Some of the barriers to technology adoption are the existing amounts of management skills and technology skills and

confidence in implementing them. That is a well-documented barrier in a number of different sectors.

We have talked briefly about broadband, but there is also a problem with access to devices that will do all these things equally for different individuals and organisations of different sizes. Some organisations and companies have been very badly hit by Covid, and their resources and ability to invest in technology will have been significantly damaged. The equation about where it is worth automating or investing in technology to improve productivity and labour costs may have changed during the pandemic. Equally, some organisations will have a lot less investment money to spend on adding those capabilities to their workplaces. Those are some of the key barriers I see.

Anna Thomas: It is probably access to finance and incentives to introduce technology in a way that is human-centred and responsible. There could be help with dispersal. In the UK, we are good at innovation but not dispersal and scaling up. There is a need to address head-on the equality challenges that have been identified in both design and implementation. We have made some suggestions in our report, *Mind the Gap*.

Q99 **Baroness Jay of Paddington:** This is just a factual question. Abigail mentioned some time ago that there was very good experience in Switzerland of trying to overcome some of the barriers and looking at ways of changing things in the medium term. I hope I picked that up correctly. Maybe she could expand on it a little.

Professor Abigail Marks: I was trying to make a broader point about education, including technical education. In Switzerland and Germany, there are opportunities for all, not necessarily going through the university or academic route. People can go into good technological education from the age of 15. There is a lot of transferability between the university system and the much more practical education system, which means that you end up with a population whose skills are much more relevant and applicable.

To take the German example, there is a much more embedded manufacturing system that often provides good-quality work for people in lower socioeconomic groups who do not have the same level of education. In the UK, we have problems with infrastructure. We will not be able to embed ourselves as a technologically advanced economy when the education system does not support it.

The Chair: Baroness Benjamin has questions on ideas about specific recommendations. Within that, perhaps you could also think about government's role as an employer. A couple of you have talked about it, but clearly there is a huge potential role that government can play in illustrating best practice and leading in some of the ways you have talked about. When answering Baroness Benjamin's questions, perhaps you could answer that as well. Over to you, Floella.

Baroness Benjamin: Carlyn is asking them, not me.

The Chair: I apologise. I had you in the wrong place on my screen. I am sorry, Baroness Chisholm.

Q100 **Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen:** Do not worry, Martha.

This is the last question. Thank you all so much. It has been a fascinating morning for us all. We have heard about the issues facing those working from home, such as connectivity, access to data, a suitable home-working place and living conditions that support home working, along with the well-being of those working from home, psychological insecurity, and the digital divide for the disabled.

I want to ask each of you to suggest what recommendations for government and other actors you would like the committee to make to maximise the potential benefits of digital technology for workers' well-being and to mitigate the risks. Louise, would you like to start?

Louise Marston: I echo Abigail's point about skills, and the need for people to be able to access skills in digital and other ways that allow them to switch between sectors. That will be necessary as the nature of jobs changes and evolves, and the different impacts of automation and digital come through, as will the ability to retrain in a different sector or skill set, but at the same level of qualification and with funding for living costs.

There have been some good moves recently by the Government, in the FE White Paper and other announcements, but we would like that to go a bit further to make sure that it is possible for people to have short periods of learning, in parallel with work and between work, and have the funding to do that, given that financial resilience for lots of people has been damaged during the crisis.

The other area is protection. Anna referred to requesting the Information Commissioner's Office look at how employees' data is gathered and giving employers more guidance on how the tools should be used well and adopted to protect people's privacy and data ownership. Potentially, they could hand over some of that ownership and make data more accessible to individuals. In some cases, people could take the data with them to another job to prove their skills and the level of competence they have achieved in one role. It might be a delivery driver rating from an app; it might be a number of things they have done in the workplace that enable them to document the workplace skills they have acquired, not just qualifications.

We think that to allow people to exercise choice in the labour market and to be able to switch or relocate from sectors that are shrinking to those that are in greater demand, we need better rights to protect the bottom end, with the ability to request longer-hours contracts and flexible working, and the right to a contract that reflects the actual hours worked. There has to be balance in the combination of the need for increased flexibility and for people to have better rights in the work they want.

As a broad cross-sector point, there is the ability to understand the nature of skills and the sort of skills that you need in different jobs, and how those translate into different courses and jobs. There is a lot of complexity around the adult education sector and skills management, and how that is documented by different employers, by government and by education. Better alignment of what we mean by specific types of skills and how they can be linked to different roles would be really helpful.

