



Covid-19 Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The long-term impact of the pandemic on parents and families

Tuesday 25 May 2021

9.45 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

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; Lord Pickles; Baroness Young of Hornsey.

Evidence Session No. 3

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 34 - 48

Witnesses

I: Laura Dewar, Policy and Research Lead, Gingerbread; Megan Jarvie, Head of Coram Family and Childcare; Simon Kelleher, Head of Policy and Influencing, Working Families; Molly Mayer, Senior Research and Policy Officer, Fawcett Society.

Examination of witnesses

Laura Dewar, Megan Jarvie, Simon Kelleher and Molly Mayer.

Q34 The Chair: Good morning. Welcome to the House of Lords Covid-19 Committee, and a particular welcome to our witnesses this morning. I really look forward to your submissions, conversations and answers about the inquiry we are currently doing, looking at the impact of the pandemic on parents and families.

As you know, we are a committee that has been set up to look at the long-term implications of Covid, not an altogether easy subject, because although we are emerging from it, we still feel like we are in it. We urge you to try to think a couple of years ahead, because that is where we are trying to help the Government to think about longer-term policy suggestions, rather than the inquiry looking at what is happening now or what has happened in the past. If you could bear that in mind, that would be immensely helpful.

This is the fourth piece of work that we have done. We started off by gathering lots of views from about the country and from experts about the long-term impact of Covid. Unsurprisingly, of course, all the issues of care, families and children particularly came up a great deal in our submissions. We then looked at the impact of technology, and we will go on to look at the future of towns and cities, so you can see the trajectory of what we have been up to.

I remind everybody that we are being recorded and we are being broadcast. My colleagues have questions and I will come to them. Perhaps we can start by having quick introductions, so that people can put names to faces. We have seen the words that you sent to us, so there is no need to do a long introduction. If you can just say your name and where you come from, that would be very helpful.

Molly Mayer: Thank you very much for having me today. I am the senior research and policy officer at the Fawcett Society.

Simon Kelleher: Good morning, everybody. I am head of policy and influencing at the charity Working Families.

Megan Jarvie: I am head of Coram Family and Childcare. I will be able to talk about childcare in particular today.

Laura Dewar: I am from Gingerbread, the charity for single-parent families.

Q35 The Chair: As you are also aware, in this session we are trying to understand the dynamics of work and childcare and how that interrelationship is falling out. It is no great new news how much this has affected families from so many different angles—it falls particularly on women—changing the dynamics within families and even changing how fathers organise their working lives, particularly in single-parent families. We are really interested in looking at all the different combinations of what has been going on and trying to unpick this complicated subject.

I would like to start by asking you a broader question. Again, we are trying to look long term but obviously against the backdrop of what has happened. If you could bear in mind what faces us currently as well as in the future, that would be immensely helpful.

I would like to ask Laura and Molly initially about parents who are unemployed or who have reduced hours as a result of the pandemic. How has that shifted over this last year, and how may it go into the long term? What are the dynamics about work?

Molly Mayer: We have conducted two rounds of polling with the Women's Budget Group and other organisations in the devolved nations. We have looked specifically at the polling of parents. We did a poll of parents in November/December, with 1,000 families. We looked at furlough and loss of work or of hours. At that point, we found that, overall, more fathers had been furloughed or lost their job because of the first lockdown. Men were more likely to be furloughed or lose their job because the construction industry and other manufacturing industries shut.

We saw a big difference in the mothers who had experienced job loss and were furloughed. It is really important to say that, even though about 20% or 30% of mothers had been furloughed,¹ 43% of younger mothers, 18 to 39, had been furloughed, compared to 34% of older mothers; 48% of black, Asian and ethnic minority mothers, compared to 34% of white mothers; and 49% of disabled mothers, compared to 34% of non-disabled mothers.

It was similar for those who lost their job or lost working hours: 47% of black, Asian or ethnic minority mothers, compared to 31% of white mothers. There are similar figures for disabled mothers. When we asked, "Why did you lose your job?" or "Why were you on furlough?", mothers were much more likely to say that they did so for childcare reasons. Some 13% of fathers said they lost their job or hours because of caring responsibilities, compared to 21% of mothers.

Like I said, so far, more men have been made redundant in the pandemic than women, but we are worried that this might change. Right now, the redundancy rates for women are 76% higher than they were during the financial crisis and only 3% higher for men. We are worried that, when the furlough scheme ends for all those industries, such as hospitality, retail and beauty, where women are most concentrated, they will start to lose their jobs. That is where mothers will become more affected.

As you are saying, we can look at what happened at the beginning of the pandemic, but that is not necessarily what will continue to happen. That is where the risk of long-term unemployment for mothers comes in.

The Chair: That is very helpful. I was going to ask you about some of those statistics. I might come back to the detail of different groups.

¹ The witness later clarified that it was 37%

Laura Dewar: Gingerbread is the charity for single-parent families and it is important to see the context of work for single parents before the pandemic. You have to have that context. I have done two research projects looking in particular at single parents and the Covid crisis. Obviously some of it is historical, but some of it is very much looking forward and trying to protect the interests of single parents in government policy.

There are 1.8 million single parents in the UK, and nine out of 10 of those are women. A lot of issues about women and unemployment will be applicable to single parents. During the crisis, the unemployment rate for single parents was at 12%, which compares to 4% of coupled parents who were actively seeking work. Also, as Molly has touched on, single parents are much more likely to have been furloughed, so 30% compared to 21% of coupled parents. Longer term, their prospects are worrying, as to what will happen in those jobs. Some of them are currently shut down. Looking at the types of work they are in, 46% of single parents are in routine occupations such as non-food retail and hospitality.

Again, it is what is down the line. So far, we have seen some drop in employment for single parents. There seem to be differing views as to the level of that unemployment, but those who lose their jobs are finding it incredibly hard to find work. The single parents I interviewed who had lost their job during our project found it really hard to find a job through advertised vacancies, because there is such a shortage of part-time and flexible work.

The Chair: That is really helpful background. Megan or Simon, I do not know whether you have anything you want to add, particularly on the numbers or your projections for what has happened.

Megan Jarvie: It picks up on what Laura said. With the parents we have been involved with and the research we have done, we find that there is often a very marginal choice between childcare and the financial gains from working, which are often quite small once you have paid for childcare, and balance all that up. We know that a bad experience can be scarring for a long time. If you have started working and it has not worked for your family, for your child, or the childcare you have been using has not worked, that can put parents off working for a long time.

I think that almost all families have had an experience in the last year of where it just has not worked. There is one side, which is the furlough and the redundancies. There is another side, which is what effect the pandemic will have on that decision-making long term. Although every family makes the decision that is right for them, there is a role for us to play in making all the choices that are available for parents better.

Simon Kelleher: I would like to support what we have heard there. Early indications from the ONS suggest that, unsurprisingly, the employment rates for all types of parents are down, but most notably for single parents. Similarly to Megan's points, research we have done with Leeds University Business School on childcare suggests that, currently, higher

numbers of new parents are not returning to the workforce after paternity or maternity leave.

The Chair: Do you have any sense of numbers on that point?

Simon Kelleher: I cannot give you numbers. In terms of polling or proportions, it has been two in five.²

Q36 **Lord Hain:** You have given us really interesting data on gender and lone parents. What about class? Where does that fit into the picture?

Molly Mayer: In our polling, we looked at parents in households on less than £20,000 a year, £20,000 to £40,000, and then above. We found that 34% of mothers on the lowest household incomes, below £20,000, were furloughed for childcare reasons, compared to 26% of mothers in higher-income households. Also, 39% of mothers on the lowest incomes had lost their work or lost hours, compared to 29% of those on higher incomes. It is clear that those on lower incomes and lower class are being disproportionately affected. They are working in the jobs, such as hospitality and retail, that have had to be shut down.

