

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Older people and employment](#), HC 359

Wednesday 28 February 2018

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Philip Davies; Jess Phillips; Mr Gavin Shuker; Tulip Siddiq.

Questions 154–203

Witnesses

I: Andy Briggs, Government Business Champion for Older Workers, Catherine Sermon, Employment Director, Business in the Community.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Business in the Community](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Andy Briggs and Catherine Sermon.

Q154 Chair: Good morning, and thank you for being with us this morning. Good morning also to those people who are watching in the public gallery or online. This is the fourth evidence session in the Committee's inquiry on older people and employment. The written evidence we have received is available to view on our website, and today we are very pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the evidence we have had so far with the Government business champion for older workers, and with Business in the Community. This will help us reflect on the Government's business-led approach to getting and keeping more people over 50 in the workforce, as we prepare to take evidence from the Ministers in a few weeks' time.

Before we start with our usual questions from members, do you want to just say your name and the organisation that you are representing?

Catherine Sermon: I am Catherine Sermon. I am the employment director at Business in the Community.

Andy Briggs: I am Andy Briggs. I am the Government business champion for older workers, chair of the Business in the Community Age at Work leadership team, and my day job is chief executive of insurance for Aviva in the UK.

Q155 Jess Phillips: Hello. You have championed the target of a million more older workers by 2020. How close are we to reaching that target?

Andy Briggs: Maybe just to give a little bit of background, I started working on this nearly three years ago, chairing the leadership team for Business in the Community Age at Work, and took on the Government business champion for older workers role just under 18 months ago, September 2016. If I look over the time I have been involved, we started out in 2014, when the baseline was 9.1 million over-50s in work in the UK. We are now at over 9.9 million in the latest stats last year, so of the first three years. The million starts from where we were taking on the business champion for older workers role; that is the baseline of 9.7 million. A year in, we are just over 200,000, so we are on track, one year of the five in, but there is a lot more still to be done.

Q156 Jess Phillips: How did you decide on the target?

Andy Briggs: We approached it from two perspectives.

Jess Phillips: A million sounds nice.

Catherine Sermon: We did round it down to a million.



Andy Briggs: If you look at the employment rate between age 45 and 50, it is 84%. Between age 50 and 65, that 84% drops to 70%, and 65 to 69, it goes down to 21%. What we basically said was, compared to age 45 to 50, let us look to close a third of the gap for age 50 to 65, and a quarter of the gap from age 65 to 69. That comes to roughly a million.

The other angle on it is we did some research with Business in the Community that concluded there are about a million people aged over 50 out of work that would like to work. There seems a happy confluence of those two perspectives.

Q157 **Jess Phillips:** That leads on to the next question, which is about the pool of workers you are targeting. Who do you expect to be the most significant group in reaching? Will it be people who are out of work but want to work, or is it about enabling people who are currently in work to stay in work?

Andy Briggs: It is very much both. We have done a lot of work around what is going to make a difference, and broadly concluded three main areas of focus: retain, retrain and recruit. It is a combination of all of those. It is a combination of retaining people in existing roles, retraining people within businesses to take on different roles, and then persuading businesses they should be recruiting more over-50s.

Q158 **Jess Phillips:** Are there not internal targets for those things? It is not like a third will be new starters?

Catherine Sermon: No, we had not said that explicitly. We anticipate that the majority of those will come from people in work, being able to extend their working lives.

Q159 **Jess Phillips:** How well are employers engaging with your drive to increase the number of older workers?

Andy Briggs: I would say they are engaging well with it, but there is more to be done. I will touch on why this is important. From an employer's perspective, there are two reasons. One is that we passionately believe that inclusive and diverse workforces are better workforces. They make better decisions, with a broader range of perspectives, better represent their customers and better represent the communities in which they operate. Also, in the UK at the moment, you have roughly twice the number of people leaving the workforce each year, through the ageing population, as are coming through the education system into the workforce. That is just a consequence of the ageing population. If businesses do not embrace older workers, they are going to really struggle to get skills and capabilities that they need.

We broadly get two groups. You get larger employers, which are approaching it from both those perspectives. They will have inclusion and diversity departments that want to look across a range of protected characteristics and what they should be doing, and recognising that they need to embrace older workers to have the skills and capabilities they



need to serve their customers and grow their businesses. Generally for smaller businesses—SMEs—they will not have specific HR departments and inclusion and diversity departments within their business, but they really will struggle to get the skills and capabilities they need and therefore will embrace it from that perspective.

Q160 Jess Phillips: Have you encountered any resistance from employers, and what have you done to overcome that?

Catherine Sermon: It is less about resistance and more about ignorance. There is just very low awareness of this. Even on the diversity and inclusion agenda for professionals, it seems to be much lower down their awareness levels, compared to gender and race, which are much more established. It is really much less about resistance and much more about raising awareness and engaging people, trying to understand where their priorities are fixed, and how we increase their action and attention on this.

Q161 Jess Phillips: Just to go back to the data again, briefly, in the targets is there obvious stuff coming out about whether race or gender also play a part in whether people stay in work?

