HOUSE OF COMMONS

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Older people and employment, HC 359

Wednesday 13 December 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 December 2017.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Kirstene Hair; Eddie Hughes; Jess Phillips; Tulip Siddiq.

Questions 1 - 39

Witnesses

I: Dr Brian Beach, Senior Research Fellow, International Longevity Centre UK, Yvonne Sonsino, Co-Chair, Fuller Working Lives Business Strategy Group, and Patrick Thomson, Senior Programme Manager and lead on fulfilling work, Centre for Ageing Better.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Centre for Ageing Better (OPE0039)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Brian Beach, Yvonne Sonsino and Patrick Thomson.

Q1 **Chair:** I would like to welcome you to the first evidence session of our inquiry into older workers and employment. This inquiry was launched initially by the Committee in the last Parliament and we relaunched it following the general election, and we did that in September. We wanted to look at the effectiveness of government policies to help people extend their working lives and to encourage employers to provide good workplaces for the over-50s and steps that could be taken to tackle issues like age discrimination.

We are really grateful to everybody who sent us submissions and written evidence, which can be seen on our website. The goal of today's session is to take a broad view of the subject from the different perspectives of our witnesses, and we will hold several similar sorts of evidence session in the coming months, focusing on different aspects of the topic, before producing recommendations to the Government next year.

Unfortunately, one of our witnesses, Professor Lynda Gratton, who was due to join us, has had to send her apologies, and I hope she will be able to send us some written evidence in place, perhaps. We are also tweeting about the inquiry with the hashtag "#olderworkers", so perhaps people will be able to participate in that way.

Can I remind visitors in the public gallery that photography is not permitted during the session? Before we start, can I also thank our witnesses today for taking the time to be with us? I know how much preparation it takes to be giving evidence to a committee, and we are incredibly grateful to you for bringing your expertise before us today.

The usual format will be followed, which is my colleagues have got a number of questioning areas that they would like to follow and, if we are running short of time, I might intervene to speed things up, so I apologise in advance if I have to do that. Before we do our first line of questioning, could I ask you just to introduce yourself and the name of the organisation you represent?

Dr Beach: I am Dr Brian Beach. I am a senior research fellow at the International Longevity Centre – UK.

Yvonne Sonsino: Good morning. I am Yvonne Sonsino, partner at Mercer, which is a human resource consulting firm.

Patrick Thomson: I am Patrick Thomson. I am senior programme manager at the Centre for Ageing Better.

Q2 **Jess Phillips:** Just to kick us off, what are the main reasons for older people wanting to stay in work, or wanting to work, full stop?

Dr Beach: The challenge that really exists in addressing employment in later life and answering that question is that what we find when we look at the evidence is that there are significant differences between people and between older workers based on their occupational group and where they sit socioeconomically. This really shapes what their position is with respect to opportunities of employment in later life, and one of the things we find is that a lot of early exit that happens might happen because of ill health, but lower socioeconomic groups and occupational classes end up working up to state pension age, primarily because of the financial necessity to do so. In that, they are facing the challenges of the greater likelihood of poor health and those concomitant issues around the need to provide care, so they are particularly disadvantaged.

On the other hand, in terms of higher occupational groups, we might believe—and I am not familiar with evidence that supports this—that they do so because of self-fulfilment and aspirational reasons. That needs to be put and remembered in the context that these are people who are in an advantageous position and able to do so.

Q3 **Jess Phillips:** I will come to each of you in a minute. I meet quite a lot of people in low socioeconomic groups who say things like, "I just want to keep going". I suppose that that is nothing to do with their financials. The dinner ladies at my kids' school, for example, say, "I would be useless if I was not at work."

Yvonne Sonsino: Through my research and working with companies and with individuals in society, there are three main reasons I see coming. Financing is one of them, although people are often quite unaware of the extent of financing that extra life is going to cost them, particularly if there is care involved. We are looking £1,200 a week care costs now, and three years of that is not cheap. People often want to stay on to finance longer life.

We hear a lot more—and there is a lot more awareness in everyone around this—of the social reasons for wanting to carry on working. It is interaction with others, avoiding loneliness, which we know is one of the biggest killers, and having a sense of purpose. It is maintaining that network. A good example is a policeman I spoke to at the Fuller Working Lives report launch in February. He said, "At 50, when he retired from the police force, a colleague of mine went in, handed over his uniform in a plastic bag, and that was it. He handed over his identity and, the next day, he was not a policeman. He felt he was nothing. He was lost". That sense of purpose is very important.

The third reason I see is that a sense of autonomy and independence are really quite liberating and lifting. They can lead to improved happiness and improved mental health. For those three key reasons, different people will want to work or continue wanting to work: financing, social and autonomy. However, it is not for everyone. We do know there are plenty of people who say, "I have done my time. I hate my job. I have slogged at it for so long and I just want a rest". For them, I hope that they find that that social interaction continues and they still have some sort of autonomy and the right finances, but certainly it is not for all.

Patrick Thomson: I would agree with what Yvonne and Brian have said there. At the Centre for Ageing Better, we have done a fair bit of research into this and interviewed a whole range of people, both in terms of people who are working for longer and asked them why they have done it, and also people who have retired and asked them what they miss about work. It does fit with all of those things that you have said. The financial situation is a predominant one. That is really important and people are working for longer because they feel they have to. You are looking at state pension age rising as well, and that is in people's minds too.

There is that inequality there. There is a big split between people working for longer because they need to and other people who do it because it is an extra bit of income, it is a fulfilment and they enjoy the work that they do. If you look at our survey data in terms of people in lower socioeconomic groups who are often on lower pay and in poorer-quality work, they are retiring because they have reached their pension age or they are leaving because of a health reason, or they are working longer in poorer-quality work that is not particularly good for their health and wellbeing.

Interestingly, when we asked people who had retired what it was that they missed about work, the number one answer was that people said that they did not miss anything, so there is such a thing as a good retirement. People are retiring and doing other things in their life, and we would support that as long as there is a good transition. The number one thing that people said they missed were the social connections of work. There was a bit of a gender divide there as well, and it is amongst particular cohorts. Perhaps the older generations, particularly amongst men, said that they missed the social element of work in particular. Further on down, there were things around, "I miss the income", "I miss the meaning and purpose", and other factors like that.

Q4 **Jess Phillips:** Do you think that those things that you know to be the case from research match up with the Government's ambitions for people to work longer? They seem to think that there is a health and wellbeing element. Do you think that the Government's ambitions match up with people's views?

Dr Beach: Working conditions really matter. They determine the likelihood of early exit before state pension age. In the mixed bag of evidence that exists around the relationship between retirement and health, the one thing we can fairly confidently say is that good work is good for health. Again, when people are in bad working conditions, the removal of those stresses can improve their health after they retire. It is a very complex situation.

Q5 **Jess Phillips:** What sort of groups would they be—people with bad working conditions; people working long hours?

Dr Beach: In terms of the research that we have been collaborating with that has come out from ESRC-funded projects, this is one called Renewal headed by a group at UCL. One of the things they found was that this idea of what is called high-decision latitude or high-decision authority reduces the likelihood of early exit and increases the likelihood of working beyond state pension age. This comes down to concepts around job control and autonomy.

