

Uber - Written Evidence (LOL0135)

Introduction

Uber is a smartphone app that lets users easily book a car with a licensed driver at the touch of a button. Since launching in the UK in 2012, Uber is now available in over 40 towns and cities across the country, with over 60,000 drivers using the platform and an estimated 5 million riders regularly using it. Similarly, the Uber Eats app lets users order a meal with a few clicks, connecting them with local restaurants and independent couriers to carry out the delivery.

The COVID-19 crisis has shone a spotlight on the essential role that platform workers play in keeping cities and communities moving. It has also shown that we need to do much more to ensure independent workers have access to benefits and protections when they need them most. To help inform the Committee's work, this response seeks to provide information on the following:

- 1) About Uber and how the Uber app works;
- 2) Insights into who drivers and couriers are, and how they use the Uber app;
- 3) Uber's response to COVID-19 to support the safety, health and wellbeing of earners;
- 4) Looking ahead at solutions and a better deal to improve platform work for all.

This response primarily uses findings from an Oxford study in 2018¹ that explored work and wellbeing in the "gig economy" as well as research carried out with Public First in 2020², both of which looked at qualitative and quantitative data and used a combination of methods including national polls and Uber surveys. It also highlights a report published by Uber in February 2021, which sets out our vision for the future of work.

1 - About Uber and how the Uber app works

By using the GPS and connectivity built into a smartphone, the Uber app has enabled several innovations to make it even easier for drivers to work flexibly.

Instead of having to travel out to scattered taxi ranks, calling a booking office, or relying on pure luck, passengers could have the vehicle come to them at the touch of a button. By making it easier for drivers to find passengers, the app has enabled drivers to spend less time waiting around, reducing costs and increasing their earnings (around half of drivers saw higher earnings after partnering with Uber).³ The use of built-in GPS and route planning to estimate fares enables more flexible and transparent pricing, and makes it easier for drivers to navigate to new destinations without prior awareness of the route.

¹ Oxford University (2018), Uber Happy? Work and Well-being in the "Gig Economy"

² Uber (2020), The Impact of Uber in the UK

³ Oxford University (2018), Uber Happy? Work and Well-being in the "Gig Economy"

With millions of people relying on our app to earn, travel and discover local restaurants for delivery, we know this must be done safely, efficiently and fairly. Our technology plays an important role in providing a reliable experience⁴ for everyone who uses the app and in keeping everyone on the platform safe, through features such as 'Share My Trip'. It also helps to identify potential violations of our Community Guidelines⁵, as well as helping ensure that the driver and courier is who they say they are through Real-time ID⁶ verification checks.

Any technical process, however robust it might be, can always be refined and improved and we are committed to continuous innovation and maintaining the trust of everyone in the Uber community by being transparent about how our app works.

2 - Insights into drivers who use the Uber app

Drivers have consistently told us that they choose to partner with Uber because of the flexibility it offers, and the ability to control their own hours. Indeed, self-employment is nothing new to the taxi and private hire industry - Department for Transport statistics show that in 2019/20, 83% of drivers in England were self-employed and one in four worked part time, which has been broadly stable over the last ten years.⁷ The 2018 Oxford study⁸ showed that drivers using the Uber app have higher levels of wellbeing than the wider London workforce, partly explained by strong preferences for flexible work among the majority of Uber drivers, and having full discretion over working hours.

Working with Public First⁹, we sought to better understand the experiences of drivers who used the Uber platform. We found that in 2019:

- 89% of drivers said that flexibility was the most important reason they choose to drive using the Uber app;
- 40% said that they had left their past job because they wanted to have more flexibility or preferred the opportunities Uber offered;
- 39% said that they earn income from other sources as well as via the Uber app, and it is only a minority of drivers who use the platform as their sole source of income.

⁴ [Keeping cities moving](#) (December 2020)

⁵ [Uber's Community Guidelines](#)

⁶ [Uber launches Real-Time ID Check for drivers in the UK](#) (April 2020)

⁷ [Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Statistics, England](#) (December 2020)

⁸ Oxford University (2018), [Uber Happy? Work and Well-being in the "Gig Economy"](#)

⁹ Uber (2020), [The Impact of Uber in the UK](#)

In terms of 'who' drivers are, in the same study, we found that:

- 87% of drivers are parents and 79% of those with caring responsibilities said that working via the platform provides them with significantly more flexibility than their past or other jobs;
- Over half of drivers partnering with Uber come from a minority background. 30% of drivers are over 45 years old and 15% over 50;
- When asked what drivers had done for work before they started to use the Uber app, the most common answer was another type of driving or delivery work - but other former jobs ranged from working as a chef to being a full-time parent.

Drivers regularly state that the freedom they have while driving for Uber helps increase their well being and satisfaction. However, the Oxford study also pointed out that flexible working might cause higher levels of anxiety for some. This mirrors other research that shows working for oneself or owning a business is generally associated with a heightened experience of negative emotions such as anxiety and stress. That is why we have in place several protections and benefits, and are committed to a new standard for platform work; the next sections explore this further.

Couriers have similarly told us the main reason they choose to use the Uber Eats app is because they value the freedom and flexibility to work.¹⁰ Prior to joining Uber Eats, many were employed in a different industry (34%), and more than one in five (22%) were already delivering for another company. Around 11% of respondents are current or recent students. We know delivery partners value the ability to adjust work around life, as is further evidenced by the fact 58% of couriers work less than 10 hours a week.