Andy Briggs: One of the major reasons people leave the workforce is because they have caring responsibilities, and that tends to be more female than male, generally. One in five over-50s have caring responsibilities, so one of the things we are calling for as part of this is for employers to have specific carer policies. The analogy I often draw to this is if a business was to say to a pregnant woman, "You can have the day off to have the baby, as long as you are in the day before and the day after", we would be pretty horrified. However, an awful lot of businesses are effectively saying that to people that have equally important caring responsibilities for dependant human beings, albeit they are older rather than younger.

The other key area we are focused on in this is flexible working. Enabling people to have specific carer leave policies and flexible working would be two of the key recommendations.

Q162 Jess Phillips: Do you have an expectation that, of the million people by 2020, it would be 50:50, or mainly men?

Catherine Sermon: We have not broken it down in that way, but what we have been very clear on—I think we said in our submission—is that age is an amplifier of other barriers and other forms of discrimination.

Q163 Jess Phillips: Exactly. There is a health disparity, for example, with different racial groups.

Catherine Sermon: Absolutely, but also we find that there are also certain patterns by sectors as well, and so we have become, as a lot of the data shows, more concerned about women working in low-paid roles and therefore—



Q164 **Jess Phillips:** Wanting to stop.

Catherine Sermon: Absolutely. We have seen that both in research we have done with older workers around training and skills, and how likely they are to be offered training and development opportunities, and how likely they are to take them up. Again, there continue to be gender disparities within that, and also by professional or lower-skilled roles, and also in recruitment. Yes, there is data that backs up those differences.

Andy Briggs: I think one of the key bits here for me is that an awful lot of the remedies and the things that you need to address will be common across all the protected characteristics. Things like flexible working are important for a whole host of different dimensions. We see a lot of unconscious bias in recruitment, for example, and we see it from an age perspective, but you also see that across other protected characteristics as well. It is quite important that businesses embrace inclusion and diversity quite broadly, age being a part of that, but a lot of what they need to do goes across all dimensions.

Q165 **Jess Phillips:** Why have so few employers met the challenge to publish workforce age data?

Catherine Sermon: Referring to the commit-and-publish activity that we have done, we have nine employers that have committed publicly to date, and we are working with another at the moment. They employ collectively over 200,000 people. My understanding is that that is quite similar to the number of employers that voluntarily reported on gender pay gap reporting prior to that being legislated. On that basis, and for the basis of doing that in the first year, we are really pleased with that, or happy enough with it; I would always love it to be more, but it is reasonable for where we are at the moment.

Q166 **Jess Phillips:** Should it be mandatory?

Catherine Sermon: It would definitely be interesting to explore how feasible it would be for businesses to report on both, but at the moment I am very aware of the fact of what businesses ask and how they collect their data at the moment. We are finding that with different businesses, they have got different contexts, and just crudely reporting is not always the right thing. Some businesses have a very large older workforce already; they are not necessarily ready to commit to taking an increased proportion for that. They do want to measure this; it is just whether they want to publish it. For us, we want to push more measurement and informed decision-making management practice, and we are working with the businesses that have participated to date to reflect on whether the process of reporting and capturing that information has changed anything in terms of behaviour?

Q167 **Jess Phillips:** What changes would you expect to see happening among employers who do publish their data? That is the more important bit than the numbers.



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Andy Briggs: We work very constructively with DWP and with Government in this whole area, but we did publish a report last year on the things that we would like to see differently from Government. One of them was to be much stronger in encouraging businesses to publish data across all protected characteristics rather than just gender and ethnicity, to cover all areas.

Ultimately, my experience of working in business is that if things are measured and published, it does get greater focus within a business. That is why we were keen to go down this route, and I think there is a case to strongly encourage, whether or not it is mandatory. I take gender pay as an example; that has brought an awful lot of focus on to that topic, and rightly so. There is merit in looking at more reporting.

Q168 **Tulip Siddiq:** Thank you for coming in. My question is around the Government business champions, and whether you think they have lived up to your expectations in terms of the impact you could have on changing practice.

Andy Briggs: I am pleased with progress to date. There is more to be done. From my perspective, I have not done a huge amount differently since taking on the Government business champion for older workers role, compared to what I was doing chairing the Business in the Community Age at Work leadership team. Before I had a regular dialogue with Damian Green, Damian Hinds, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Employment Minister, as was at the time, prior to this role. However, it has helped quite a bit with the media, for example, and one of the main ways we can get messages out to employers, particularly SMEs, is through media articles. It is interesting how, of all the different things I do, this topic gets more traction with journalists than most, which is great. It has been helpful in that regard. We are making good progress, but there is more we need to do to really address the opportunities and issues.

Q169 **Tulip Siddiq:** If the biggest success is the engagement with the media, what do you think is the biggest failure or biggest challenge?

Andy Briggs: Businesses have a huge number of different focuses and things they are trying to address and deal with, so getting the airtime compared to everything else people are looking at is probably the biggest challenge.

Having said that, I come back to the core business case. If businesses do not embrace older workers more fully than they have done hitherto, they will struggle to have the skills and capabilities they need, because of the ageing population, the numbers leaving the workforce, the numbers coming through. Businesses would be better for it as well. We have lots and lots of examples of businesses that have had real benefits from taking this on. I am confident we will get there. It is a case of continuing efforts to get more and more businesses to embrace this.