Q6 **Jess Phillips:** Autonomy rather than just people who work long hours: "We work long hours but we have lots of autonomy."

Dr Beach: Right, yes.

Yvonne Sonsino: I would add to that that the Government have enabled those who want to to be able to. The abolition of the default retirement age, in my view, is an enabler.

Jess Phillips: Sorry, can you say that again?

Yvonne Sonsino: The abolition of the default retirement age—removing the need to take you out of the workplace at 65—has enabled people to carry on working. The Matthew Taylor report looking at what good work looks like is a very welcome addition to the set of criteria to review. However, where we still really suffer is that recruitment bias is really rife. The words "anti-ageing" should not be in our vocabulary but they are used every day, in a good way. When you look at recruitment—and the Anglia Ruskin study is one of the sharpest and most recent evidence pieces around the bias that still exists around older workers—there is no real policing of that. The report that I have submitted to you in soft copy worked with 25 different recruitment organisations and shows that, in over 90% of cases, employers do not really check and do not really give a brief about bringing in older workers.

The other thing where more support could be given is training. We talk a lot about training and education. We need to really unpack what it means because, for some people, it means back to school and the way school used to be. We all need training: work is changing; jobs are changing. From some work we did with the World Economic Forum last year, 65% of primary-school children will be doing jobs that do not currently exist. This is not just an issue about retraining older workers; it is an issue about re-education for the entire society. There is much more that could be done there to help people to do different types of work and get their re-motivation and their new career.

Patrick Thomson: I would agree with most of those points.

Jess Phillips: I am going to ask you first next time.

Patrick Thomson: Thinking about the point about health and the working relationship between the two, I would certainly agree with what Brian said. Job quality is hugely important there, particularly around numbers of hours worked, and particularly around how physically demanding the job is, which is a big factor in terms of how long you can do it.

Jess Phillips: It is a young man's game.

Patrick Thomson: Particularly certain sector like manufacturing and construction are often thought about, but even things like working as a nurse or an occupational therapist. In terms of some of the physically demanding things you have to do there, we do not always think about those jobs when we think about physically very demanding ones.

I suppose in terms of the cause and effect there, we can say that, looking across a whole range of studies, people who are healthier are able to work for longer. Beyond state pension age, working for longer does not necessarily improve your physical health and mental wellbeing. It may well do in certain situations but the evidence is not clear-cut there. It is more a factor that healthier people are working for longer than the other way round.

Q7 **Jess Phillips:** Do you think that there are groups for whom working is not the most appropriate means of providing financial security, health and wellbeing?

Patrick Thomson: The reason why we have the social security system is to make sure that people who are unable to work for whatever reason have other forms of income to support them, so there is something there. Generally, if you can be in work and it is of good quality, it is always worth trying to be in work, if you can. Poor health is not an inevitable part of ageing but you do see an increase in health conditions as you age. 44% of people aged 50 or of state pension age have at least one long-term health condition, and it increases as you age. It is more about what individuals can do and what employers can do to support them, which I am sure we will get on to, and thinking about what it is like to develop a health condition if you are self-employed too. There is a whole range of things where there could be and should be more support there.

Q8 **Jess Phillips:** The research from the Centre for Ageing Better showed that retired people have greater odds of high mental-health wellbeing. How does that square with the Government's idea that your health and wellbeing are better off if you stay in work?

Patrick Thomson: There is a lot going on there. You can also look at the ONS wellbeing stats, and your own personal wellbeing does change anyway throughout life. There is a lot going on there beyond just being retired or not, and you do see that there is a dip in midlife in terms of your own wellbeing, which does start to increase as well, whether or not you are in work. There are reasons to be cheerful there as well.

I would come back to the point that, if you are or you feel that you are being forced to remain in work and it is not in your control and not in your autonomy—so you are forced into a lower-quality type of job or a job that is putting more demands on you—we would say that, overall, that is not a good thing for your health and wellbeing. It is about creating better jobs and redesigning jobs to better support people overall.

Dr Beach: Something that I would want to add on that is that this research that has come out from UCL under their Renewal programme, as well as research led by the University of Kent called Uncertain Futures, has highlighted the fact that early exit—leaving before state pension age—is highly correlated with childhood mental wellbeing. Adversity in childhood is related to your likelihood of leaving early. That is mental health as well as childhood adversity, like trauma, neglect and abuse.

Jess Phillips: The wrong sort of cradle to grave.

Dr Beach: It leads to this idea that, if ill health among older workers is a major driver for them leaving early, you cannot really fix ill health once it has happened, so this means that understanding what can be done to enhance work in later life in older workers needs to have a life-course approach and think about circumstances across the life-course.

Q9 **Jess Phillips:** How far do you all think that current work opportunities and practices provide what older people want from work and, from what you are saying, what they need from work?

Yvonne Sonsino: I might start on that one, given that that is the work we do in helping companies get themselves geared up for this. The evidence is pretty low. There is not a lot going on that companies are yet becoming more age-friendly. The Fuller Working Lives group were an exception: a small group of enlightened employers who really understood it and have made amazing changes in their own workforce practices to enable older people to work. There is just not enough awareness of that out there with companies. We have a checklist of 23 things that you can do to become a more age-friendly employer, including things like flexible working. That is quite complicated to do and is a fairly big cultural change. It also includes things like pay-equality checks. When pay awards are made at the end of the year, are they dispersed equally across gender, race and age? Age-equality checks do not exist yet on pay reviews, on promotion reviews or on performance-grading reviews.

There is a checklist of 23 things that employers can do. In our first study looking at this—how age-friendly you are as an employer—that covered about 70 employers and 3.1 million employees, just a handful of companies were doing four or five of those 23 things. Of all the things that could be done, employers are not yet doing enough of them. We want to launch that study again in January next year, to see whether things have improved, because we believe that, given the labour-shortage pressures at the moment, our demographic challenges—a shrinking youth population, a growing older population, and now potentially reduced immigration—companies are going to be facing really severe labour shortages over the next 10, 15 or 20 years that they simply cannot bridge by using the normal labour pool that is available to them.

The only part of the labour pool that is growing in the UK at the moment is the over-50s. The under-50 labour pool is shrinking. Companies that will rely on UK-based labour—public services, hotels, farming, agriculture and multiple industries that we can quote—are going to have to try to source labour from pools that they do not normally dip into. Older workers are one. Returning mothers are another. Returning carers are another. These are rich seams of experience, skills and talent that companies will need. Not enough companies yet understand that burning platform. We are doing our best to get that message out there but there is much more that could be done to make people realise that the business-continuity risk is so great that, to keep their business going, they have to make work a friendly place for older workers, for returning women, for carers, et cetera

Q10 **Eddie Hughes:** Who is doing a good job? What employers or types of employers are the people who get it?

Yvonne Sonsino: In terms of some of the companies involved in the Fuller Working Lives group, there was a lot of representation from financial services—banks and insurance companies.

Q11 **Eddie Hughes:** Can you also give me a feel for proportion? Is it a greater percentage of businesses or still a very small percentage?

Yvonne Sonsino: Still a very small percentage of businesses are doing anything. I will quote Aviva and Barclays, for example, who have taken active steps to prepare their workplace in a much better way for carers—giving carer's leave and making advice and support available for carers in the workplace—so that you can carry on working and not just give up work because you need to care for an elderly relative. Barclays have done exemplary work in older-worker apprenticeships, and there are some aspirational stories of success coming out of those. They are creating work opportunities for older workers, but it is still very much in the minority.