3 - Uber's response in supporting the safety, health and wellbeing of earners during COVID-19

Due to COVID-19 there has been a fundamental shift in how people use the app, with usage of Uber Eats jumping by 124%. Meanwhile, usage of Uber rides had dropped by 60- 70%¹¹, and we encouraged all riders to stay at home during national lockdowns unless travel was essential.

Throughout the pandemic, we have maintained our commitment to ensuring the UK continues to move safely. We introduced a number of initiatives to enable drivers

¹⁰ ORB Uber Eats poll (2018)

¹¹ TechCrunch (2020) *Uber says rides down by as much as 70% in cities hardest hit by coronavirus*

and couriers to continue to have work opportunities, while prioritising their health and wellbeing. This includes:

- *COVID-19 financial assistance:* Offering £200 for drivers (and up to £100 a week for couriers) for two weeks if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or asked to self-isolate by a public health authority.
- *Social protections:* Providing our AXA insurance program¹², which entitles drivers and couriers up to about £1,000 over a 15-day period should they fall ill. Last year, AXA paid 23,500 days of lost earnings for COVID-19 illnesses. AXA has been in place well before the pandemic and since 2018, over 15,000 partners received more than 190,000 days of earnings compensation from AXA while recovering from illness, accidents or injuries and over 8,000 have received childbirth payments.
- *Health & safety:* Distributing more than 1.6 million free face masks and 54,000 units of cleaning spray and hand sanitiser, as well as reimbursing drivers for up to £25 they spend on PPE. A new partnership with Unilever also gives drivers free access to hygiene kits, including hand sanitiser, cleaning supplies and face coverings.

Whilst our top priority remains the safety wellbeing of drivers and couriers, we have also looked to provide drivers with alternative means of earning and supporting the national effort in tackling COVID-19. This includes:

- *WorkHub:* Introducing WorkHub, which has enabled drivers to supplement trips by connecting them with earning opportunities in and outside the Uber platform. We've partnered with companies like Yodel, Ocado and Adecco to connect drivers to other work opportunities and launched Uber Medics which has enabled drivers to support NHS and care staff with over two million discounted trips since the start of the pandemic.
- *Vaccine delivery:* Providing drivers the opportunity to support the delivery of the Government's vaccine delivery plan by offering 28,000 free trips to the main vaccination centres in the UK. In addition, Uber is giving £60k free ride credits to Age UK volunteers who are accompanying the elderly to their vaccine appointments.

The COVID-19 pandemic has - and will continue to change - everyday behaviour, and we endeavour to continue evolving the ways our app can be used to reflect the changing environment in the UK.

¹² More information on [Partner Protection Insurance with AXA](#)

4 - Looking ahead

Uber is committed to playing its part in aiding the UK's recovery from COVID-19, while also supporting the Government's green recovery and encouraging business innovation. Recent research by Public First¹³ estimated that Uber created £3.2 billion in economic value for the UK in 2019, by saving time for businesses and creating work opportunities across the UK. We want to build on this to help the UK economy recover from COVID-19.

A key part of helping the UK's economic recovery is utilising our platform to support drivers and couriers to adapt, grow and remain resilient for the future. Our award-winning partnership with The Open University¹⁴ is widening education access not just to drivers and couriers, but to their families too. Over 400 learners signed up in the first few months and a recent report by TrainingZone¹⁵ dives deeper into how the 'learning as a benefit model' through The Open University can provide flexible, inclusive learning and development on a large scale. Most recently, we've been working with Enterprise Nation to support drivers, couriers, restaurants and food entrepreneurs turn their side hustles into a growing business. Since launching in November 2020, over 3,000 have applied to join the 'Business Builder' programme alone.

However, the Committee has rightly discussed that the COVID-19 pandemic shows there is still too much uncertainty about how this important type of work is classified and protected. Looking ahead, we are keen to work with the Government and others, including other platforms, to look at how we can ensure that flexibility and new economic opportunities do not come at the cost of peace of mind and security.

On 15 February 2021, we published a new report entitled *A Better Deal: partnering to improve platform work for all*¹⁶. It calls on policy makers, platforms and key stakeholders across the UK and Europe to come together to set a new standard for platform work. The report sets out five pillars that we believe 'good platform work' should be built on. This includes:

1. **Flexibility** - the freedom to choose if, when, where, for whom and for how long to work
2. **Protection/benefits** - access to a broad set of reliable social protections, including for sickness and injury
3. **Earnings** - fair and transparent earning opportunities

¹³ Uber (2020), *The Impact of Uber in the UK*

¹⁴ Open University and Uber partnership is available at: <https://skillshub.online/>

¹⁵ TrainingZone (2020), *Closing the opportunity gap: The economic drivers for learning as a benefit*

¹⁶ Uber (2021) *A better deal: partnering to improve platform work for all*

4. **Growth** - lifelong learning and development opportunities
5. **Voice** - the right to be heard, with demonstrable action on feedback

We want to work with others to bring much-needed clarity to the legal framework and get a better deal for independent work, as we cannot achieve ambitions like this alone. Any new, cross-industry standard for platform work should be grounded in the principles drivers and couriers say are most important - flexibility, decent and transparent earnings, relevant benefits and protections and meaningful representation.

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