Catherine Sermon: It is still relatively early days in terms of the scale of the challenge that we are looking at and the demographic changes. Therefore, in the first instance, we have been looking at and working with a range of organisations and building the evidence base: what works and what is needed. That is really reaping results now, and the next stage is about getting that to translate into action. The practical action is the bit we know will make the difference, but we have had to have the evidence base first and build the group of the willing.

Andy Briggs: Just to give a sense of some of the evidence, there are a lot of myths that are not true. For example, businesses will often say to me that older workers are less likely to be around in five years' time. A 50-year-old is five times more likely to still be with the organisation in five years' time than a 20 to 30-year-old. Those are the facts.

Another example would be that older workers are more likely to take sick days. On average, one in four over-50s will take a sick day each year. Half of 20 to 30-year-olds will take a sick day each year, so they are twice as likely to take a sick day. This is not against younger workers; this is about embracing all and having that diversity in the workplace.

Just in terms of facts and evidence, we did some research with Anglia Ruskin University, and we basically created CVs for a 50-year-old and a 28-year-old, both with pretty much exactly the same skills and experience. The 28-year-old was four and a half times more likely to get an interview than the 50-year-old, even though the skills and experience were the same on the CVs. That is a clear sign of the unconscious bias. A lot of what we are trying to do is just address that unconscious bias, address some of the myths that just are not borne out by the facts.

Q170 **Tulip Siddiq:** Are there any questions raised about the use of technology, when it comes to older workers? Are there questions from employers about whether they will be able to use the same technology as a 28-year-old, in the example you have given of the CVs? Is that ever an issue?

Andy Briggs: Again, it is one of the things that crops up from time to time, but, from my perspective, first of all technology is becoming easier and easier to use now anyway, and it is all about diversity.

I will give you a specific example: in our York office at Aviva we employed a chap who had retired from the civil service, and he and his wife had relocated from Edinburgh to York. He had decided he still wanted to work, and he joined our protection claims team, which is typically younger people in the team, but they are dealing with typically older people ringing up saying that a partner or a relative has died. The benefits of having someone who was more in that age group, and what he was able to teach the younger folk in the department or how they could learn together—and equally what he learned from some of the younger folk—was just fantastic. The engagement in that department



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and the quality of service offered to customers went up significantly. It is a great, specific example of the benefits of embracing diversity.

Catherine Sermon: We have not looked at it specifically from a technology perspective. We looked at future skills, some of which are technological and some of which are about knowledge work and complex decision making. We did a quantitative piece of research last year with about 2,000 workers—1,000 over 50 and 1,000 under 50—and consistently it came through that the older workers were less likely to be using those future skills within their day-to-day roles. They were less likely to feel that they were being informed by their employer about automation and changes to their roles. They were least likely to think it was going to affect them. They were least likely to be offered training and development opportunities, even when they were they were least likely to participate in them.

At every stage you could see how older workers were feeling alienated or excluded from this, and that was not to say to employers not to bother, but to ask how you really target older workers in a way that would enable them to embrace these changes and participate in them. Again, within that there were gender differences.

Q171 **Chair:** Just before we move on, you said a moment ago that there is more to do. Is there anything specific that you are thinking that “more” is?

Andy Briggs: We tend to put this against those three headings: retain, retrain, recruit. Particularly around “retain”, flexible working, part-time working and carer policies would be the key areas. On the retrain, we are big supporters of the mid-life career review. At age 65, your life expectancy is 22 or 24 years, depending on whether you are male or female. At age 50-plus, there are many, many years ahead; what do people want to do with the next stage of their career?

The “recruit” is a range of things. There is a great example that a number of businesses have done. Take Co-op, for example: Co-op has 393 over-50 apprentices in its apprenticeship scheme. Barclays is another one that has embraced this. It went from 4% of over-50s in its apprenticeship scheme; it is now over 20%. What Barclays has actually found is that within the business, the demand for those over-50 apprentices is far higher than the demand for the younger apprentices, through recruiting around different departments.

Alongside that, it is just embracing more and more businesses getting involved in this. We are pretty clear on what it is that businesses need to do. We are pretty clear why it is really important they do it. We are making some good progress. It is very much more of the same.

Q172 **Chair:** And raising awareness.

Andy Briggs: Yes.



Q173 Tulip Siddiq: Could I ask how you ensure that you reach beyond the usual suspects: the employers with large human resources teams and a London head office?

Andy Briggs: This is a fairly simple way of thinking about it, but broadly speaking you have the larger employers, who employ roughly half the people in the UK, which tend to have HR departments and inclusion and diversity departments and so on and so forth. You then have smaller businesses that typically do not. It is fair to say that it is easier to get to the larger employers.

In terms of the smaller employers, we are probably tackling that more now, having done less on this to date. One of the things, for example, I co-chaired a roundtable with Alok Sharma, the Employment Minister, last month where we had the chief executive of the British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the CBI, and a number of other groups, just exploring this topic. Ultimately, the way we want to tackle it for smaller businesses is purely through the skills shortage that they have, and often particularly online tools to help them think about embracing older workers and how they can solve the skills shortage, which they are all feeling quite strongly, through embracing older workers.