Q12 **Jess Phillips:** B&Q always used to get heralded for having old people working there because they knew what a tungsten screw was.

Yvonne Sonsino: B&Q started this way back. 20 years ago, they had started to look at older workers, because what they wanted to do was to represent their customer base better. A lot of businesses do not yet really understand that they are not representing their customer base well enough by not having older workers in their customer-facing staff. More and more companies are getting it, but it is being driven, I have to say, by Brexit and the impact on our labour flow. That is now creating a burning platform—

Jess Phillips: Let us not waste that crisis.

Yvonne Sonsino: And a financial business case to think about the older worker. Up until that, I am afraid we were getting no traction.

Jess Phillips: Does anyone else want to say anything?

Dr Beach: I will add one random thing. In terms of sectors and older workers represented in sectors, the sector with the largest proportion of older workers is agriculture. Almost half of their workers are 50-plus. This is about food, so this issue really does touch on everyone's lives and necessitates better planning and thinking forward.

Jess Phillips: Are they happy there? Do they have autonomy and long working hours?

Kirstene Hair: I think they are happy there. I come from an agricultural background and they are happy.

Jess Phillips: I come from a city.

Q13 **Kirstene Hair:** They do because they have a choice to leave, and a lot of them—as we have mentioned here—do not leave. They want to stay because of its purpose and they enjoy what they do. There is, however, turning that on its head, not enough younger people getting into it, so there will be a bit of a crisis in years to come.

Dr Beach: That is true in other sectors like health and social care and education, in particular.

Yvonne Sonsino: Construction, agriculture, energy, water, real estate, public admin and defence all rely heavily on UK-born older workers.

Q14 **Eddie Hughes:** The burning question in this section of it is not, "In what industries are people working later?" My thinking is: which are the industries that are doing their best to accommodate an age-diverse workforce? For example, in construction, clearly, we have an ageing population. Youngsters do not find it sexy to lay bricks—they want to do computer coding. The construction industry has a problem, so what are they doing to make it more acceptable to have an age-diverse workforce?

Yvonne Sonsino: We are not seeing a huge amount of activity from some sectors like that at the moment. There are pockets of brilliance but some of these industries are now relying on more automation and robot automation, and we will see more of that. It is driving a need to accelerate the need for automation in some of those industries.

Patrick Thomson: I suppose, if you look at things like construction, over decades there have been big steps. Looking at health and safety, there has been a lot done on the safety side. We have reduced workplace accidents and made huge steps there. Increasingly now, they are starting to look at health because they have a whole cohort of people in their 40s and 50s who are finding it harder to stay in their work. Some of it might be automation, so using different tools and that kind of thing; some of it is just workplace practices; some of it is things like diet, if you have a workplace culture where you do not have very good diets. It is things like thinking more about the health side, so maintaining the safety side but thinking more about the health side and keeping that cohort, because they are seeing a big risk of not being able to complete big construction jobs that they have coming up.

Yvonne Sonsino: Our advice to companies in that situation is that they really need to create a working proposition that will attract their fair share of the shrinking labour pool. That may mean a huge amount of disruption for them: it may mean job redesign; it may mean structural redesign; it may mean regional relocation or even international relocation. They are pretty significant challenges that companies are facing here.

Dr Beach: That ties to some of the findings from the Uncertain Futures group, which did five case studies in five different industries with businesses, talking to execs, HR people and employees themselves. There was a lot of interest in flexible working, phased retirement and gradual retirement, but it was pretty much non-existent as an offer. In addition to that, one of the main findings to come from this, which relates to the impact of government policy, is that, while we welcome the abolition of mandatory retirement, it is had an unintended consequence among organisations because, whereas before they might talk to people and employees about what their retirement plans are, now they are afraid that that will be seen as discriminatory and ageist. Therefore, they are not having any conversations around retirement, which is not good for the employee and it is not good for the business, because they then cannot do adequate succession planning.

Q15 **Chair:** Just before we move on to the next section, the reality is that, at the moment in the UK, we have 1 million people over the age of 50 who are not in work but would like to be. While we have talked about why it might be good people or not good for people to be in work, there is clearly a group there who are struggling, for whatever reason, to get into employment. Why?

Yvonne Sonsino: Recruitment bias is rife. That would be the single thing I would suggest that we could do to change that. If were to police recruitment equality better, that would solve the issue. Yes, there are other things Government could do, like improving incentives, tax savings and National Insurance savings for getting more older workers in. That is a big carrot; I think we need a big stick on this one.

Dr Beach: I agree with that because, at the same time, the appropriate opportunities for these people who are out of work and want to work do not exist. If there are opportunities to create incentives for employers to do this, the employer role is vital here as well.

Patrick Thomson: Just looking at the labour-force stats around why those 1 million people left in the first place, it is overwhelmingly for health reasons leading to exit. It is then caring responsibilities and then things around redundancy or involuntary exit in other ways, so things around age bias as well. Very often, however, it is a combination of those factors working together. Quite often, though you might get that as prime reason, it will be a combination of "You have a health factor but you are also caring for a partner". I am sure we will get on to caring in more detail later but the age of 50 to 55 is the most likely time in your whole life for you to be a carer, and that predominantly falls on women.

There is a whole range of reasons why people leave, and then there are the barriers to getting back in. If you look at things around the Government's Work Programme, the likelihood of getting a long-term job out of that is smallest for people over the age of 50 out of any age group, but also that is lower than people with disabilities and lower than lone parents. It is about a one-in-six success rate of a long-term job outcome there. That is emblematic of the wider problem: not just people going through the Work Programme but, elsewhere too, there are many barriers to getting back in.

Q16 **Chair:** Can I ask one supplementary? You talk about recruitment bias. What is the bias? Why are they biased?

Yvonne Sonsino: The Anglia Ruskin study highlighted it beautifully. For each job application, they sent two CVs: one was quite open about age and experience; the other had exactly the same skills—sorry, they both showed age but they had exactly the same experience and skills for that job. It was something like 20 times less likely for someone over 50 to even get an interview for that job, predominantly because employers want a bright young thing to come into that role. They express the job in terms of "energy", "enthusiasm"—

Patrick Thomson: "Dynamic".

Yvonne Sonsino: They are not using the word "young" anymore—not all of them. I am still seeing some, sadly. It is the way jobs are advertised. The older CVs just get sifted out because employers are looking for younger people. Employers believe that younger workers are better for them because they cost less and are likely to be more productive. Both of these are myths, by the way, and we have a huge amount of evidence to support this.

In terms of the evidence on cost, we have something like 1 million data points of pay ranges in the UK, so it is a fairly decent sample. If you look at jobs and the amount of money people earn in those jobs, and the trajectory of it with their age, as you get past 40, 45 or 50, the pay tends to tail off, by up to 7% in some jobs. Older workers in the same job are not paid more; they are paid less. The myth is continued because, as you get earlier, you typically get promoted. If you are being promoted, you are likely to earn more, but that is a different job. You are not paid more because of age; in fact, the evidence shows you are paid less.