The Chair: Louise, you touched on this in the first part of your answer. You talked about some of the bigger trends that are emerging, such as e-commerce and the increased use of automation, to pick a couple of them. On balance, do you think the trends are towards good work or away from it? Is there anything in policy terms that can mitigate a move away from good work? I know you have touched on it, but this specifically links back to the macro trends.

Louise Marston: There are a number of different trends happening in parallel with the hollowing out of middle-income jobs. There is rising demand for lower-income roles in areas such as health and social care. It is very hard to discern whether the aggregate move is towards or away from good work.

The risk I see at the moment is the increasing use and faster adoption of automation. The initial response to that is to remove the quality aspects of work, and that is mostly what we have seen in the past few years. Without intervention, that is likely to continue. I hope that the things Anna was speaking about—employer guidance on how to involve workers and users in the design and implementation of systems, and putting automation in place—augment people’s roles, and do not replace them, and improve quality of work, not decrease it. Looking at the impact assessments could help to improve things.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: Thank you, Louise. I am sorry. I have to keep going on mute because I have some very unruly dogs in the background.

James, could you give us some recommendations that you think we could make to the Government?

James Taylor: First, building on the point about skills and digital inclusion, a huge number of disabled people cannot access the internet and, even when they can, they have not necessarily had the support or education to get the digital skills needed for the workplace. Therefore, there is a role for government to invest much more in digital inclusion, particularly for groups of young disabled people who are at risk of being isolated and left behind in this fourth industrial revolution, with its increasing reliance on technology and a technological society.

Secondly, I talked a bit about Access to Work, but there are two specific things. The first is to increase knowledge about the programme among employers. It is important that the DWP promotes the benefits of the

programme to businesses and disabled people and how it can support many disabled people to stay in work and get into work.

Related to that, there is a role for DWP to upskill employers much more coherently and cohesively than perhaps it does at the moment, whether that is through an online information portal or hub or just somewhere employers can go to get the information they need. Some of it is because they just do not know about Access to Work, or they do not know that they need to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people under equality legislation, but there is definitely a gap in the amount of information for employers and in their development of that knowledge.

Finally, there is a specific point about ensuring that young disabled people have personalised career support, and access to apprenticeships and internships. The opportunity for that is the national disability strategy, which the disability unit in the Cabinet Office is currently leading. It is slated to be released, in a Civil Service spring, this year. There is a huge opportunity in that strategy to address some of the barriers that disabled people face, and to promote some of the opportunities and positives that I talked about at the beginning of the session.

Anna Thomas: To answer the Chair's question about key trends, we have found that inequalities of access to good work and health are becoming more pronounced, as well as access to good work across the country. If you connect that with the macro picture, it suggests that at the moment technology is not being correctly used or is not open in a human-centred way that augments human skills or improves work quality. That is the downside.

On the upside, we have seen very clearly that good work builds resilience and aligns the different interests you have identified. It aligns health, social and economic interests in a way that is shown very sharply by the correlation with the deaths of despair as well as the Covid mortalities. There is such a different picture across the country, and local dynamics are so nuanced, that perhaps it points to a transformative role for local authorities and a more local, tailored approach, because it is difficult to identify a set of factors that apply to every area. As for bigger trends, we have seen that worker transitions are accelerating quite fast and are likely to do so significantly in the next two to five years, with people and communities in areas with the lowest good work monitor scores needing additional targeted support.

As for key recommendations, I have already mentioned the good work strategy and repositioning good-quality work as a central cross-government policy objective. That will meet a lot of challenges that you as a group have identified. Similarly, in levelling up and recovery, which must be a social as well as an economic endeavour, good work, if it is positioned more centrally, can be used as a guide, and to evaluate and adjust levelling-up and recovery policies. Good work standards should be embedded, with full use of policy levers at national, regional and local level. In some instances, that includes boosting the protection of law

where gaps have been identified, such as access to information and explanation about how surveillance technologies are used, in the way we have talked about.

As a specific recommendation, we have used a machine-learning clustering mechanism to group areas in our good work monitor, released today, which might be useful in enabling a new approach to devolved funding and how to advance the local work agenda. It would enable different groups and areas across the country that face similar challenges perhaps to get together, as we sometimes see in the States, and form a compact to pilot and advance something that they think is particularly important.

The final recommendation I would like to make is about better data on quality work. A number of the dimensions that we wanted to have in the monitor, including voice, representation and even health and safety, which you can see in our flagship good work charter, are not available. We could not get even the core things for Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, which is a bit embarrassing, frankly. To continue the task of the work quality group that was set up and boost it further, in particular with objective indicators, is super-important and will help both policymakers and everybody else.