Catherine Sermon: We are taking a UK-wide approach, as Business in the Community, with the membership and the wider reach that we have through our network. We are working closely with our partners in Scotland and recognising a significant demographic shift for them, and through regional offices and looking at this around the country. For us it is important to get beyond the London HQ. I would not underestimate: I still think we have some way to go with the usual suspects. I do not think that is job done, either.

Q174 Tulip Siddiq: What is the division of responsibility between the business champion and the Government for enabling people to continue working in later life?

Andy Briggs: I first got into doing this because my day job—or part of my day job—is helping people enjoy a secure and prosperous retirement through running the biggest pensions business in the UK, among the other parts we do at Aviva in the UK. It seemed to me, if that is the goal of what we are trying to achieve, one part is helping people save more; the other part is helping those who want to to be able to work more. That is how I first got into this.

Although the business champion role is a Government-appointed role, I am non-political and not bound to have particular views aligned to Government. I stand for what I think is right for businesses and people in the UK. It so happens that our views are well and strongly aligned. There are some areas we think the Government could do more, but we think that generally the Fuller Working Lives and the approach taken is helpful and is going in the right direction.



Q175 **Chair:** Are you surprised at how many people are not working by the time they get to the age of 65?

Andy Briggs: To give you some statistics on this, at state pension age, one in four men have not been working for five years, and one in three women have not been working for five years. I do not see this as being about trying to force people to work who do not want to work, because, as I said a moment ago, there are a million people aged over 50 who want to work and are not working. This is about giving people the choice, but an awful lot of people want to work, both because they will get a better standard of living in retirement and there are financial benefits, but also because of the social and intellectual stimulation benefits of working for longer.

Do I think we would benefit from having more over-50s working? Absolutely. If we had the same employment rate from age 50 to 65 as we have from age 35 to 50, GDP in the UK would be £88 million higher or 5% higher. There are huge economic benefits as well as the benefits for business and the benefits for the individuals. We would definitely benefit from more.

Q176 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** We hear both support for and critiques of the employer-led approach taken by Fuller Working Lives. What do you think the strengths and weaknesses are of that approach?

Andy Briggs: Catherine, you might want to comment as well. The strength is that there is so much in it for businesses. The benefits of being an inclusive and diverse business, for me, are really clear, as I commented a moment ago. Businesses will not have the skills and capabilities they need unless they do this. I am strongly of the view that encouraging and supporting businesses to do this voluntarily is the best way to go.

Having said that, I do think there are some areas that need improvement. To give you an example, legislatively businesses need to offer flexible working, but only when someone has been employed for 26 weeks. If you are someone who needs flexible working from day one, there are a lot of businesses you will not then go to. Some businesses go beyond that. At Aviva we offer flexible working from day one, but if you need flexible working from day one because you have caring responsibilities, you are not going to join a business that will not give it to you until week 26. There are some areas where I think we could change regulation and help move things forward, but I think largely a business-led approach makes sense.

Q177 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** How would you measure progress?

Andy Briggs: We put out the target in terms of 1 million more over-50s over the next five years, starting from 2016. That is our key target. Businesses are feeding back anecdotally. The Barclays example I quoted a moment ago is a great one. Another example I can offer is from one of our companies we work with, Home Instead care homes. They are a



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smaller business focused on care homes, not office-based at all. They have consciously changed all their recruitment approaches. They recruit through rotary clubs, the Women's Institute and so on and so forth. They now have over 40% of their workforce aged over 50. When you hear examples of it working well, anecdotally, that is very good, but the key target is the million more.

Catherine Sermon: One of the other ways we are measuring progress and tracking against that, which is related, is looking at the gap in the employment rate. Andy mentioned earlier in quite a lot of detail how we set the target. Within that we know that there are more people working overall in the UK. For us, that employment rate and the employment rate gap is another way for us to measure progress and make sure that the overall total is not misleading, which it could be, in that sense, if we do not track both.

Q178 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** You mentioned that flexible working was an area that was lagging behind. Are there any others?

Andy Briggs: Yes, the carer policy as well. Just to give you a sense of this, the million more is basically 12% more. We have been focused on this at Aviva. In the first year, we have 6% more already. We are aiming for 12% more over five years, and Aviva already has 6% more. We start from a lower base: it is only about 20% of our workforce who are over-50s, but one of the things we have done as part of that is a carer policy, where people get specific amounts of time off for care responsibilities, and we are definitely finding that is keeping more people in the workplace, who otherwise would say, "Look, I cannot do my job and look after my elderly relative, so I am going to have to give up work". That will be another example.

Another example will be that across different Government Departments there is focus on skills and capabilities, but we probably feel it is not well joined-up and does not come together well. The mid-life career reviews would be another example of something we would like to see more strongly encouraged. There are a few areas we think there is more we could do.

Q179 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** How difficult is it to get a critical mass of employers on board?

Catherine Sermon: It depends over what timeframe you are talking about and what you mean by critical mass. I feel like this is at a very early stage of employers thinking about these issues. If you think how long it has taken and how far we have come on things like gender and race, thinking about older workers is in a very early stage compared with that.