On productivity, there is a huge amount of studies and I submitted one to you in soft copy. Individual productivity may decline with age but it may decline in younger years as well. It can often depend on health, capacity, skills and learning, et cetera. In terms of productivity overall, having an age-diverse team can enhance your bottom-line profits and productivity results, the reason being that, when you have older workers in a group or a department, they tend to be more stable and they turn over less. The rate of turnover and replacement costs are reduced for that overall unit. They also bring experience and skills. They tend to have better people skills and better anger management, so, overall, they are creating a new dynamic in the team, and these spillover effects stabilise the team. From a cost perspective, an age-diverse team can be much more efficient than a young team.

These two myths that employers expound will result in them, time and time again, wanting to opt for the younger worker, who they believe is going to cost less, be mouldable and be more productive, and we have to get rid of that bias.

Dr Beach: A third one that I would add to that is the misconception that hiring a younger person means you will get more years of work out of them. Some of the evidence I have seen suggests that hiring someone over the age of 50 gets you, on average, five years of work out of them, whereas hiring someone under that age gets you about two. That is shaped by many factors, of course, including the lead-up to the transition to retirement.

Patrick Thomson: If I could add just one more thing on the perceptions of why some employers do not want to hire older workers, there is this whole perception out there about older workers blocking younger workers' jobs. If you talk to economists, across the board people would say, across an economy, older workers are not taking younger workers' jobs. There is not a finite number of jobs in the economy. Older workers in the economy can boost and build more jobs. Within particular closed sectors, there might be something there but, across the economy, it is not that older workers are taking younger people's jobs. Sometimes you see in the recruitment that people are less likely to take on an older worker because of that.

The other problem is that it is often internalised. An older job applicant will say, "I am not going to put myself forward for that job because that could be better used by a younger person". It is not purely on the employer and recruitment side; a lot of this comes from people themselves.

Yvonne Sonsino: You hear it from younger workers. In fact, I could not believe that, about a month ago in my own company, a younger worker was very dismissive about the value of an over-50s person in the workforce—to my face. I pointed out that my two grandchildren and my recent book on older workers and over-50s would have an influence on my view on that. She was embarrassed and sorry for making such a comment, but we are still seeing that younger workers believe, "Older worker, get out of my way. You need to make space for me to climb and grow because I want to conquer the world". There are a lot of individual-level beliefs that we need to dispel too.

Q17 **Eddie Hughes:** As a 49 year-old, I feel a vested interest in your cause. You have touched on some of the good stuff. The Cridland review into pension age highlighted the idea of older people as trainers being something that made it worth retaining them. You have set out some others. Are there any drawbacks though or risks that need to be managed with regard to having an older workforce?

Patrick Thomson: The only thing I would say is that, in terms of workplace risks or someone not being fit to be doing the job, employers should be looking at people across the board, irrespective of their age, thinking, "Is there a reasonable adjustment I need to make because of a health condition? Is there some other support I should be providing to them across the board?" Their chronological age should not really be a factor in that at all. You might be more likely, on average, to have a health condition but employers should be treating each individual worker as an individual and making adjustments as required for them.

Yvonne Sonsino: I would add that it is the normal place you would think to start: "What adjustments do we need to make to the workplace?" There are some good examples of that being done. BMW is one of the most famous. They made simple adjustments to the production line, with softer floors, more seating and zero-gravity tools, and they improved production by 7%, because it was predominantly an older-worker group who were very experienced engineers who they could not replace. Toyota have also done some very similar great stuff.

However, a lot of the changes that employers could make to some of the risk factors benefit all generations. I am a big fan of intergenerational collaboration, not conflict. Things like flexible working, for example, help everyone. They help younger caregivers with children; they help older caregivers with elderly relatives and neighbours. Flexible working is a brilliant intervention that employers can make. Managing it can be a little more difficult but there are ways of doing that. We have developed a very objective and systematic way of evaluating jobs on each of the key dimensions to make it very fair and robust.

Dr Beach: On the question of flexibility, speaking to the Uncertain Futures research, there was no evidence that flexibility was being considered or discussed. Even if there were some informal policies that existed that would allow it and even given the right to request flexible working, there was not, from the employee's perspective, a valid option. In addition, it is challenging to find flexible working outside office and administrative jobs, which are only, of course, a portion of the economy.

Q18 **Eddie Hughes:** Are all sectors equally engaged with the Government's partnership approach to improving age diversity?

Yvonne Sonsino: From my experience on the Fuller Working Lives group, I would say no, all sectors are not equally involved. We saw a strong representation from financial services and from retail. There were others; I am not missing sectors out but am just commenting on the ones that were very well represented. With the financial services, the realisation for them was the piece around matching their customer base better. There was a business need to engage older workers, not just a social, demographic or economic one, and that is what we are finding. When we really can get to the heart of what the business need is to do it, we can generally get more support from companies to embrace the idea.

Patrick Thomson: As an example from the financial services, I talked to one employer and they were saying that in their call centres, if they are selling insurance over the phone, it does not necessarily have to be older workers but people with more life experience of having had insurance themselves or having had a mortgage is more conducive to talking to customers about that as opposed to someone who has never had those things. That customer element is a clear part of the business case there. There is also a peer element to the financial services in particular, where some innovators start to make a move and others are trying to follow that and people do not want to be left behind.

For other sectors, if you look across the health and social care sector as a whole, the NHS has a Working Longer Group. Having workforce shortages in key parts of that industry is going to be hitting them quite soon, and because they have the scale of looking across the whole sector, they can be thinking more long-term about it as well.

Probably the only other point to add would be looking sectorally is very important, but in terms of who is engaged in the Business Strategy Group and who we have talked to elsewhere, there is a size element to it as well. It does tend to be larger employers who have full-time HR departments, who have inclusion groups within them, who are thinking about this more strategically. There is a lot of good practice within SMEs as well, but we do not always hear about it because they do not have a communications department putting it out there. There is an organisational size difference in terms of who is engaged.

Dr Beach: A few years ago, I heard a presentation of research that had been done amongst SMEs on the idea of transition to retirement. The overall point was really that it does not seem that small enterprises face significant challenges in addressing retirement, because of the close-knit nature of the small number of workers. They are more intimately familiar with people’s circumstances and, therefore, take action when needed, because they see it as almost like working with family and helping out in that way.

Q19 **Tulip Siddiq:** Good morning and thanks for coming in. My questions are around the Fuller Working Lives strategy and I know, Yvonne, you are a particular expert on this. Do you think the strategy is well known amongst employers, and do you think it has had the kind of awareness it should have? Following on from that, what do you think are the successes and failures of the strategy?

Yvonne Sonsino: From the small group of employers that were represented, the group was about 50 in the end, they were not all employers though; there were lots of small organisations that wanted to be part of it that were active in the ageing space, so we did not really have enough employers on it. In my view, no, the work is not known about anywhere near widely enough yet. When I was on the group, I always thought that it would be fantastic to do some sort of campaign, much like the anti-smoking and the drink-drive campaigns, to really bring awareness into everybody's homes and understanding, to appreciate the severity of the demographic issue this country is facing. There could have been much more done there.

In terms of successes of the group, the summary that was submitted as part of the evidence is quite a good summary and it certainly had the employers that were involved and engaged doing some really great stuff. They are almost pioneering the best practice now. On carer's leave policy, for example, we have some really good examples now for the Government to perhaps use as a benchmark to legislate on.