Lord Hain: Is childcare a big factor in that? It is cheaper to be furloughed than to try to find another job, if one is available.

Megan Jarvie: Yes, quite often. We have some upcoming research. We will be looking at labour market effects locally for parents and, alongside that, what has happened to the childcare market. In particular, what interventions has local government made in childcare markets? Has that made a difference to the labour market and whether parents have been able to stay in work because of different things that have happened with the childcare market?

Molly Mayer: It is important also to remember that the childcare benefit—30 hours' childcare—and the Universal Credit childcare element are tied to being in work. Parents have to be working in order to access those extra childcare benefits. Once they are out of work, not only is it expensive; they now have extra costs to pay because they are not receiving extra money from the Government.

Q37 **The Chair:** We will come back to childcare later in the morning. I wonder if I can pick up on something you started to elucidate, Molly, about the different groups and how they are affected. There were really interesting statistics there about black, Asian and disabled communities.

I wonder whether we could look at that a bit more deeply. Do others have comments particularly about trying to break this down demographically, to Peter's point? Any more detail you have, particularly about any vulnerable groups, would be extremely helpful. Do Megan, Simon or Laura want to add anything to Molly's statistics? No? Just reinforce them, I guess. Nod if you agree. Okay.

² The witness later clarified that it was one in five.

Megan Jarvie: We know that it is parents in the most precarious work who have been most likely to lose work. That is normally also the lowest paid. That picks up on the class point that was mentioned earlier, too.

- Q38 **Lord Alderdice:** As our Chair has said, we are trying to look at things and what they will be like after the pandemic. It is very difficult to speak about that in terms of research, because research is necessarily about the way it is now or has been. We are trying to look forward to how it might be afterwards. Some of the things you have mentioned that are very important at the moment will not pertain in quite the same way. For example, we have been talking about furlough, but, by definition, furlough will not continue after the end of the pandemic, whenever that might be.

Childcare of course also changes, because many children have been off school for periods of time, which has added to the pressures. Schools are getting back to some kind of normal, so that is a change. We found in our first report that the pandemic has accelerated the use of digital and people operating from home, which has plus and minus sides. There are changes, and we are looking on the other side of the pandemic, rather than how it has been up until now.

You have pointed out, quite rightly, that some of the furlough will end up in unemployment and that other people are simply now unemployed. I wonder whether I could touch a little further on that question. What do we know about the impact that unemployment has on the overall sense of well-being in families? If increasing numbers of parents are unemployed, what are your concerns about the impact that will have long term on their well-being?

Laura Dewar: I agree that some things that are happening currently, furlough and so forth, have an impact now on families, but a lot of things that have happened in the pandemic will carry on having an impact. There has been huge scarring, not just on well-being but on mental health, for lots of families and single parents during the pandemic. Some 54% of single parents during the pandemic said that they were suffering from depression or bad nerves. Some of those things will continue.

You talk about childcare and schools. The pandemic has had an impact on the childcare sector, but I am sure we will talk about that in more detail later. I do not think it is as simple as saying that there is the pandemic and then we all get back to normal. There are things that have happened during the pandemic that will carry on having an impact.

Schools are back. Children are back in school, but some of them will still be sent home to self-isolate. The children of some of the parents I interviewed missed a third of the autumn term because they were sent home to self-isolate. That will carry on. There will still be pockets of children having to self-isolate. Some of the single parents we talked to were loath to use available wrap-around care, which has diminished as a result of the pandemic, because they are worried that if their children go into the bubble of afterschool care that is another reason why their

children might be sent home to self-isolate. All those things will continue to have an impact on families and families' ability to work.

Megan made a point earlier about families making choices as to what they will do about employment, juggling childcare and all those things. Some 75% of single parents are on some form of benefit. It is most likely that they have to be jobseekers when their children are three. They have no choice about that. They cannot say that they will not look for work. The very condition of being on Universal Credit means that you need to be a jobseeker.

One of the things about well-being is taking account of the fact that people have been through an awful lot during the pandemic. The job market and the childcare market are very fractured, and people have to be supported in going back to work. I had a call through my helpline in the last couple of weeks from someone who has a four-year-old child and has been through the pandemic and all those things,. She said that she felt hounded by the jobcentre to get back to work when she is only just catching her breath. The pandemic has had an impact on families, and that needs to be taken account of going forward. Some of those things will have a very long-lasting effect in the years to come.

Megan Jarvie: I will pick up on some of the points that Laura just made about the impact of unemployment on well-being. I would slightly challenge the question, because there are a lot of parents who choose not to work. That is a very positive choice, and actually, for them, increases the well-being of their family. That is worth recognising. Where it can be very damaging is where there is no choice for parents when it comes to being mandated to look for work, wanting to work but not being able to afford childcare, or not being able to find work that fits about the family.

Employment has a big impact on family incomes. We know that low-income has a huge impact on child poverty and children's outcomes, particularly in educational attainment but also in health. Employment is one way of tackling that, but there are also ways of tackling that through the benefits system. It is about looking at that holistic choice for families. We want families to have genuine choices about working and caring, and to do what works best for their family. That is what will be best for families' well-being.

Molly Mayer: Megan mentioned the benefits system. It is really important to say that more families out of work means more reliance on state benefits, but because of the two-child limit and the benefit cap families are really limited in what they can get. Like Megan said, the system is developed to encourage families and parents into work. It means that, if you have children, you try to work.

Right now, we are in a situation where parents just cannot find work. There is not the same availability as there normally is. We know that, during the pandemic,³ about 76,000 households were affected by the

³ The witness later clarified that they meant to say "before" rather than "during" the

benefit cap. By November 2020, it had risen to 180,000 families, and 85% of those households include children. Like Megan said, for some of those families, whether you want to work is a choice, but there are families who want to and are able to work but, because of the system, they are having their benefits reduced.

Simon Kelleher: Where not working is not a choice is a particular concern for parents, for a lot of the reasons we have just heard about. Molly alluded earlier to how your entitlement to childcare changes. We know that when unemployment is not a choice there are connections to stress and poorer health outcomes as well.

People with caring responsibilities are sometimes more limited in the options and choices of work that they have before them. They might be looking for part-time work or work where they can flex their hours. Currently, there is a big problem in the labour market with the demand for flexible work and the actual supply of it. That is also a big concern. The flipside of that would be a lot of jobs where there is lots of flexibility but it is all at the behest of the employer, so people are concerned about being pushed into more insecure forms of work and the gig economy.

Lord Alderdice: I wonder if I could press a question about choice and employment. I am not quite sure what is being said. You have mentioned the people who do not have a choice because they cannot get a job. They want to get a job, but they cannot get a job, so they do not have a choice. I understand that.

I also got a sense that people were saying something about choosing whether to work, which of course assumes that they have the choice, but that, somehow or another, if people chose not to take up employment, they should be able to do that without any cost in various ways. I am not quite sure what is being said about that. I understand absolutely what is being said about people not having a choice if there are no jobs for them. If there are jobs, there was something about people having the choice of not working. I may have picked that up wrongly.

Laura Dewar: With a very changing employment market, there will be jobs that do not exist in the same way. I have interviewed single parents for the research that we have done. The majority of single parents want to work, but it is also about other choices. This not only about their long-term work prospects. Some of it is about training and skills.

It is not a stark choice: "I do not want to work". They are saying, "I want to work but I also want to get a job that will be sustainable and longer term". It is about access to training and work experience, perhaps in a new area of work that someone has not worked in before. It is not just a straight choice about moving into work. It is also using the time when you are not working to try to upskill.