Equally, there is a wider cultural challenge, which I do not use as an excuse for anything, but I think with age it feels much more like older workers' and older people's own perceptions of ageing come into this



very strongly. Anecdotally, we hear lots of evidence around older workers feeling that they should put themselves forward for redundancy; that is much more likely than younger workers. It is less about these typical power dynamics around wealth and status and power that we have with some of the other protected characteristics. In that sense, we are starting from a much earlier stage, and critical mass will take a long time.

However, I also am passionate about this and the urgency with which we need to turn up the volume on this, and the fact that we are not having to start with a blank sheet of paper, with the progress we have made with other characteristics. On that basis, I remain optimistic that we can get to a much greater groundswell of businesses doing this, much more quickly. However, you still have to recognise the cultural and behavioural aspects of this and the role that older workers themselves play.

Q180 Tonia Antoniazzi: Is there a risk that the use of an employer-led approach misses out the priorities and concerns of older people and older employees themselves?

Andy Briggs: There are more than enough over-50s who want to work for longer and would like to train and do different things, so I am not unduly concerned about that. This is not about, as I said a moment ago, trying to get people who do not want to work to start working again.

One of the biggest challenges we face on this is in more manual roles, though, where sometimes the physical side of it becomes more challenging. There are good examples of businesses addressing this. Take, for example, Jaguar Land Rover. In their Jaguar cars, they hand-sew the leather seats, and they worked out that the average age of their seat-sewers was well over 50, and they asked, "What are we going to do?" Equally, they were starting to find arthritis and other things were starting to be a challenge. What they actually did was take a number of the over-50s and retrain them to train the next generation of seat-sewers.

BMW is another example. On their production lines they made a number of changes to make it physically more workable for older workers: softer floors and different heights of different parts of the production line, and so on and so forth. We have seen some quite good examples of businesses starting to do things, and that is not because we have said, "You must go and do this". They have worked out for themselves, "We need to do this for our business to be successful going forward". The more we can be in that space, the better.

Catherine Sermon: There is always a risk. I do not think it is a big one. The suggestions that we have made in the governance code for company reporting and governance are about more employer voice and much more engagement and responsibility within businesses for thinking about what employees want and understanding that. An employer-led approach is



entirely congruent with saying, “Understand the needs of your older workers, listen to them more and target them more effectively”.

Q181 Tonia Antoniazzi: Are employers engaging with the challenge that many older workers will not want to stay in or return to employment if their jobs are unfulfilling or physically arduous, which you have touched on as well?

Andy Briggs: If I am honest, I would say we are probably seeing less activity in that space. We have some examples of it. In terms of the number of businesses that are embracing older workers in their apprenticeship schemes, there are some examples but not as many as I would like to see. Yes, I think there is more to be done on that.

Catherine Sermon: We have heard from some employers and other groups who are working in this area that it is much harder to anticipate how businesses make reasonable adjustments for the gradual ageing and other kinds of chronic conditions that mean people might be deteriorating over time, compared with what is a much more well-known approach for businesses of reasonable adjustments for specific health conditions and disabilities. That is an area where we need more learning.

Q182 Tonia Antoniazzi: The Fuller Working Lives strategy puts forward a number of actions that the Government want employers to take, but relatively few actions for the Government themselves. Do employers need more action from the Government, or have the Government struck the right balance in responsibility between themselves and employers?

Andy Briggs: I do not think it is that far off. I will touch on this briefly, but our report to Government last year basically highlighted six areas we thought the Government could do more in. One is much more strongly encouraging reporting across a broader range of protected characteristics, which we touched on a moment ago. There is flexible working from day one. There is having formal carer policies, much as we have maternity policies within businesses. The public sector can do more to embrace older workers as a sector that employs a lot of people. What else did we have?

Catherine Sermon: Removing age bias from management processes. There is a lot of focus on recruitment, but it is across a wider range of those aspects of management processes, and there is support for business to do that.

Andy Briggs: The other two I was going to mention were the mid-life career reviews—again much more strongly encouraging that as part of what people do—and then the National Skills Strategy: the fact that skills and development goes across a number of departments and does not really join up across Government as well as it might. Those were the key recommendations that we made that Government could do more on.

Catherine Sermon: Equally, alongside that, we were delighted that DWP participates in the Age at Work leadership team as an employer, and I



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really would not want to underestimate the power and signals that they can make as an employer with the civil service, more broadly across the public sector and through the power of public sector contracting.

Q183 Chair: Just before we move on, we talked a little bit earlier about the usual suspects and engaging the usual suspects. Do you work through local enterprise partnerships or other organisations to make sure we are getting to SMEs as well? That can be much more difficult, but they employ most people.

Catherine Sermon: That is part of the approach that Government have been leading on themselves, in terms of relationship with the LEPs, and our colleagues in Government have been doing that directly. They have led on that aspect, but we also, through our network business on the internet, engage a wide range of employers of different sizes around the country.

Q184 Chair: Do you think the Government could be doing more with LEPs on identifying these sorts of issues?

Catherine Sermon: We could all always be doing more. They have made really good strides in that regard. One of the other things the Government have been leading on is around learning and skills policies. We talked in one of the first examples about things like the flexible learning fund. We really welcome that, but the focus was on adults. There are a lot of activities and funding for younger people in skills, but it is not specific to older workers. There is more to do in some of those. Yes, we could always do more. It would be great to double or triple efforts. That is not being rude about what is happening currently, but it is about making sure that is more targeted at the specific issues that will support older workers.