The Chair: The point you make about specific objective indicators is really interesting. Can you give some examples? My colleagues may not be aware, as I am not, of how you might start to measure some of that.

Anna Thomas: In the Good Work Monitor out today, which I will circulate afterwards, we have broken down good quality into things that can be measured, almost all objectively, across England, even if not Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and grouped them into areas, such as labour market access, where we have used the unemployment rate and workforce participation, and status and autonomy, where we have used the percentage of workers in routine occupations. We have used that as a proxy for autonomy, but it is also, as you know, an indicator of how automatable work is. Other indicators are the percentage of workers in professional and managerial work; pay and conditions in terms of median pay; and the percentage of workers reporting satisfactory hours, which is a more subjective indicator.

We can map those and relate them to conditions and health impacts in a quite specific way. The model as a whole, and the parts within it, may be useful, we hope, in enabling the Government to make recovery and levelling up a reality, placing good work at the centre of that mission.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: Thanks, Anna. I greatly look forward later today to reading your report that has just come out. It sounds fascinating. Abigail, do you want to give us your recommendation?

Professor Abigail Marks: Before I start, I need to apologise. I too have a dog that may be about to start barking.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: There will be an interesting song going on between them.

Professor Abigail Marks: Most of my recommendations are based on working from home, which is my area of expertise. We have found over the last 10 months that there has been a very poor set-up in people's home-working space and the equipment they are being provided with. Clearly, that is a product of the pandemic, but going forward it is important that organisations are made accountable for the home-working space, both the physical provision of chairs and desks as well as the provision of technology, and perhaps financial support to optimise broadband, domestic heating, et cetera. There should be allowances for home working if that is the direction of travel.

The idea of community hubs needs good support. As we have heard, not everybody has the space or ability to work from home. Particularly for young people who may not be getting socialisation within the organisation, perhaps the next best thing would be provision within community hubs. Following on from that, we have talked about the balance between working in the organisation and working from home, and we have to be very careful not to force people to work from home when their home-working space is not suitable, or where it may damage their physical and psychological well-being.

Going back to the points about surveillance and timing of work, we found that the pace of work has changed. Over the last 10 months, when people have been working from home, there has been a massive change in the pace of work. That is because of increased back-to-back meetings, going from Zoom meeting to Zoom meeting and Teams meeting to Teams meeting. The normal ebb and flow of the working day that we would expect has disappeared. You might have had a 10 or 15-minute gap when you would catch up with a colleague over coffee and have a debrief, but that has gone.

One of the things we can do with the technology is ensure that those gaps exist. There are clear issues about surveillance and watching what people are doing, but one of the biggest issues that we have established as becoming problematic is the lack of ebb and flow and the lack of the normal pace of the working day. The technology can be utilised to avoid that.

Finally, we are still very much focused on how many hours people work every day, and that is causing issues of e-presenteeism. Within the culture, the more hours people work, the more value they are perceived to have; it is not about what they produce. We need to move away from that and look at outcomes. There should be real encouragement to evaluate people on what they produce, rather than on how long they take to produce it, to avoid the issue of overwork and e-presenteeism.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: We have lots of good recommendations to put into our pot. Does anybody on the Committee want to follow up?

Q101 **Lord Alderdice:** I have two questions. First, it may be too early to know, but I wonder whether the remote-working possibility has begun to feed through to the dispersal of work and jobs from companies based in the south-east of England to companies in the north where there are lots of people and lower costs in many ways. Have people talked about it? Maybe it is too early, but is there any evidence of that?

Secondly, most of the people you have been talking about carry out various levels of work. I have become aware that in some of the professions, of which law would be an example, the ease of use of billable hours for the work of young lawyers in particular means that they are being put through the mill in a very serious way, which is damaging to their health and their relationships.

Some of these problems are not just at the levels we would often have focused on when thinking about exploitation; in many of the professions, there is a degree of exploitation. Law is one example; it is by no means the only one. In your research, have you been able to look at any of those groups as well?

Professor Abigail Marks: I can answer the first question, which is basically about geography. One of the great things about this enhanced home-working experiment is that there has been a lot of talk by workplaces about expanding the geographical reach of employees. Large companies in the south-east of England can now employ people living in the north because of the optimisation of technology. That is definitely being talked about and seen. People now see a much bigger world available to them.

I live in Edinburgh and I have just started a job in Newcastle, which is not so far away. That possibility is not just for professional workers; it will move down the ranks. It gives people far greater opportunities. I hope that is one of the positives coming out of the pandemic; employers we have spoken to are certainly very conscious of that.