Molly mentioned the benefit cap. There is Universal Credit, where, if you have a child aged three or above, you need to be a jobseeker. Under the benefit cap, it is even more stringent than that. It is not about being a jobseeker; it is about securing work. You can be asked to do that when your child is any age, not even at three. There is no consistency. Unless you move into work, you will continue to be benefit capped. There are currently 100,000 single parents with children, some of them babies, who are expected to find a job.

Megan Jarvie: The main concern that we as an organisation have about choice and work is that childcare often takes the choice of work away from parents. Either the amount that they will earn is less than they would be paying in childcare, so they will actually be financially worse off for working, or the childcare is not available that meets that need. That is a particular problem for disabled children, where there are huge shortages in childcare availability, and for parents who work atypical hours. Should you fall into either of those groups, it is very hard to find an option that works if you do not have friends and family available who can help. If the childcare that is available is not right for your family, it can mean that you do not have that genuine choice.

Q39 **Baroness Benjamin:** What kinds of initiatives will help parents who are unemployed while they are at home to help with their well-being? Also, what initiatives could be introduced to help unemployed parents perhaps work from home? Laura, you seem to have spoken to a lot of parents and I was interested to hear what you were saying just now.

Laura Dewar: The Government are starting to introduce some good schemes to help people get back to work. The Restart scheme, for instance, will start next month. These schemes are holistic and take account of wider things—childcare and so forth. There have been some really good voluntary schemes in Scotland. They have some devolved powers about back-to-work support. Some of their schemes have really good results, particularly for women, because they are longer term. They are not saying, “What are the available jobs? Move into that. Move into a job as quickly as possible”. They have a longer-term view.

Children grow up, so what job you might be able to do when your child is three is very different from when your child is going to secondary school. You have many more options. It is taking that longer-term view, which is different than for other jobseekers, where they do not have those other considerations.

As I say, there are some initiatives that the Government are doing. Having a much more holistic, longer-term view and factoring in childcare is so important. That emphasis on childcare not just being about being in a job, but also leading up to getting a job, and having access to training and improving someone’s skills, is really important.

Baroness Benjamin: I suppose it is empowering them to take charge of the situation they are in. Is that basically what you are saying?

Laura Dewar: Not necessarily, no. Very often, someone will lose confidence if they have been out of the labour market and had a child. I cannot remember what the Scottish system is called, but it was the replacement for the Work Programme. It is a voluntary programme. A lot of back-to-work support is mandated, so that gives it a different edge. That mandating has slightly more negative connotations for certain groups than for others. Women, and mothers in particular, really value a more supportive, holistic and longer-term approach.

Megan Jarvie: There are some quite simple things that could be done with childcare to support single parents to move back into work. I cannot fathom how I would apply for a job without any childcare. I do not know how that would add up. It seems impossible to me.

The 30 hours' free childcare scheme is a really great example that could be changed quite easily to support parents to move back into work. That is childcare that is currently available for working parents, but if it was extended to parents in training or looking for work it would be incredibly useful to allow parents to take the step to build up their skills, recognise that the job market might have changed since they last worked, and make that journey into employment. At the moment, there is no space to do that, because they do not have childcare so do not have time to get work ready and do job applications.

The 30 hours scheme could be changed very easily and simply. It works very well. The same could be said for other childcare support that is out there, particularly Universal Credit.

Molly Mayer: One thing that I hope is changing—Laura, correct me if I am wrong—is that, right now, with the Universal Credit childcare element, parents have to pay their costs up front and then they are reimbursed. I think Gingerbread was part of a really great court case to challenge that, and I believe the DWP is appealing it. Right now, if you want to access childcare, if you get a job and you are on Universal Credit you are eligible to getting 85% of your costs reimbursed. You still need to pay those costs up front, and that can be thousands of pounds. Laura, am I getting any of that wrong?

Laura Dewar: It was a legal challenge taken by Save the Children, but I provided written evidence to the court about it, and it was won in the High Court. It is not only that Universal Credit is paid in arrears. If you have a pre-school-age child, very often a nursery will also want a deposit, so it can be thousands of pounds if you are starting work. You need to pay a deposit to secure a nursery or childminder place, and then pay the up-front costs of childcare, which is prohibitive.

It is a very strange system. It implies that somehow people have a couple of thousand pounds in the bank in order to start work. It is very negative for parents starting work, but also for progressing in work and doing more hours, because there is this constant thing that they will have to meet those childcare costs.

Molly Mayer: I also did some background research for Save the Children on the case. I interviewed single parents who were claiming the benefit. They found that, because they had to pay the up-front costs, they were then having to go into credit card debt and into debt with their landlord. They were having to negotiate with the childminder, who was already not earning enough money, to let them have a free space up front. A couple of parents decided to not take up work because they just did not have the money to pay these up-front costs.

This is a barrier that the High Court has said needs to be removed. It is something the Government can do to enable parents who have gained a job and need childcare to move into work easily without going into massive debt.

Lord Alderdice: These things are, of course, not hermetically sealed from each other. I know that we will be coming back to the childcare element of employment and unemployment. Maybe I should hand back to the Chair at this point and we can come back into that territory a little later.

The Chair: Listening to your really interesting answers, it still feels as though a lot of what you are describing could have been true pre-pandemic. Unfortunately, you are describing a landscape, we understand, of immense complexity and then the pandemic layered on top of that. It would be immensely helpful if you could help us to unpick those different themes a bit. To John's point, I know that it may be inextricably linked, but, if I am surmising correctly from what you are saying, more unemployment and more of the continued hastening trends is what I am hearing.

In future answers, could you bear in mind that, for us, casting our minds ahead, we are trying to say, "This is what the pandemic has created in an already complex situation with vulnerable families and so on"? We would appreciate your help in doing that. I am anxious that a lot of what you are saying could be quite generic because of the challenges that single-parent families faced before, such as childcare barriers and so on. That is just an observation about some of the answers. I realise this is complicated. That is why we need your help.

I will pass to my colleague, Lola, Baroness Young, who will talk about some of the specificity of childcare.

Q40 **Baroness Young of Hornsey:** Thanks to our witnesses today. I can understand how difficult it is, because we are looking at how the pandemic has exacerbated a lot of the inequalities and issues that already existed. It is almost like you have to run on two tracks—to acknowledge and contextualise what has gone before—what has happened, what will be different and how we can make it work for vulnerable people.

Some of you have already contributed quite a bit about the barriers to childcare and its impact on the ability to regain employment or, indeed,

gain employment for the first time. We must remember that people have had children during the pandemic, and they will be in this completely weird and different situation. We need to address that too.

The key question then, for me, becomes how the current system could and should be changed to improve parents' employment prospects, in the light of what has happened during the pandemic. Some of this has already been touched on, particularly the disparity between the experience of black and minority ethnic women, and non-black and minority ethnic women, and people with disabilities and/or with disabled children. I would like to drill down a little more into those areas, taking on board what has already been suggested about class and vulnerable workers.

I know it is complex. The whole question of intersectionality comes into play there as well. Can we get to what the current system needs to do in order to take on board and improve the situation for parents seeking employment as a result of what has happened during the pandemic? We have not really touched on the issue of the age of parents and how there might be different needs for different ages. It is about targeting a change in policy.

Megan Jarvie: I will try to separate out what was there already and what is new because of the pandemic. There have been problems with the childcare market for a long time. A lot of the problems we are talking about are not new but have been exacerbated by the pandemic. There are two things that the pandemic has done in particular that are worth picking up. There will be more parents needing to move into work because their work has been disrupted. They are changing jobs, have lost their jobs or need to find new work. Moving into new work is becoming a more pressing issue. Also, the childcare market has become more precarious.