Q185 Jess Phillips: Previous witnesses have told us that there are significant problems of age bias in recruitment, often unconscious, despite the ban on age discrimination having been in place for over a decade. Do you think that that bias is weakening at all?

Catherine Sermon: At Business in the Community, we have a number of employers who participate in some benchmarking activities, and recruitment by age and by gender is one of the things we have looked at. We look at what the trends are in terms of number of applicants, likelihood of being shortlisted and likelihood of that to go through to hiring. We see some very specific differences by age, and that likelihood of being shortlisted declining steeply, and also by gender in terms of likelihood of people to apply. We then move through to shortlisting.

The biggest thing—and one of the most challenging things—is in the difference between people still getting quite a lot of invitations through to shortlist but not in terms of appointments. I would remark that I agree with a lot of the previous evidence that has been given, in that there is a lot of unconscious bias, but I still think there is quite a lot of conscious



bias, and that is where I come back to this broader need culturally to drive a better awareness and understanding.

Q186 Jess Phillips: What more do you think needs to be done, and how are you addressing this in your work?

Andy Briggs: I will give an example of it from my own firm, Aviva, where we are focused a lot on this and are making some good progress. We hired 165 over-50s last year, which was up 33% on the previous year. The overall hiring at Aviva would have been broadly flat, year on year, so quite a big relative increase for over-50s but still not a big enough proportion, and I want to do more.

One of the key things we did was look at our recruitment adverts and where we were recruiting, so the recruitment adverts themselves were not full of younger people; they were much more diverse in the range of people featured in the adverts. A lot of it is quite simple, straightforward things, and, as Catherine says, one of the challenges is people's own self-confidence.

It is also about where you go to recruit. Taking Home Instead Senior Care, if you go to the Women's Institute and rotary clubs, you are going to get people who are quite different than would be the case if you went to school-leavers. It is about businesses having awareness around this. This is an area where less progress has been made, but if we can come up with the case studies and get them out across businesses through the various different routes we can get case studies out, of where things have worked well, I think that will start to make people sit up and think, "Actually, why do we not try some of that?" That is a key way we are going to look to influence.

Q187 Jess Phillips: We have heard concerns that employers, eager not to be accused of age discrimination, say that they shy away from legitimate and helpful discussions about career and retirement planning for older workers. What do you think can be done to overcome this?

Andy Briggs: My strong preference, again, is just to encourage. Again, using an Aviva example, one of the things we encourage employers to do—particularly larger employers with their employee engagement surveys—is to look at the data. Cut the data by age and what is it telling you? What can you learn? One of the things that I learned from that within Aviva is over-50s are significantly less likely to have a development conversation with their manager than under-50s. Why? There is no evidence at all that over-50s are less able to develop and grow and learn new skills than under-50s, and it is a question of the biases coming out there. We are piloting mid-career reviews within Aviva as part of that. Someone aged 50 may choose to work for another 15 or 20 years, so why would they not look to train or do something different in that period of time? There is more to be done in this space, definitely.

Q188 Tulip Siddiq: How common is it for employers to provide the kind of



retraining for older workers that Fuller Working Lives envisages?

Catherine Sermon: There are two aspects. One is that employers in many instances—and they may still be the ones you would badge as the usual suspects—are offering, and have for a long time offered, quite comprehensive approaches for their employees to participate in. What we hear anecdotally is that they are not necessarily targeting them in a way that would be specifically appealing to older workers, and some of the research that we have done has highlighted the fact that older workers are much less likely to be interested in formal qualifications, much more interested in on-the-job learning. It is about making that more attractive, and communicating that in a way that is more likely to appeal to older workers. A lot of employers have a comprehensive approach to this.

Equally, the other point I would make is that we are aware that the apprenticeship levy and the cost of that have now swamped a lot of those existing training and development budgets within businesses that existed for other learning and development activities. One of the things we would like to see is flexibility in the levy for how employers could use this to support that retraining/reskilling activity for existing workers, where the activity they need is not an apprenticeship. It may not require that length of time and it may not appeal to some of the older workers. I think that has displaced a lot of that investment in businesses.

Q189 **Tulip Siddiq:** Do you support calls for the Government to adopt a national skills strategy to enable people to train and upskill throughout their lives?

Andy Briggs: Yes, we called for it as part of our report last year. I recognise the challenges. Overall, I am positive about the interaction with Government and DWP on this topic. We have a good common view and will work collaboratively. This is one area where different Government Departments do different things, and it feels much less joined up. There would be merit in pulling that together.

Q190 **Tulip Siddiq:** If such a strategy did take place, what would you see as the role of employers?

Catherine Sermon: An employer-led approach is really important, and I know there have been aspects of this to try and get much greater employer ownership of skills. Globally, there are other countries that do this better by industry, and I think there are some sectors that do this better in the UK. I would love to see more employer ownership in that regard. Highlighting what they can do to offer that diversity of opportunities for learning and skills and how to make those accessible to the widest range of people and employees is where I would like to see their input.

Andy Briggs: I would agree.