The piece that is still lacking in this executive summary of what happened with the Fuller Working Lives group is it says that there is already strong protection against direct and indirect age discrimination in employment, which makes it unlawful to discriminate. It has no teeth, so more policing of those types of policies is needed, along with an awareness campaign of the implications for us and the labour flow shortages; it is all very much linked. It also links well with the future of work and the way jobs are changing, and the fourth industrial revolution type argument about the way work will change and the way certain jobs will disappear or tasks from jobs will disappear.

As part of that type of overall campaign, it would start to get more traction with people, because just talking about older workers does not cut it. It is not an argument that people recognise or want to buy into or want to solve the problem. However, those ancillary pieces, such as our demographic shortfall, migration and Brexit implications around labour, the real risk to business continuity through not having enough labour, the real risks to companies about automation and the way the nature of work is changing and skills are changing—those types of messages wrapped around older workers start to create a much more engaged audience. People want to listen to those sorts of challenges; they can identify with some of them as being real problems that they need to think about.

Q20 **Tulip Siddiq:** You have touched on this already, but if there was an aspect of the policy that you would recommend the Government change, could you name one? I do not know if that is too difficult, so maybe the most important aspect.

Yvonne Sonsino: I have a list. It is a short list. Age equality audits, especially on recruitment, could be the single biggest thing that would help get more older workers back into the workplace. To answer the direct question of this Committee, we have 1 million people who want to work, why can they not work? That is going to be the single thing that helps with that, so it is the stick.

The other things on my list include support for skills rebuilding, so why not a later-life university? We touched on education a little bit before, and relearning, reskilling and people's beliefs around that—that it may be just back to school. It need not be. It may be learning a craft or an art. It may be that small maker communities come from that, which start to rebuild the economy. It is about support for skills-building and later-life learning. Singapore is a good example to look to there, because they have now encouraged and are funding university again at mid-life. You get to a certain point in your new lifecycle and you realise, "It is about time I went back to school and learnt a new career. Why not?"

The mid-career review is another thing I would have on the top of my list. This can feed into the skills, relearning and later-life learning.

I also think there should be something around a campaign to build this awareness, a bit like the harshness of the anti-smoking campaign and the drink-driving campaign. It is maybe that sort of campaign that is needed, because from an economic perspective the outlook is very grim.

Finally, the other thing I have on my list is about building resilience. Historically, we have lived with the concept of stress and stress management, but we are not tackling the underlying challenges here. If we can build resilience in people rather than just dealing with the symptoms, we are building people who are stronger and more capable of dealing with the stresses of modern life. Maybe that one would not necessarily just come into our minds and thoughts when we think about the older workers and the economic issues, but building resilience generally across our population could really help support this becoming more successful.

Patrick Thomson: In terms of what is in the Fuller Working Lives strategy, there is a good start there, but there has to be better co-ordination across all government departments as well. We have near enough 10 million people working over the age of 50. That is one-third of our whole workforce. You need a co-ordinated, strategic approach. As well as what is in Fuller Working Lives, you have to look at the Cridland review of state pension age and what is happening there next, in that the state pension age is going to be rising; does everyone know everything they need to about that and how long they might need to work before they are entitled to their state pension? You need to look at how Fuller Working Lives fits into the joint Work and Health Unit, about how health and work interacts and the support you can provide there.

The Government Equalities Office is already doing a lot of good work on women returners, but it is at that point in mid-life when many people leave work and then need to return for whatever reason. In terms of looking at the Government's industrial strategy, we were very pleased to see that one of the big parts of that was about the ageing population and how people can be supported to work for longer through various different means of technology and other new, innovative ways of approaching it. Government are doing a lot of good things across the board, but tying it all together and making sure it is all co-ordinated would be key.

Dr Beach: I absolutely agree with everything that has been said. I have worked on older workers as a topic for over 10 years, first in America and then here. One of the things that I have noticed in the evolution of our research work has been, looking at older workers, what we can do for older workers and then needing to understand that this is not one homogeneous group. We have to unpick all the differences, whether it is socioeconomic or gender, etc. If I had a recommendation on what could enhance the Fuller Working Lives strategy, the change from extended working lives to fuller working lives is great, but we have to remember that there are differences between getting people to work until state pension age and then trying to get them to work later and later.

The strategy could also be enhanced by more concrete action related to these differences, primarily that affect women. If we are taking an approach or an assumption of how do we get people into full life course, full-time work, that is just not the reality for women. It is only one-quarter of women who you can approximate have full-time work careers and that impacts their pensions particularly, immensely, to the point where part-time work for women in later life, adding extra hours increases your weekly pension by £1. That is not advantageous. That comes from work led by King's College, a programme called Wherl.

Q21 **Chair:** Just thinking particularly about the workplace, what are the most significant changes that have happened in the workplace that really impact on older workers? We have talked about what people and employers want, but in terms of the physicality of the job and the workplace, what are the most significant changes?

Yvonne Sonsino: There is not a huge amount of examples to draw on to answer that question, but certainly from the evidence we have, flexible working is the number one benefit now. In fact, if you ask any generation, the number one employee benefit they look for in their next job is flexibility. From our own experience, we have tried hiring people and they simply will not come unless there is flexibility around the working hours and I think that is going to be seen more and more. As you have already said, it is a certain type of job that enables flexibility, and other sectors are not looking at that yet. Flexible working is a really strong contender, and in our earlier survey on this something like 80% of employers were offering some sort of informal or formal flexible working arrangement.

The other things that can help enormously are targeted health and wellness interventions. You might have a private medical policy or a healthy eating week or you may experience, at some time, a wellness activity from your employer. The more these are targeted for specific segments of the workforce the more effective they are. It is a bit like marketing: if you target your market well enough you get a much better take up rate. I am not seeing enough yet done for the older worker.

It comes back a little to your point earlier, Brian, about HR departments being frightened to death about saying anything to older workers now, because they are worried that they are going to breach some sort of protocol or law. In fact, older workers would welcome a conversation. They would welcome a little more targeting with proactive health and wellness interventions—not all, but some.

Q22 **Chair:** Are there any negative changes in the way the workplace is operating now that mitigate against older people's participation? Is that another side to this point?

Patrick Thomson: We have moved to a service sector. We are more sedentary in our workplaces. It is good in that fewer of us are doing harder manual jobs, but more of us are sitting, inactive. There is a knock on there to different types of health conditions that might be acquired by sitting largely sedentary for eight hours a day. Multigenerational workforces are a very good thing overall and their only negative is part of what we have in terms of the ageing population. If you talk to employers and HR directors, there can sometimes be conflicts within workplaces, particularly if you have a younger line manager managing an older worker. It is quite a widespread thing and a lot of that is through having a lack of common understanding of some of the issues, so there could be more done in terms of line manager training in particular. That is just one example.

Dr Beach: That is a very important one. It relates to your idea about having audits for recruitment and age bias in recruitment. Some of these challenges manifest at that line manager point, because even if an employee makes a request for flexible working, that is going to be determined by the line manager.