There has been a growing awareness that childcare is really quite important. It is part of our infrastructure. It is an essential part of enabling employment, which I do not think was quite as fully recognised until employers without children suddenly saw children popping up on Zoom calls and realised how difficult it was to manage that whole puzzle.

On the question of moving into work, there are many flaws in the childcare system, but it works better for parents who are already in employment and getting that continuous support through the system. It starts to fall apart when you are looking at starting work for the first time or moving back into work. Molly and Laura have already picked up the Universal Credit issues, which are so acute for low-income families. It is just "Do not pass go". How do you move into work if it will cost you £1,000? It is impossible.

It also plays into the 30 hours' free childcare that I talked about. That is for three and four year-olds. It is for working parents. You become eligible the term after you start work. If you are offered a job today, you become eligible for 30 hours at the beginning of September, when the next term starts. There is no plan for what you are supposed to do from

now until then. That means that parents will face huge costs when they first move into work, which creates a huge barrier to moving into work.

One part of the childcare system that works very well and is much more flexible about moving in and out of work is tax-free childcare. It is the most responsive part of the childcare system, but it is really poorly targeted and not as generous. It covers only 20% of the costs of childcare and it is largely claimed by better-off families. The uptake is not that high anyway. That shows that the infrastructure is there to create a system of childcare that could work really well, respond to families' needs and enable that move in and out of work.

We know that the jobs market is much more flexible and changeable now, so we need childcare support that matches that. Particularly for families with school-age children, who often get forgotten about with childcare—we think of childcare for the under-fives—their costs will double, probably more than double, during the holidays, compared to during termtime. With the Universal Credit, the support is paid in arrears every time, so parents have to meet these huge extra costs of school holidays without any extra income until a month later. That is very hard to manage when you are just about breaking even each month.

We would like to see a complete overhaul of the childcare system, one that supports the quality of childcare, where funding goes directly to childcare providers and parents are paying what they can afford, based on their income and the number of children they have. Tax-free childcare provides the blueprint for how that could work. It is possible within our system. At the moment, we have a fragmented, confusing system where parents get lost between the cracks. It acts as a huge barrier to work for parents who would otherwise want to work.

Molly Mayer: To come back to your question, and bringing in the intersectionality point, going back to what I was saying at the beginning and joining all this up, we know that younger mothers, mothers on low incomes, black, Asian and ethnic minority mothers and disabled mothers were much more likely to lose work and be out of their job. For all the reasons we are talking about—the high costs that you have to pay up front, or the 30-hour system, as Megan just explained—those groups in particular will have the hardest time and the biggest challenge moving into employment. Not all mothers are affected equally by this. It is these groups who will have the most difficulty.

The other important thing—and we completely echo what Megan said—is a complete overhaul of the system, so that lower-income families and those out of work can access employment. It is really important that we also think about who delivers childcare. About 97% are women and they are often mothers. Some 44% of early years practitioners receive benefits, because they are not paid enough. The average wage for practitioners is below minimum wage. We need to understand that this is an immense group of women who are being affected by this.

Childcare is a job that allows mothers, often, to combine caring for their own children and earning an income. Childminding is a job like that. I have done quite a few interviews with childminders, and a single mother has said to me, “It was either becoming a childminder or licking envelopes. That is what I can do at home all day while my kids are at home”. We need to realise the important job opportunity that well-paid childcare can offer to women who have children or who need to work around term time or school hours.

That is why it is about not just extending access for families but increasing the wage and the funding for the women who are providing childcare. It is important that we include early education as well, because it is not just care. Early education is one of the biggest tools we have for tackling disadvantages and attainment gaps, and that is what they are doing. We need to realise what they are doing and value that.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: That seems to suggest two things to me. One is reskilling, upskilling and changing the status of childminders and childcare providers, especially recognising that, during the pandemic, a lot of children in early years have missed out on some of the socialisation and all the other benefits that come from being at school or nursery. The other is more targeted action on childcare, so it is not a generic system but something that recognises the different vulnerabilities of the different sectors of society.

Molly Mayer: On the first point, I completely agree that there needs to be a look at and investment in the qualifications of early years providers and enabling early years providers to gain qualifications and progress. In terms of targeting, because the pot of money is currently so limited, that is an option to consider. Other countries, for example the US and Canada, have looked at the pandemic and seen that parents are out of work. For them, universal childcare is the solution, because it enables all parents to get into work. We need to consider what options are available, while maintaining that, whatever we do, we need to improve funding rates for settings.

Megan Jarvie: There is a huge divide in the use of childcare. Formal childcare—nurseries and childminders—is the preserve of better-off families. I often talk to groups of families and try to ask them about formal childcare, and there is this idea that it is not on their radar at all. It is not something that they would really consider doing because the costs are so high. There is really strong evidence of the benefits of high-quality early education and childcare for children.

The Government pay for early education and childcare to help to narrow the gap that opens up before children start school, and to help children who are disadvantaged in any way to learn and be ready for school. Often, families completely miss out on that.

It also means that informal care—unpaid labour, which is what care is—is being shared widely between low-income women. It is normally grandparents and friends who will share out childcare between them, or

reduce their own earning capacity in order to look after each other's children, so it plays into the gender pay gap issues. Informal childcare is a great option for families, and I am not saying I think it is bad at all, but we need to recognise that it has an impact on women's earning ability, because it is so commonly shared between women rather than between both men and women.

Laura Dewar: If someone is a single parent, to enable them to work they will have to rely more on childcare, and they will be the only person who takes and picks up from childcare, so they might very often need more childcare than a couple. Some of the research that I know Megan has done and figures from the GLA show that loads of providers will close. The Government's own figure from the beginning of this year is that 2,000 childcare providers have closed their doors. Megan will know the figures in more detail, but there have been closures and some childcare providers who have remained have had to put up their prices because there is less economy of scale.

Although we want to look ahead, childcare and having lots of other good initiatives is really the way forward. The pandemic has had a shattering impact on an already fragile childcare market. Can I also put a positive in about employers and what employers can do? Gingerbread worked with the GLA and set up a childcare loan scheme similar to someone's annual travel pass or a bike loan system, so that people's childcare costs can be spread more evenly.

The family of organisations within the GLA— the fire service and so forth, so lots of employers actually—have this system. It has been really effective at spreading out that cost. Even though people are working, meeting those costs can be really high. They have also introduced it now for holiday childcare, so that can be much more evenly spread. There are things that not only government but employers can do to support childcare.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: That is a really good point.

Simon Kelleher: The pandemic will exacerbate the inequalities in who accesses childcare and the type of childcare that they are able to access. We see that parents are more likely to have had their hours and incomes reduced over the pandemic. Through the ONS, we see that parents are less likely than the wider population to be able to pay a sudden bill, so people do not have that money for those up-front costs. Some of the demographics we have been speaking about, young people and young parents, will be most affected by that.

There is evidence to suggest that the closures that were mentioned for childcare settings are happening predominantly in poorer areas. People who are in insecure employment and cannot guarantee their hours have trouble accessing some of the childcare entitlements. You are seeing a division between who gets sent to nursery and those kinds of early years settings, and who uses informal childcare. Given the concerns about child development, that is quite a serious concern.

Q41 **Lord Hain:** This may encroach on Eric's next question, in which case stop me. If the future is hybrid and people will be working more from home, online, on the one hand there is the space in the home, house or flat and the strength of broadband, and on the other there is the fact that both parents, if you have both parents, or the single parent may be working. How does childcare possibly fit into that?