I have a little knowledge of the legal profession. I am not sure how home working will impact on it, but certainly in all professional groups we have seen work intensification both in hours worked and in how much work is undertaken in those hours. It goes back to the point I made about the ebb and flow of the working day. We all think that we have to be 100% productive at any given point in the working day, but that is not how it works. The periods when we are 40% productive are just as effective in managing pace in the longer term. Employers need to be aware that 100% of every minute of every day is not necessarily the best way to work. We all need ebb and flow and pace.

Lord Hain: Is e-presenteeism a new word I have just learned? It will be in the Oxford dictionary next year. Do each of you see the world of work being hybrid for the foreseeable future, with the obvious exception of firefighters, bricklayers, et cetera, who have to be physically on site? Is it a permanent shift?

Professor Abigail Marks: It is absolutely a permanent shift, but not for everybody. As has been pointed out, not every job can be undertaken from home, but it is clear from the employees and the employers we have spoken to that people who are able to home work want a hybrid model; they want between one and three days at home and the rest in the office, and trying to manage that will be hard.

I was talking a couple of days ago to somebody who worked in retail. Obviously, face-to-face retail is very difficult to bring home, but they were talking about a hybrid model where people who work in a shop also work in a call centre scenario at home so that they can balance being physically present in the workplace and being at home. From both the employee and the employer perspective, I think it is very much here to stay.

Baroness Benjamin: Abigail, some of the points you have just made have got me thinking. You have talked about health and safety; you have talked about the extra costs of using your home. What about insurance companies? Are there any indications that insurance companies will start to charge higher premiums because of home working? How will they cover themselves? Has any thought been given to that?

Professor Abigail Marks: No, but it is a very interesting point. Would it cost more or less? You are less likely to be subject to break-ins if you are based at home, but you are probably more likely to have fires. I do not know. It is an interesting question and one that will need to be added to the agenda. There is also a question about car insurance for domestic and commuting purposes. The key question, if those are all additional costs to the employee, is the extent to which organisations will be made responsible. Broadband, heating, electricity and insurance will have to be carefully thought out.

Lord Hain: Do any of the other witnesses want to add, succinctly, to what Abigail said about a hybrid model for the future?

James Taylor: I can add a few specific points from people we have spoken to. There was a point last year post first lockdown and pre second lockdown when some disabled people were being pressured to go back to the workplace by their employer because they could not do their job from home. We have heard about some of the roles that might be trickier to do from home, such as manufacturing and a whole host of other things. Typically, lots of disabled people congregate in those sorts of roles, which might be lower paid.

An assessment needs to be made in relation to the Equality Act and other legislation about whether people are being made worse off. We hear from some people that they have to make a choice between protecting their health and having to go into the workplace. I enter a slight word of caution from some people we have spoken to about that.

The Chair: Does anyone want to add anything on Lord Hain's question? We have been more efficient with time than sometimes. Louise, do you

want to add something?

Louise Marston: You opened this section talking about the role of government as an employer, and we did not address that hugely. Building on what Anna said about the need to come up with objective measures of the quality of good work, the great work that IFOW has done and the work following up the Taylor review on measuring good work are good starting points. To the extent that the Government can put conditions in place and look for ways to measure them when both employers and government are commissioning big construction projects and commissioning care, they can often play a very influential role in how those conditions are passed down through agencies, contractors and suppliers. That can have a very big impact on how they play out in the way that contracts and people are managed. There is a very important role for government in establishing that standards are important and cascading them into different parts of the workforce.

The Chair: That is very articulate. Thank you very much. It has been a really interesting session. The ideas you are talking about are still relatively new in society, and understanding the concepts and language around them is sometimes challenging in itself. Thank you for helping us to navigate that.

I have made a couple of notes. I was particularly struck by some points made by Anna. It feels obvious when you say it out loud, but perhaps not as obvious until you think about it, that good work aligns with health, education and equality. That is not your language, but my note. I hope that we will be able to drill down a lot into that in our inquiry and recommendations. I am also much struck by Floella's point about the lack of research and data on black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, so we will bear that very much in mind.

Thank you very much from all of us for helping us to understand more about this area. As you know, this is part of a three-part work section of our inquiry, so it really helps us understand the trends and policy recommendations specific to the idea of good work and well-being, which, as you know, we are trying to keep as the backdrop to everything we do. Thank you all very much. Stay safe and sane in these crazy times. Thank you very much, and my thanks to colleagues.