Q191 **Chair:** Catherine just said that other countries do it better. Which ones



would you point us in the direction of?

Catherine Sermon: Germany, absolutely, particularly in terms of how they work within sectors to make it easier for employees to have and understand the transferable skills they might need to work across the industry more. That is one of the things that we are looking at here: yes, lifelong learning, but how does that relate to a skills strategy? It would be looking at how we make it easier for employees to work and passport between different businesses on the basis of their transferable skills. There are some good examples of that within German industry.

Q192 **Chair:** Do countries like Germany use legislation more than we do to achieve that higher level of success?

Catherine Sermon: No, I do not think they have. There has been a much greater level of employer ownership, and there has been less Government intervention and therefore potentially greater stability, people would say, in terms of how that approach has been led.

Q193 **Chair:** So more ingrained in the culture. Just before I bring Philip in, you were talking earlier about reasonable adjustments, a concept that we most readily associate with issues around disability, but you are implying that this concept could be used more widely, particularly in relation to age. Could you expand on that?

Catherine Sermon: I mentioned it when Andy was talking about some of the examples of changes that employers had made that were led by employees—he was talking about the BMW example and so on—that just made it easier and the working environment more comfortable for some of their older workers to extend their working lives. It is about recognising that they are different from what at the moment is a reasonable adjustment made around a disability, and that people have not thought about that for their older workers in a positive and proactive way, necessarily. That is where there is good practice already happening, and I think that could be replicated.

I also think we feel much less well-equipped to support employers to pre-empt that or to think about this in an environment where, over time, we know that someone's health may deteriorate gradually, rather than something that is a specific pre-existing condition.

Q194 **Philip Davies:** Could I ask how many older workers in different types of employment are able to work flexibly, particularly with regard to moving towards a phased retirement?

Andy Briggs: It is one of the key things we think employers need to embrace more. I think there are some examples of this, but it would be beneficial for businesses and employees if it was far more prevalent. I gave the example of the chap in our York office. Last year, he went down from five days a week to four days a week, because he wanted to spend a bit more time with his wife, who has retired. From our perspective, we strongly encouraged that, if that is what he wants to do. I would rather



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have that skill and capability for four days a week, than have to hire someone new in, with the cost of doing that, and train somebody new, and so on and so forth. There are not enough examples of job shares, for example, and that is one thing we are encouraging businesses to embrace more.

Q195 Philip Davies: The way that you are flagging that up would indicate that that is a rarity: "Look at this one person here". That would indicate in itself that that is something that is rare. In terms of people having a gradual or phased working life towards their retirement, is that something that is just the preserve of senior managers in the UK?

Andy Briggs: You might have evidence on this. I think it is less likely for senior managers generally. I think we are poorer at job shares for senior roles. It does happen, Mr Davies, but what I am saying is that a lot of businesses are set in the routine that everyone works Monday to Friday, nine to five, or whatever it might be in their particular line of business; that is what you do. They have not really embraced the idea that, "Hold on. Are we not better off allowing those who want to work three days a week to work three days a week and not have to recruit so many people?" I just think it does happen—it is widespread—but it could be embraced much more.

Catherine Sermon: A lot of the jobs at the lower end of the pay scale in the labour market are already flexible. We have worked closely with an organisation called Timewise, and they are very clear about the need to make flexible jobs good and good jobs flexible. That is where you get the disparity; a lot of the lower-paid roles are very flexible. I know this Committee has been considering the recommendations from the Taylor report, to look at how you make sure there is good protection for workers within that environment, and that that is good-quality work and that people are not just staying in work for longer because they have to, when they are not enjoying and getting the purpose and fulfilment from that.

That happening at a senior level is rare. I do not think it is as rare as one person here and one person there, but it is not as commonplace as we would like to see it. There are two sides to this again. With all of this it is about making sure that the policies are there and well-communicated, but also known by people, so they feel confident that that is something they would want to do and that would support their status or their work/life balance. I do think flexibility is the single biggest way of making a difference on this agenda, and I know that research that DWP conducted showed that 47% of employees felt that flexible working would help them extend their working life, and indicated that that would be really effective.

Q196 Philip Davies: Might it be the case that some employers would be prepared to do it, but they do not have a culture of giving the impression that they would welcome it, and therefore people may feel fearful of requesting it?



Catherine Sermon: That is why I say there is a cultural side to it. It is about people knowing that that is an option and that that is something they could do. There is evidence that when employers are more on the front foot about this and are using individuals who have done this as good examples and role models, then that can have a positive effect. I still think it is very early days, in people showcasing those role models. There are employers who have done it.

Andy Briggs: It is two-way. Employers do not give it sufficient thought and attention, but equally, from the employee perspective, there is the established norm that you retire at such-and-such an age, and you go from working full-time to not working at all, because that is what you do. It is ingrained, rather than actually, "Does that work for me? Would it work for me better to work longer or to work part-time for a period of time, or work more flexibly?" We definitely need to encourage that from both perspectives.