Megan Jarvie: You still need childcare if you are working from home. You cannot work and look after a child. Looking after a child is full-time work. The busiest day of my week is my non-working day, when I am looking after my child. The difference is that you do not have a commute. That will be the bit that might change demand for childcare. It might be more common to do compressed hours so that you need fewer days of childcare.

We will talk about flexibility in the jobs market a bit more later, but it particularly links to this question. There might be an assumption that, if you are working from home and need a shorter day, your childcare becomes cheaper. That is not always possible from a childcare provider point of view.

As we have said, it is a sector that is struggling financially and has been for many years. It operates on very narrow margins. They need to be operating at full capacity, so that all their staff are looking after or are close to as many children as they can be. That does not necessarily allow for some long days and some short days, so there might not be those gains for parents from choosing a shorter day of childcare if they do not have to commute.

Simon Kelleher: We have seen that working from home is no replacement for childcare. You cannot leave toddlers unsupervised while you work. The other issue we see is a gender imbalance, even for couples who are both working from home, in who is looking after the child. We have seen that women are more interrupted in their work when they are working from home than fathers are.

The Chair: We will come on to questions about men and women and the division of labour, so perhaps we can park that. Laura, if you have a different point to make, particularly on Peter's point about space, that would be really helpful.

Laura Dewar: No, I am not going to talk about space. I was going to say that, as part of the research I did on Covid and single parents, I agree with Megan and Simon that people still need childcare, even when they are working from home. One of the reasons we did our research was this assumption, when people started working from home, that there were two parents. If there are not two parents and there is one of you, as one single parent I interviewed said, "It was an impossible balancing act". To this assumption that you can work and care, it is really not going to be possible. There are still quite limited jobs for some people that can be done from home. We will probably go on to that in the next questions.

The Chair: That is a perfect segue to Eric's questions about the changing patterns of work.

Q42 **Lord Pickles:** Hi. That was a really good point about childcare still being necessary for people working from home. I want to leave the hybrid world to one side for a moment to talk about flexible working hours. Do you think the pandemic has extended the acceleration of flexible hours? Is that entirely a good thing, or is there a downside to it?

Simon Kelleher: I am really glad you have made that distinction between location and hours, because flexible working is about much more than location. It is really important that we look at it in the round. Our concern is really that a lot of the public discourse about this has been focused on home-working and hybrid working. At the height of the pandemic, under 50% of people were working from home, so it is not the full story of flexible working.

Parents and carers particularly want to have greater access or flexibility about their hours. One thing we are concerned about is that the conversation becomes fixated on home-working, remote working and hybrid working. We know that up to nine in 10 people say they want the option to work flexibly. However, the Timewise index of flexible working suggests that only two in 10 jobs are advertised as flexible, so there is a real supply and demand issue there.

Throughout the pandemic, based on their latest index, there has been only a 5% increase in jobs advertised that directly reference flexible working. Despite everything that has happened over the last year—we have seen that so many more jobs can be worked flexibly, whether that is remotely or with parents flexing their hours to balance childcare—there has been very little movement in that. Perhaps when the job market picks up later this year we might see some more movement, but we at Working Families think that more from employers and government needs to be done to improve that situation.

Lord Pickles: You said that there has not been that big an increase in the number of jobs that have been advertised as flexible working. Do you think, in a way, that is a lag, in that we have proved that quite a significantly larger number of jobs could be worked flexibly, or do employers really like strict nine-to-five working?

Simon Kelleher: If we think about the job profile of where we have seen job losses and who is recruiting, there may be a lag because there may be a situation where the jobs that are being advertised now are in areas where remote working is not appropriate. We have to wait a couple of months to see the full picture there.

In terms of employers, in some instances we have seen companies saying that they want everybody back in the office. I think that is a minority of employers. The more progressive employers are thinking about the needs of their workforces and how they can attract people into their organisations. Offering flexible working is one way to do that. By

doing that, you can also widen your catchment area, so you can have a more diverse group of people applying for work and you can diversify your employment base geographically.

Laura Dewar: Access to home-working was not consistent. It is not the same across the board. For instance, there was a 21% increase in single parents working from home, compared to a 38% increase for coupled parents.

To your point about flexibility and home working, those were people who were already working for organisations and were offered home-working. The ethos of flexible working is that it is an earned right. For instance, you have to wait half a year in order to apply for flexible working. The ethos of flexible working is that it is a perk when you have proved yourself. In the jobs market, it is more about someone who is new to you, whom you do not know, so home-working, hybrid working and other forms of flexibility are not translating to how jobs are advertised.

The Timewise flexible jobs index that Simon referred to has said that, as has the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. It has seen changes perhaps in geography of where jobs can be done, but not in hours. There are certain groups of workers who really need to work part time. You have a three-year-old child and you are a single parent. You will want to work part time. In fact, the welfare rules mean that, if you have a child under 13, you can work part time. There is such a gap.

Before the pandemic, 50% of single parents were working part time, so geography is just one aspect of flexible working. There does need to be more access to advertised, good-quality part-time employment. Hybrid and home-working is one aspect for some workers. Timewise talks about there being a two-tiered system of flexible working. Well-paid, more managerial jobs can be worked from home with much more flexibility in how you do your hours, and part-time work continues to be low paid with little access to flexibility. It is one of the real missed opportunities of the Employment Bill, which might have changed that, to advertise jobs as being flexible by default. Coming out of the pandemic, that is a real missed opportunity.

Lord Pickles: That is a very good point. What should government do to encourage flexible working? You have partly answered that. What should employers do to encourage flexible working?

Molly Mayer: I will answer your question, but I want to raise the important point about mothers, because it is often mothers, who are requesting flexible working. As Laura said, as it is right now, you have to wait 26 weeks to be able to request. When you do, you also run the risk of your employer thinking that you are not as committed to your job. That can have detrimental effects on women's employment. We know that that can contribute to the gender wage gap, which I think we will talk about later.

It is really important to understand that, while there has been a growing acceptance of flexible work, a lot of employers are saying, "Okay, you can come in. You can work flexibly two or three days a week and, if you want to do any more, you have to request that". Again, that puts mothers back into the really difficult position of the worry of outing themselves as not as committed or, God forbid, having other things they have to think about outside the workplace.

I will come to your point about what government and employers can do. We would like to see government legislate, as Laura said, ideally in the Employment Bill, which we hope is brought forward soon, that employers must advertise their jobs flexibly unless there is a clear business reason not to. That will be clearly defined, but we want to see it as a day-one right such that, when you enter a job that has been advertised flexibly, you have access to that. That will help to level the playing-field. A few weeks ago, a large tech company said what its back-to-work plan was and said, "You can request extra flexibility". Instead of employees having to make that request, make it available to all so that mothers do not have to come out and say that they need that.

Another thing is improving technology in the workplace. We have got quite used to using Zoom, but we need to make sure that, as we head back into the office, all important meetings are still on Zoom. If people are still engaging on Zoom, others should not be having side meetings in the office where those who are not present cannot attend.

Lord Pickles: That is very helpful.

Simon Kelleher: I have a quick point on why this is important before I say what we can do. Laura made the point that, often, flexible working is negotiated. The issue is that a lot of people can become stuck in a role that they know gives them flexible hours or whatever. Then, they do not move on and go into other jobs. There is an impact on productivity and on women's progression. Employers can have clear policies, as Molly says, that enable more people to access or have flexible working, so it is not something that you have to request. For many people, you can make only one request a year and you have to wait. They can say, "We'll not do that".

Crucially, they should be thinking about how jobs can be worked flexibly at the stage of job design, so rather than advertising it and then having conversations those conversations take place at the very beginning of that process. We would like to see government legislate that employers should be advertising roles flexibly unless the employer has a good business reason why the role cannot be performed on a flexible basis.