Another recommendation that has emerged is we have mentioned these mid-life career reviews that should take place around the age of 45 to 50, say, to help people think about what their future career will be like. Another recommendation would also be for there to be some sort of pre-retirement check for people right before retirement. That could be a way to alleviate employees' concerns over potential discrimination and ageism if they felt empowered to have these conversations.

Yvonne Sonsino: That is a good point.

Patrick Thomson: It is something we are working on at the Centre for Ageing Better. We are working closely with the Department for Work and

Pensions on how they are exploring mid-life MOTs, which is a build-on from mid-life career reviews. We are looking across the board also at how people manage major life changes, so the transitions either in mid-life or in later life. In particular, it is about, if you are moving to retirement, having a phased retirement rather than a cliff edge. We are increasingly starting to see that with people working part-time into later life or having a career change and becoming self-employed. There is something there and it is the difficulty about planning, preparing and visualising yourself very far ahead. We see it in terms of uptake of pension savings and things like that as well. People do find it difficult to think of themselves in the future in that respect and there are some courses and retirement transition-type things that have helped people along that way, but it is still early days on that one.

Dr Beach: Yes. Behind that, the Uncertain Futures group looked at data in England and the US, and this idea of bridge employment, the shift to part-time work to help you transition, does not occur nearly as much as we want to believe it does, because it is a reasonably good option for people.

Q23 **Chair:** With the sort of changes that we are seeing now for the people who are retiring at this point, how would you compare those with the experiences that are going to be there for our children when they come to retirement? Is there any work being done on how that is going to evolve?

Yvonne Sonsino: I think all of us could write a book on this one. The worry is that with the decline in the design of pension schemes in the UK, the outcome of those is so much more a financial drag on people. The younger you are the more likely you are to have been in a poorer quality pension scheme for a longer time and, therefore, need to work longer and longer and longer and longer. I was originally going to call my book "Keep Calm, You Will Be Working Forever". The title did not go down too well with a few people, but that is the reality. I do worry enormously about that younger generation. While there are a few steps being taken—automatic enrolment and the increasing contribution rate—the current pensions gap in the UK is something like £80 trillion; I have the numbers here. That is the gap between what people will need and what they have saved and it is increasing at 5% a year.

Q24 **Chair:** So all the things we have been talking about this morning will only become more acute, because people will not have the financial safety blanket.

Yvonne Sonsino: Yes.

Dr Beach: Yes, because early exit occurs often amongst people in relatively higher socioeconomic occupational groups and who have these strong occupational pensions. That enables them to retire early. With those going away, we will most likely see fewer and fewer people in older age who have that financial resource that enables early retirement.

However, that does not change the reality of those issues around financial adequacy in retirement or the necessity to work and how that all is impacted by health and caring responsibilities.

Patrick Thomson: A piece of advice you could give to anyone is that the way you work and the way you retire will be nothing like your parents and grandparents. Think of how the world of work has changed. I mentioned about the move to the service economy, the change of ICT within the workplace, and people working more flexibly, and remotely as well. All these things are for good and bad, but it is very difficult to think ahead.

Look at what came out of the Matthew Taylor review and the changing ways that people are working there as well. There are a lot of older workers in self-employment. There are relatively few in what you would say was the Matthew Taylor gig economy type thing. Thinking about those groups, if you are an Uber driver, a Deliveroo driver or anything like that, you may be able to do those types of jobs for a few years when you are young, but you start to miss things like not having pension contributions, not having sick pay, not having paid annual leave. There is very little protection there as well, so it is thinking about how those jobs will impact on people over the long, long term.

If Lynda Gratton was here this morning, her book is very incisive and thoughtful about what a 100-year life might look like and it is going to be very different, and there are risks. There are opportunities to do with that as well, but it is just that you might compartmentalise your life a bit more; as opposed to having a 35, 40-year career where you are largely doing one thing, you might have chunks were you are doing something for 10 years and something else for 10 years, you are thinking more about childcare for one bit, you are thinking more about being a carer, and you are really focusing on your career for another bit. It is a whole different way of thinking about how we work and retire.

Yvonne Sonsino: I was going to add to the mid-life MOT point. It needs to investigate and explore a few things. In my view, the perfect mid-life MOT would cover your health, your finances and your career and learning opportunities. If you were doing a thorough check-in at some point in mid-life—we struggle to put a number of on this because for every single person it is going to be a different place—on health, wealth and finances and career potential and your training needs, this could help so many people plan better for those later phases of life. They are compulsory in France—a mid-life career type review—and to see them as compulsory in the UK would not be a bad thing.

Q25 **Chair:** Who do you think is the most at risk? You are painting a very different picture for our children's generation or for the next generation. Who do you think is going to be most at risk of having the poverty in retirement that should be cause for concern?

Yvonne Sonsino: The biggest group I would think of at the moment is women. When you look at the current financial status for women in Europe, the average pension gap between a man and a woman of the same age, having done the same job, is 40%—the average gap. In the UK, it is about 38%. There are a number of reasons for that: we live longer, although the gap is shrinking; we invest slightly differently, we tend to take slightly less risk with our money; when we have spare money we tend to put it into the home, not a pension savings pot; we generally earn less and we all know the stats on that.

The big killer is career breaks; we will take time off to care for children and we will take time off to care for elderly relatives. For women, the compounded impact of those five implications is immense and they would benefit hugely from a mid-life career review in every profession. We advise companies in all sectors, and I never cease to be amazed at how many people will benefit from a good conversation about those points.

Q26 **Chair:** One of the trends you see in the data is the increasing number of older workers who are self-employed. Do you want to give us any comments on that, as to what might be behind it?

Dr Beach: To become self-employed and to succeed at it requires a certain number of skills in terms of management. In some cases, it requires a substantial amount of capital to start up your business, so I see self-employment as really wonderful opportunities for those people who are already in an advantageous position. My view is that self-employment happens amongst those who are not the ones suffering from systemic or life course, cumulative disadvantage.

Q27 **Chair:** Why do they make that decision in the first place, to go down a self-employed route?

Dr Beach: I do not know the research on that. I would hypothesise it is because, in certain instances, they want to seek those improved working conditions that we know have all these other positive knock-on effects on ability to work and health outcomes, so taking control over their working environment, the autonomy and flexibility.

Q28 **Chair:** Right, so it is going back to the initial part of our conversation about what the drivers are for older working lives.

Patrick Thomson: The only point I would add to that is there is definitely a group of people who are self-employed because it suits them, for whatever reason, and they are doing well out of that. What gets hidden in the data sometimes is people who are self-employed but it is an alternative to not working at all, and they would rather be in full-time employment for an employer. It is important not to forget that group; it is not always through choice.

Yvonne Sonsino: The point I would add to that is the type of new self-employment, like the Uber drivers, where there are no social protections. That group really worries me and I am watching the latest court cases for that particular employer with a lot of interest currently. That type of large gig economy that has no social protection at all, nothing for any of the life events, such as unemployment, sickness, retirement, is growing quicker than any other occupational group in the world, and it is a serious concern.

Q29 **Chair:** We talked earlier on about the importance of reskilling and skills training. How easy is it for people to access that sort of training when they are older workers?

Patrick Thomson: In terms of the amount of spend that goes to older workers, there is almost a straight decline with age, so the older you are the less likely you are to receive workplace training. You are also less likely to be offered it. Finally, and most interestingly, you are also less likely to ask for it yourself. You need the budget and funding to be there, you need employers actively to be offering it, but you also need individuals to want to do it and see it as being something for them.

Yvonne Sonsino: That was one of the questions we asked in our original age-friendly survey, "What happens to your training budget for older workers?" and pretty much everybody said, "We do not measure that". However, the anecdotal evidence is that it does decline.

Dr Beach: CIPD—the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development—did a survey a few years ago, and one of the things they found was that the vast majority of older employees believe they have the skills they need to do their job and do not require training. That was quite similar to the proportion of employers who thought their older workers had the skills they needed for them to do their jobs. This was maybe six years ago and I do not know whether that is still the case—it may not be—but it raises questions around how effective training for older workers will be in changing the outcomes of higher employment rates and fuller working lives. The evidence I have seen so far does not suggest that it has an impact in terms of outcome, especially for transitions into employment from being out of work.

Q30 **Chair:** The Government have advocated apprenticeships as a way that older workers can enter work or stay in work, and it is particularly, perhaps, beneficial to women returners. Is this something you would agree with and what is the evidence that that is happening?

Yvonne Sonsino: Personally, I do agree with it. It is one of the tactics that companies and Governments can support, and I have seen evidence of it. There was the Barclays Apprentice of the Year, at the event earlier this year; she was 52, and it gave her a new lease of life; her story was very moving.

However, it is not for everybody. I have also seen evidence of people saying, "An apprenticeship at 55 when I have had a prestigious career? There is no way I am going back in at the bottom and starting again". It is a tactic that can be used and it has a place, but it is not for everybody.

Patrick Thomson: I would agree. If you look at the numbers, for 45 to 59 year-olds, about 11% of all apprenticeships are in that age group and 1% are aged 60 and over, so it is still overwhelmingly skewed towards younger people. You do also have differences. For example, if you were a young apprentice, under 25, the employer gets a national insurance contribution holiday, so there are slight differences in terms of whether that apprentice is attractive to the employer. However, I would agree 100% with what Yvonne said. It is great and it is good that it is open to everyone and the opportunities should be put out there. In addition, in terms of how you advertise and promote them, you should try to avoid age-skewed ways of representing them, because very often you have photos of younger people in the apprenticeship literature. However, it is not for everyone. It is also thinking about how you are, most of the time, starting at an entry-level role, which is great if you want to change something or return to something, but it is not for everyone.

Q31 **Chair:** Returnships is another area that the Government have put money behind. Is that something that is going to be beneficial to people, particularly women returners?

Yvonne Sonsino: I have not seen a lot of evidence of those, personally.

Dr Beach: I have not either.

Patrick Thomson: As a government policy, it is 100% a good thing to be doing, especially when you see people returning to the workforce, having had a career break, often wanting flexible or part-time work. Part-time work overwhelmingly is lower paid and in lower parts of organisations. Therefore, if you have focused returnships that help people go back into the types of jobs they were in before they had the career break, it is absolutely a good thing and something that helps people in their 40s, in mid-life and that helps them for the rest of their career as well.

Q32 **Chair:** Before we go on to the next section, how good do you think the public services are, many of which are really struggling to recruit, particularly the NHS, or thinking laterally about the use of this 1 million over-50s who have skills, but they may not be skills that are very logically linked to the skills that the public services are looking for. Do you think there is more work that could be done in that area?

Patrick Thomson: Just giving one example, there is a new start-up organisation, Now Teach, which is a bit like Teach First but at the other end of the life course. It is about supporting people into public sector jobs like that who may never have thought of it, may have a huge range of other skills and may want to do something different. Having those kinds of things as a course could be a really positive thing.

As mentioned before, organisations like the NHS and NHS Employers are doing a lot in this area because, exactly as you say, they see this upcoming skills shortage and they see the need to do something different within their workplaces. It is not necessarily always doing something innovative, but it is just using good practice where it exists there.

Dr Beach: That has stimulated me to point out that we have also been finding in the Renewal work that there are some significant geographic differences; geography really matters. Early exit from the labour market is happening more frequently in places of lower unemployment than where unemployment is higher. These different local and regional differences are shaping the structure of opportunities for employment in later life. In terms of what that means overall, there is a case that can be made for national Government to think more strategically about investment in infrastructure in those regions, to support the local economies. There is scope within the context of things like devolution to give more authority and powers for local authorities and Governments to channel resources towards something like recruiting older people into public service.

Patrick Thomson: The Centre for Ageing Better has a partnership with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and there are a lot of opportunities there with devolution. The new mayor for Greater Manchester is keen on putting out an employer charter that could be used within the public sector in Greater Manchester. There are a lot of other public sector employers doing good things on this as well. For instance, many local authorities are working with Timewise, an organisation supporting and promoting good quality, flexible work. That is to support workers of all ages, but it is an important thing for older workers to work flexibly, for people who are already working. A big thing is about advertising jobs as being flexible at the point of entry, and there is a psychological aspect that people are then more likely to offer those jobs as well, and I know that local authorities are increasingly doing that.

Yvonne Sonsino: The point I would add to this is in terms of at-risk sectors, because of migration and Brexit challenges. The public administration, defence and health services are all at risk because they are reliant on both UK-born older workers and, in many cases, older workers from abroad, predominantly the NHS. It is the third-largest employer in the world, behind the Chinese army and the Indian railways, and just with the scale of it, with something like 50% being over 45 and, therefore, likely to retire in the next 10 or 15 years, replacing 2.5 million experience health workers is just not feasible.

Patrick Thomson: In terms of what the public sector does already and with the public sector duty to report on all aspects of equality characteristics, we can at least see the data there across all government departments, in terms of what the breakdown is by age, gender and so on. That then gives you an image of what some of the issues are. For instance, we do see, within certain civil service departments, a big exit just before 50 and some of that may well be around things to do with voluntary redundancy schemes and things that are offered at different ages. Even though the public sector is doing very good things in terms of good practice, sometimes there are things built in within voluntary redundancy schemes that might be pushing people out of work earlier.

Yvonne Sonsino: You make a very good point. Thank you for picking up on that. Typically, the public sector has been a sector that has enjoyed a defined benefit type pension scheme, which is largely a very rich type of pension scheme. With retirement now possible at age 55, people in those services who have been in there for a long time probably have enough to retire on and, just through pension scheme design, it is forcing a labour exit issue that is obviously not necessarily in the interests of keeping older workers in the workforce. That is a really important point.

Dr Beach: Yes, that is incredibly important. Alongside that, I will note that my organisation, ILC, is part of a global alliance of centres in 17 countries and, earlier this year, at two different international for a, we presented some work we had done collaboratively to essentially score countries on how policy orients towards early retirement or later retirement. One of the areas that impacted our score for the UK was the presence of these lower retirement ages within public sector jobs, which are such a large proportion of the workforce.

Patrick mentioned the idea of the right to request flexible working from the beginning. When we did the work with BITC on this Missing Million series of reports, one of our recommendations was around the idea that the right to request flexible working only comes 26 weeks after employment itself can be a deterrent for people who are looking for new work. I would still encourage thinking about whether or not that right can be extended from the onset of employment.