We say that because, rather than having flexibility as a right or being able to request it as a day-one right, parents apply for a job hoping that they can then have a conversation about it becoming flexible, but the job has not been designed that way in the first instance. We have that supply and demand problem that I alluded to earlier on. We really need to see

employers thinking about flexibility at the job design stage, and that is why we say it should be legislated.

Laura Dewar: What impressed me about the research on Covid was that it is clear that employers have a vital role. Some employers were so supportive of the single parents I interviewed who were working from home. Some employers really do the right thing. There is a space for employers and government to do something, but I agree that there needs to be legislation. The Women and Work All-Party Parliamentary Group had evidence from a group of insurance companies that will develop their job-sharing register for people who are entering work.

There needs to be legislation, but the Government could do things in the meantime. The DWP has the Find a Job site. They could develop job shares on that. For employers who need a full-time person, they could develop a job-share register on that. They could consider incentivising it. The trouble is that there are so few part-time quality vacancies and the competition for them is so fierce. If a job needs to be done full time, going back to Simon's point about job design, get two people to do that job. Incentivise and support employers to do that, because then you are much more likely to help lower-income people get better quality work.

As Simon said, moving jobs or moving employer is how people progress in employment and improve their wages. If you have flexibility, you will be really worried about losing that. It is a great risk to move jobs without that flexibility.

Lord Pickles: I want to make an observation. I wonder, in terms of this progression, whether we are looking at the wrong end of the argument as far as employers are concerned, because there is a question of resilience here. A firm that has flexible working will be able to adapt easily to changes in the market. I hope we never see a lockdown again, but, against even a local lockdown, one that has flexible working will be able to weather that storm much more easily. I wonder if that is a push that we should make. Maybe just think about that.

Q43 **Lord Hain:** Flexible working, as you talked said, is not just about hours. It is also presumably about an ability in a hybrid future to work from home and physically at work. If you are working from home, what if you do not have the space to do so? What if both partners, if you are in a partnership, are working from home? What if you have kids scurrying about and you do not have strong broadband in one particular part of the home compared with another?

Molly Mayer: That has been an issue. We collected coronavirus diaries from about 400 women across the country over the past year. So many mothers wrote in about doing their work at the kitchen table surrounded by papers and everything. It means that you cannot focus very well and you have all the different distractions around you. You do not have the space available to you. That is something we need to consider for those who live in small flats or are in large cities, and those on low incomes.

Not being able to have that clear space, and, like you said, broadband, incurs extra costs.

Some employers have been really good about providing allowances for work-from-home budgets. If it is something that we are expected to go into long term, having your heating on all day in the winter, for example, is an extra cost that families will have to incur if they are home most of the time. That can be very expensive, so employers need to start thinking about what extra benefits and compensation they are adding if they are expecting their employees to work from home part time.

Lord Hain: Molly, could you can send us a written digest of those diaries or something brief that captures the essence of working from the kitchen table or whatever?

Molly Mayer: Of course, I can send that across.

Laura Dewar: I would reiterate that the majority of single parents will not be doing a job that can be worked from home. They are in the service industries. They are in jobs that cannot be worked from home. Hybrid and working from home can be positive. Some of the single parents I interviewed saw that as a way forward for them in their job, particularly not restricting them to geography and being able to apply for jobs that were going to be less restrictive in that way.

It is only one part of the puzzle and, as we have said, it is much more likely to be open to people who are already in a better-paid, more managerial role. It cannot be seen as a solution for lots of single parents. It is one piece of the puzzle of flexibility.

Lord Pickles: It is important for us not to conflate flexible working with hybrid working. That is one of the big takeaways from this session.

Q44 **Baroness Young of Hornsey:** I wanted to ask for a piece of information, because I do not think we have ever had a breakdown of what proportion of jobs have been and can be carried out remotely, as opposed to those that have not. Leaving aside the flexible working issue, what proportion of jobs are available to be worked remotely, from home, as against those that are not?

Simon Kelleher: I can direct you to the home-working survey that the ONS did recently. I believe that, at the very peak, under 50%—in the high 40s—of people were working from home at one point. Over last year, it was lower; it was over a third. That would be the place to get that information.

All jobs are made up of different elements. There are many different aspects to one's job. Some of those things will have to take place on-site. Even in construction, there is admin and things that can be done from home. Construction companies, for example, are thinking about that and allowing some people to work from home.

The Chair: We have skated about some of these issues, but I will call on

Carlyn to talk a bit more about fathers.

Q45 **Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen:** Bearing in mind that we are looking into the future, which I know is always difficult, I want to talk a bit about the dynamics between coupled parents and future work patterns. We know that mothers have been affected more than fathers during this pandemic, but there has also been evidence showing that fathers want to spend more time in the caring roles. That, of course, could have a positive impact on mothers' employment and children's well-being. What action is required from government, employers and others to make this possible for the future?

Molly Mayer: We know, like you said, that fathers increased the amount of time that they spent caring for children during the first lockdown, but so did mothers. They increased it even more.

Governments can reform shared parental leave. That is the really simple answer and the first priority. Right now, with shared parental leave, the estimates are that 3% to 4% of couples use it. About 40% of families are not even eligible for it because both parents need to be in work and be an employee. If the father wants to take leave and he has committed to taking leave for six months for his child, but his partner works freelance or on a contract basis, he is not eligible to take shared parental leave.

Another really big barrier is the pay. The maximum you can receive on shared parental leave is £150 a week. That is half the national living wage, so for so many families it is just not possible.

The final thing is that it takes leave away from the mother and we know that a lot of women need the time off to recover from childbirth, breastfeed and care for their child, so we need reserve parental leave for fathers. In combination with Gingerbread and Working Families, we have set forth principles for what this reform needs to look like. That includes having this reserve leave for dads. At Fawcett, we have suggested six months, so we would have six months' maternity leave and then six months each for mothers and fathers of "use it or lose it" leave.

It needs to be "use it or lose it", because that is what we know will encourage fathers to take leave. I am from Canada. In the province of Quebec they had paternity leave for five weeks starting in 2006 and the rest of the country has had shared parental leave. In Quebec, 85% of fathers took it up and in the rest of the country only 16% of fathers did,⁴ so we know that, when it is there and it is paid at high enough rates, dads will take it. We also know from other countries such as Sweden that, when dads take leave, that cements the behaviour for the rest of their child's life, and they are more likely to be involved in a child's life and provide caring responsibilities. That also means that mothers can return to work earlier, which can then have impacts on lowering the motherhood penalty.

⁴ The witness later clarified that the figure is 20%

In short, we need to see reforms of this system, which the Government know is not working. A 3% to 4% take-up is not working and something needs to be changed. That is bringing in reserve parental leave for dads.

Simon Kelleher: We know that fathers' aspiration is there. The Fatherhood Institute did some polling, and three-quarters of partnered fathers who worked from home or had flexible working over the pandemic want that to continue in the future. I will not address shared parental leave, because Molly said exactly what I wanted to say. I will mention that employers can make sure that, in all their documentation about parental leave, it is treated as a default that fathers will take their paternity leave or shared parental leave. Employers such as Volvo have been doing that.

Employers that can should also be thinking about encouraging or offering parents general parental leave, a few days across a year, to respond to childcare emergencies or significant things within a child's life. Employers should encourage fathers to take that up as well and not target those HR things just at mothers.