Q33 **Tulip Siddiq:** I am conscious of time, so I will not spend too much time on this. You have already touched on carers; I want to focus a bit on the carer’s needs assessment under the Care Act and whether you think that supports the employment aspirations of carers.

Yvonne Sonsino: I am not familiar with the exact detail of that, I am afraid. Our experience is that the number of carers in the workplace is growing very rapidly. I think it is currently one in nine, growing to one in six over the next five years. The majority of people are often reluctant to even talk about it. They are reluctant to even admit that they are caring for an elderly relative. There is stigma around, potentially, the conditions that they are caring for and there is also an unwillingness to admit that they have stresses outside of work that may impact their work performance. One of the things we are wrestling with at the moment is how to get people to self-describe that they are a carer and then how we can give support to help them with what can be very challenging circumstances.

Patrick Thomson: One example to support that is I was at a Carers Network and there was a large employer in the room, the person who organised their Carers Network. They sent out an email to their entire network. They had accidentally sent it to the whole organisation and they had a lot of emails coming back from people who said, "How did you get me on this list? How did you know I was a carer?" so there are a lot of disguised carers out there who are not saying anything, and then, sadly, after that, saying, "Take me off this list. I do not want my boss to know that I am a carer". There is a whole problem with it not being identified and also people feeling insecure in their jobs about putting themselves out there and saying that they are a carer.

Q34 **Tulip Siddiq:** It is a cultural change that you would be advocating.

Yvonne Sonsino: Yes, it is. It is huge, and the impact when you know somebody is caring and you give them a bit of space, help and support is phenomenal, in terms of what it does for them when they come back. They come back with such a loyalty to you for supporting them at such an emotional time for them. It can be a very productive outcome for an employer, to put it into business case-speak.

Q35 **Tulip Siddiq:** So I take it you would support statutory leave for carers.

Yvonne Sonsino: Yes.

Q36 **Tulip Siddiq:** Are there any drawbacks of that?

Yvonne Sonsino: The cost.

Tulip Siddiq: An obvious one there.

Yvonne Sonsino: This one—gosh, how do we ever tackle this challenge? It is the curse of longevity, not the blessing. We are faced with both and if we did move to a statutory care environment, we would be sharing the cost, some for employers, some for the Government and some for individuals too.

Dr Beach: Something to note from the Renewal research that I have been talking about is that, of course, becoming a carer increases the likelihood of early exit, but one of the things they found, very much moderated by work conditions and socioeconomic group, is that those who became carers also started to engage in poorer health behaviours: higher alcohol consumption, poorer diet and things. That obviously will then have a knock-on effect about their ability to return to work.

Q37 **Tulip Siddiq:** My last question is related to Brexit. If the proposed EU directive on parental and carer's leave is adopted, do you think that the UK should continue to apply the rights it contains after we leave the European Union?

Patrick Thomson: I will be honest: I would not feel qualified to answer that.

Dr Beach: I do not know the details of it. Just off the label I would support it, but I do not know the details.

Yvonne Sonsino: Yes, I would be very supportive of any intervention that equalises parental and carer's leave.

Q38 **Eddie Hughes:** We talked briefly about the discrimination of people over 50 entering work. How well do you think employers are managing the introduction of the ban on age discrimination?

Patrick Thomson: In a previous role, I was in the Government's social research unit, and there I was co-ordinating the evidence for the removal of the default retirement age. We were working within DWP and what was BIS then, and weighing up the difference between employees' rights in relation to equal opportunities and what employers wanted in terms of that was a way they could manage their workforce effectively and they saw that as a useful way of knowing when people could be leaving the workplace. It is still early days, because we are five or six years into the new system now. Overwhelmingly it has been a good thing and it has knocked on to how people view age bias in a different way, so you cannot manage retiring people at a certain age.

As Brian mentioned right at the beginning, there is now a vacuum, though, perhaps influenced by legal departments or HR groups within organisations, where people are scared to mention age in any way. People are scared to mention retirement at all for fear of the legislation there. Something that government could do and put out more clearly is say that you can talk about these things as long as you talk about them in an equal and open way, a productive way. You can stave off a lot of problems if you have an open conversation where an employee says, "I am thinking of phasing down" or "I am thinking of doing something different; perhaps in five years or so I might retire", as opposed to no one talking about anything and then that employee just hands in a month's notice and the organisation loses a valuable and experienced person. There are important things on both sides where open dialogue could really help.

Dr Beach: When Uncertain Futures went into the five different industry organisations and spoke to employees and the HR people, their conclusion was that this age discrimination legislation is well known and quite applauded; they think it is good and there were not many examples of direct discrimination on the basis of age. However, at the same time, one of the things that did emerge was a concept around what they called "lookism" affecting older women, where they felt under scrutiny because of their age. That also leads to this idea of employees who internalise ageism, thinking that they are too old for something or apply that lump of labour fallacy that they need to leave because younger workers need opportunities, etc.

Q39 **Eddie Hughes:** In the employment tribunal statistics we are not seeing many claims for age discrimination. Is that because they are not being brought or because it is not happening?

Yvonne Sonsino: It is interesting, because I have recently had this conversation with an employment lawyer and, in her view, yes, many just are not being brought. There are barriers as well; there was a fee imposed on tribunal hearings and that has prevented many being heard. Interestingly, when they are heard, they are often found in favour and the outcomes can be quite significant. They will also be connected with, possibly, a gender claim as well. I have limited evidence, though.

Dr Beach: This is an educated guess, but I would presume this internalised ageism impacts people's reluctance to bring them forward. They start to think, "Well, it is because I was not productive", things that are justifiable from a business point of view, even though it may just be the application of an ageist stereotype rather than anything measured.

Yvonne Sonsino: Even if you look at the greetings card industry and how they reflect getting older, try to buy a card for a 50 year-old or a 60 year-old; there is always something about "past it" on there. It is making fun of and legitimising your dysfunction after a certain age. It is really not helpful.

Patrick Thomson: Maybe it is that it is the only protected characteristic in the workplace where you would still have those semi-jokes around being past it or just saying, "I am no good at IT; I cannot do that"—things like that, which would not be acceptable for any other characteristic around race, gender or disability, and yet people still feel that they can say those things and it is a self-deprecating kind of thing. Not to be the fun police or anything, but that is something that we have to say, as a society and as employers, "This is not acceptable and you should not make those kinds of comments".

Chair: Thank you so much for your time this morning. It has been an incredibly useful session for us to hear a very broad range of views on a broad range of issues, and I am sure this will help us shape the rest of our inquiry. Thank you again for taking the time to be with us, we are enormously grateful, not only for today but also for the written submissions you have given to us. I hope you will be looking at our report when it comes out. Thank you very much.

Yvonne Sonsino: If I may, there is one thing we have not really touched on. We almost got there, but it is about digital skills for older workers. There is often a belief that the over-50s or over a certain age are incapable of using or working with a computer. The evidence shows that more and more are using computers for online shopping, for online banking and for all sorts of different reasons, but it is an area that needs to be looked at.

I would also add that automation can help with workplace changes and improvements to support older workers. There is this great expression about the three Ds: if a job is dirty, dull or dangerous, it could be replaced by a robot. The digital age will help older workers and so there are some very positive interventions I see, but then there is the same conflict with the skills requirement. That is my final comment, thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much for that. That is very helpful.