Megan Jarvie: Most of the points I would make have been covered and I would absolutely agree. There are two sides. There is a structural problem and there is a social problem. There is not necessarily the space for fathers to have those conversations with their workplaces about flexibility and caring. That is one thing that needs to change. We were talking about what government can do. It can lead from the front on that. If we could see some really visible examples of fathers changing working patterns and taking time off work to care, it would be really helpful in opening up a space for more fathers to do that in the workplace.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: What Molly has said is very interesting. If fathers take parental leave, it gives them the interest to take part more in the childcare later on. That is a very important point, so paternity leave is a must, really. I can see everybody nodding.

Megan Jarvie: It absolutely is. On the care responsibilities, we often see that the mental load is carried by the one who has the most knowledge about care for the child. Separate paternity leave can create equality of knowledge about the care so that it can genuinely be shared, rather than looking at how many hours are done here and there.

Molly Mayer: We did some polling in October, I believe, where we asked fathers if they would like access to better-paid care and longer parental leave. Seventy per cent of fathers with young children said, yes, they would want it. That desire is there. As Megan was saying, sometimes we assume that dads do not want it, do not care or are okay with being the babysitter and letting the mum do the dirty care work. That is just not true. It is just that, right now, the systems are not in place to enable that. There is desire among fathers to play a bigger role. Simon referenced the Fatherhood Institute's statistics that show that they do want to be involved.

The Chair: We will come to the last set of questions now. Peter will lead them. If we can get as many specific policy recommendations as we can, that would be really helpful as we begin to wrap up.

- Q46 **Lord Hain:** Feel free to butt in on this question, colleagues, since I butted in on a couple of yours. I would be grateful if you could focus on the long-term impact of the pandemic on the gender pay gap rather than the well-established facts that we are all aware of on the existing gender pay gap. What action is needed from government, employers and others to address what you foresee, in the light of what you have seen over the last year or so, are likely to be the gender pay gap issues in a future world, particularly a hybrid world? Generally, what trends that have been accelerated by our experience over the past year need to be addressed in the future?

Molly Mayer: This is Fawcett's main area, so I can talk all day about this if you want, but I will not. The fear is that everything we have talked about up to this point, with more mothers being out of work, the risk of furlough leading to higher redundancies when the scheme ends and then the difficulty of getting back into work, will increase the gender pay gap. We know that, after mothers take time out of work to have children, as we are talking about, when they come back they face the motherhood penalty. They can never regain where they were compared to their male colleagues.

The fear is that this will have long-term impacts. Like I said, we just do not know yet. We do not have the data to know what the impact is. We are looking at so many women being out of the labour force for such a long period and then trying to get back in.

We also talk about women on furlough. When you are away for a year, you are not involved in certain conversations about your progression or there to take certain training opportunities. Then, in a year's time, when your employer has to decide whom they should be promoting, it is just natural that they will probably think of the man who did not go on furlough for childcare reasons, not in a discriminatory way but because that is who was in front of them for a solid year. That is who stepped up when their other colleagues were on furlough. That is where we will start seeing this even bigger divide and it will play out over time.

In terms of what the Government can do, Fawcett has our Equal Pay (Information and Claims) Bill, which was introduced by Stella Creasy in October 2020. We are still trying to pursue it, alongside the Employment Bill. This would give women the right to know what a male colleague is being paid for the same work. Currently, if you suspect that your male colleague is getting paid more, you have to go through a very long and expensive tribunal process to find that out. This Bill would require employers to provide that information and put safeguards in against it.⁵ This would not only make it easier for women to make equal pay claims

⁵ The witness later clarified that they meant that there would be safeguards so that employers only need to respond to requests within reason

but encourage employers to prevent pay discrimination happening and reduce waste in the courts system.

As part of this Bill, we are also calling on government to lower the gender pay gap reporting threshold. Right now, if you have 250 employees or more, you have to publish your gender pay gap. We want that to be lowered to 100 and for there to be a requirement to introduce mandatory action plans, saying how you will tackle your gender pay gap. Again, right now, employers do not have to do that. We did a study comparing the system in the UK to nine other countries and we found that the UK was unique in not requiring employers to say how they will tackle their gender pay gap.

Finally, in this Bill, we also introduce ethnicity pay gap reporting, because we know that there are large gaps between women of colour and men in the workforce. This Bill is directly targeting existing factors that play into pay discrimination, which we know existed before the pandemic and will continue way after the pandemic. Everything else that we just talked about—improved childcare, shared parental leave and greater flexibility of work—will also help contribute to addressing the gender pay gap, because those are all contributing factors that currently make it exist, which have been exacerbated during the pandemic.

Simon Kelleher: We have discussed today that the impact of the pandemic is really going to drive the pressures behind the gender pay gap and will increase it. We will have the end of furlough. Many of the parents we speak to, particularly women, are very concerned that, when it comes to redundancies, people will be looking at attendance and performance. If they have not been in the workplace, that is a very big concern. The cost of childcare potentially increasing as well will drive more women to stay at home.

We were talking about the changing world of work. A negative side of more home working is that we know that home workers or remote workers are half as likely to be promoted as people who are in the office or workplace. Similarly, they are 38% less likely to receive a bonus. We know those things will drive this problem further.

We need to do two things, because those drivers will also solidify attitudes, which will determine behaviour and make this more problematic. The first big thing we need to do is address the cost and accessibility of childcare, so more women can go back to work. Secondly, we need to look at the quality and availability of flexible jobs. We talked about legislating that in the Employment Bill. We hope that, if we do that and employers are thinking more sophisticatedly about the types of work that they offer, things such as job shares could become more prevalent.

We heard the point about resilience earlier. If you have a job share, you have an in-built succession plan and an opportunity for two people to perform a senior role. Given the motherhood penalty, that could be a really good way of ensuring that more mothers are able to progress in employment and go up into higher-paid positions.

Laura Dewar: The stark figure for the pay gap is that a mother in a couple earns almost twice as much per week than a single mother. That is not even the gender pay gap; that is a single mother compared to a mother in a couple. I will concentrate on those going back to work, because we know that, as a result of the pandemic, there will be an increase to unemployment. There was already 12% unemployment among single parents at the start of pandemic. I will concentrate on that.

Others have talked about progression in work. The back-to-work service when people are unemployed is a crucial way in which the Government could help stop some of the pre-existing gender pay gap and look to the future. There is a real role for government there in back-to-work support. There are some good schemes, as I have mentioned, including the Restart scheme and the JETS scheme, but have specialist support for certain groups of jobseekers such as single parents. You used to have lone-parent advisers. There is much more of a role for specialist providers within jobcentres and that could make a real difference.

As Megan has touched on, you give childcare to people when they are looking for work. You have a real emphasis on improving people's skills and skills in areas where there will be jobs, so careers advice. Help with that. Do not just think, "You've got a single mother in front of you. Therefore, she likes children. Why doesn't she become a childminder?" Think more broadly about what jobs people can do and what better-paid jobs will exist.

As we have touched on, there has not been an Employment Bill. I still think there needs to be an opening up of more part-time jobs. The Flexible Working Task Force could have a real role in promoting job shares. I do not know the mechanics, but I think the 26-week rule of waiting to request flexible working could be changed under existing legislation to become a day-one right. I do not think that is ideal, because you might annoy your new employer by asking for a request the day you are offered a job. It would be better by job design and through the Employment Bill. If that is not there, existing legislation could be used to try to get that right request much earlier in someone's job.

Like I have said before, the Government could have a role through their Find a Job service anyway, the site where people post jobs. They could encourage and financially incentivise job shares, and see that as a real priority and a real way to give someone who wants to work part time much greater choice in the jobs they can apply for.

Q47 **Lord Hain:** You mentioned, Laura, that there are no longer lone-parent advisers in the DWP, jobcentres and so on. Can you say a bit about that? Perhaps you and others can add to that about changing patterns of work. You hinted at that, but what do you foresee?

Laura Dewar: In jobcentres, there used to be much more specialist support. There is specialist support to some degree for claimants who have a disability. Also, there has been much more emphasis on specialism to support younger unemployed claimants. There has

generally been a move in recent years away from specialist support to generalist support. That is a really tough job for a work coach, given the broadness of all the different types of jobseekers that they have in front of them.

There used to be lone-parent advisers and they did a fantastic job. There was the New Deal for Lone Parents, which really targeted and saw certain claimants, such as single parents, as a distinct group and needing distinct help. Like I say, there has been a move away from it. The Government have doubled the number of work coaches, and they should use that opportunity to increase the specialism. That would really help certain groups of jobseekers.

Lord Hain: Megan, did you want to come in on that? I would be particularly interested in the patterns of work that you foresee changing as a result of the pandemic.

Megan Jarvie: I am afraid I am not an expert on that, but I want to look at it slightly more narrowly through the childcare lens, because that is so important to the gender pay gap. I mentioned earlier that there was some evidence of a shift away from formal childcare towards informal childcare. The University of Leeds has done a large survey of parents and it is starting to see a small move towards informal childcare. This has the risks of passing unpaid care between women of different generations or more widely among low-paid women, rather than looking at the employment opportunities that can come from childcare.

We really need quite urgent action to open up the formal childcare market to parents. We know that the uptake of formal childcare is much lower than it has been as a result of the pandemic. We are not quite clear yet how quickly that demand will come back. We really need to have clear information for parents about the safety of childcare and the financial support that is available to help with childcare, as well as the improvements I talked about earlier for that financial support.

We also talked about the childcare market being in quite a precarious situation. It has been for many years and funding has been very, very stretched. The insecurity of demand has created additional pressures on childcare providers, and government funding is becoming more and more troubling. It is not rising with inflation; it is not rising with the costs that childcare providers are facing. That needs to be addressed quite urgently.

Lord Hain: What cost gap do you think there is to close? What amount of money would government need to provide to address that?

Megan Jarvie: We have not done direct figures on that, so I am not sure. It would not be huge amounts of money. The cost of providing childcare is rising above inflation because of rises in minimum wage and rents, so it would mean the funding rate going up slightly above inflation. Given the total amount that is being spent on childcare, it would not be a huge amount more. Money has been allocated to tax-free childcare that has never been used, which is also available and could be used for that.

Alongside that funding, that needs to address some of the staffing issues faced by the childcare sector, which again is a largely female workforce. They are very low paid. The morale within the sector has been particularly battered by the pandemic. A lot of childcare providers took as a sign that they were undervalued the decision that they should stay open through the winter when schools closed. Teachers' safety was protected and schools were closed. Childcare workers were not treated in the same way. It is a sector that relies on the good will of low-paid staff. That has the potential to have a big effect on the availability and quality of childcare.

Lord Hain: It would be really helpful if you had time to summarise for us in writing the cost issues that you addressed.

Q48 **Lord Alderdice:** We have been looking at things from the perspective of the person looking for the job and how much can and needs to be done on that front, which is absolutely right and appropriate. There is also another side to it in certain kinds of jobs. I was a doctor and psychiatrist. My wife was a pathologist. We both worked part time for substantial periods of our careers, so I am very supportive of part-time work. However, there were substantial issues that we had to address, particularly in my work in mental health, in that the people who were coming to see me were not always so happy about me working on a part-time basis.

That is true of doctors, nurses and teachers. Working part time, job sharing and so on is not without consequence in certain jobs where the relationship with the people for whom you are providing the service is an important aspect. I am sure that is also true in the NGO sector, where you establish relationships with the people you are working with. When you are not there, simply putting somebody else into place does not necessarily achieve what one might hope to achieve.

I am not saying that in order to struggle against the propositions you have been making, because I agree with you. As I say, my wife and I operated in that way, but I became aware that there is also another side to it. The people you are providing a service to very often have a difficulty when you are not there for as much of the time. I wanted to bring that into the story, because it is an aspect of the complexity of all this that we would do well to keep in mind as we try to move forward in the areas that you are describing.

The Chair: I can see nodding heads.

Laura Dewar: People are perhaps more used to someone working full time, but even if you work full time you are not available all the time. People go on holiday, people have weekends. People who work full time are not constantly available. There is a certain freshness in not working full time and in doing other things. People are more than just the sum of their work and they can bring other things to their job through the experiences they have that are not in work.

Timewise has done some really interesting work about nursing and teaching, where there have been shortages and people are leaving those jobs because they were not offered flexibility. The NHS and schools are increasing that flexibility because it is needed. Otherwise, there will be no one doing that job. There will not be teachers or nurses, because they cannot combine it with the rest of their lives.

Lord Alderdice: Could I stop you for a second so that we are not getting off on the wrong foot here? I completely agree with that. Both my wife and I had to fight to make sure that that part-time work was available. It was very important, positive and all the things that you are describing. But I also had to take into account that those we were providing a service to were not so attracted by the fact that we were less available. In our case, it was patients, but it would also be true in education and in other areas.

Indeed, in psychotherapy, with holidays and weekends, you have to take into account that people have adverse reactions to precisely those things. The more we move to a situation where everybody has portfolios, works part time and so on, for the person themselves there is an enrichment, as you absolutely rightly describe. I have no proposition to reduce that enrichment. I am simply saying that we need to take into account that there is a price for that for the person who wants to continue to access the service. We also need to keep that in mind. It is not just each of us as individuals and our fulfilment.

As I say, I completely agree. My own life has involved exactly the things you are describing, but there is another component to it, which we also need to take into account. This is a big issue in medicine, for example, where doctors are increasingly wanting to move to operating on a hybrid basis, a flexible basis and so on. Patients are sometimes finding that quite a problem. Some are welcoming it, but others are finding it quite a problem, so it is a very complex business.

Laura Dewar: Maybe that is also down to management and how jobs might change. Simon and I talked about the expansion of job-share roles. Say someone job shared a teaching job. There would still be that consistency built in through the design of jobs and job shares rather than a part-time job. Say, on a Friday, you want to contact someone. You know there is someone else you can contact who is responsible. There used to be two people who did Simon's role, who complemented the different skills that they had in that job and had a crossover of days to make sure there was consistency. Maybe it is about the designing of a job that needs to be done and that requires some work.

Baroness Chisholm of Owlpen: I have a very quick point, reiterating what Laura says. I would not have been able to go back to nursing when my children were young if my Trust had not started job sharing. I job shared with another nurse who was at the same level as I was and we had one line. As long as one of us was on duty, it did not matter which one was on duty.

Sometimes I would work five days in a row. Sometimes I would work three days in a row. We would always discuss with each other what was happening when the other one was taking over. It worked incredibly well. We were the first to try it in the hospital. This is going back a long time because I am very old. It worked incredibly well. The hospital really brought it in and it is now quite a big thing. As Laura says, it can work and it is all about, as Simon says, job design in the first place.

The Chair: It is something that the Civil Service is using increasingly as well. Thank you very much. It has been a really interesting session. I have found it harder, in a way, to tease out some of the issues from this particular subject than others, where you can cast your mind ahead and say, "The impact of technology in two years' time is likely to be this", when you can see trends accelerating. Clearly the same is true here, but there is much more intersectionality—to use Lola's word—about them.

Thank you for helping us unpick them with your suggestions about legislative ideas, ideas for employers and the really important nature of how we help the structures about care, the payments and how they flow. There is a lot for us to think about. Thank you very much for your time today. I hope that you all have some freedom now over the next few weeks.