Catherine Sermon: One of the other aspects that we find when looking at this is that there is obviously, "How do we become more flexible within that working pattern?" and that is easier within an office setting, but one of the areas where there is a significant skills shortage, where businesses are struggling to recruit and where there are trained workers who are not coming back into the workforce on this, is jobs with specific shift patterns, and therefore where businesses need to think it is not just about offering flexibility for people in the office; it is thinking about how they can redesign the way in which their shift patterns work. In that sense, we have been talking to employers who need a quite skilled engineering workforce, but they work 12-hour shifts.

Q197 **Philip Davies:** Mr Briggs, you mentioned in a previous answer in an earlier section people who work and are carers, and they end up giving up work because it conflicts with their caring responsibilities. Would the introduction of dedicated carers leave be a solution to that? How would employers react to the introduction of dedicated carers leave?

Andy Briggs: We think it would be a solution, and we think it is something that we should seek to pursue. I can talk from experience of organisations like our own that have done it. People often ask me, "What is the cost of it?" and I say, "It is a benefit, not a cost, because it means that I keep those skills and capabilities in the business for much longer. I save the recruitment and retraining costs of new people coming in. I do not view it as a cost; I view it as a benefit".

Yes, you do run the risk of some businesses saying, "This is yet another imposition on our business", and that is why generally our strategy on this is that we think there is an awful lot in it for business to embrace this: businesses need to have the skills and capabilities they require, and therefore the more that we can do through encouragement and making the business case, the better. I think that statutory carers leave is one of the areas we should actively look at.



Q198 **Philip Davies:** Is there a difference between big companies like yours and small businesses that only employ one or two people? Do you see a distinction having to be drawn between those, or not?

Andy Briggs: My perspective would be that I recognise that it is harder for smaller businesses, but I think the principle probably applies to both. I recognise it would be harder for smaller businesses.

Catherine Sermon: That is where the devil is in the detail of how it is implemented, but around that, if you combine that with good flexible working practices it is possible for businesses of any size but, like Andy, I acknowledge that there will be challenges for smaller businesses.

Q199 **Chair:** You have emphasised throughout this session that we are still at an early stage with regards to these issues, but that there is also a need for very rapid progress and that there are still too many employers not embracing flexible working and the economic benefit for the country if they were to do that. Andy, you indicated earlier that there could be an argument for the Government to make changes in regulation. What did you mean by that?

Andy Briggs: The particular areas would be carers policy. In the same way that there is statutory maternity, should there be statutory carer policies, so flexible working from day one rather than 26 weeks? They would be the two main ones, but also something maybe not legislative or regulatory, but something more around mid-life career reviews. John Cridland in his report on the state pension age talked about the mid-life MOT; I think that was the expression he used. I am thinking of that type of concept—maybe not mandatory, but certainly much more strongly encouraged. Those would be the main areas we would focus on.

Q200 **Chair:** Do you not think we have been strongly encouraging this for a little while now? It is interesting: the Prime Minister last year was suggesting the need to make all jobs flexible. Do you think we have gone beyond simply prodding, and now we need to do a bit more?

Andy Briggs: In terms of statutory carer policy and in terms of flexible working, I think we should move to legislate and regulate on both of those. Flexible working is already required from 26 weeks into employment, but that does not work if you need flexible working on day one. People will not go for those jobs and those roles. Those two, we would call for and advocate that the regulation is changed, yes.

Q201 **Chair:** I have a second supplementary. You said earlier that the public sector could do more, and it reminded me of an evidence session we had with the Schools Minister, where we were talking about a review of teaching, and were quite astonished to find that there was not anything within that about flexible working. There are so many jobs within the public sector that could embrace flexible working more. Why do you think there is such a high level of resistance, or is it just they are not talking about it? Is it resistance or is it a lack of awareness?



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Catherine Sermon: My sense is that there is, in many instances, a mixture of all of those things, including a lack of experience and knowing how to manage it well. Therefore, it is ensuring that businesses have the competencies and the confidence to be able to implement this, as well as the policies and procedures that enable them to do that. Back to some of those low levels, there is a lack of experience of this, and therefore we need to do more to equip employers, both public and private sector, across all of that, in terms of how to do this well.

Q202 **Chair:** So it is more complicated—people need more support, and, if they do not get that support, then they will not do it?

Andy Briggs: I think that the public sector organisations are not dissimilar to private sector businesses in so much as there are an awful lot of different demands on their time and things they are trying to focus on and trying to do. If you take the NHS, for example, it has quite a high proportion of its workforce over age 50. I do not want to go down the Brexit route, but we are already seeing that immigration is dropping significantly. I talked before about there being roughly twice as many people each year leaving the workforce through the ageing population as are coming through the education system. With a lot of immigration, maybe that would balance the books. If, post Brexit, without getting into the rights and wrongs of that, there is less immigration, then if organisations do not embrace older workers are they really going to have the skills and capabilities? The NHS would be a good example of that.

I think we are going to see, and I hope we are going to see, the compelling need to do something in this space get stronger and stronger, and organisations will not have the skills and capabilities they need without doing more for older workers, which will include flexible working as a key part.

Q203 **Chair:** That is a really interesting point. We have ignored the problems faced by older workers, and these million people who want to get back into work, because we have been able to plug the employment gap with workers from overseas. This could be a benefit of Brexit for older workers. I speak as a remainer, by the way.

Andy Briggs: I am not sure I would say that businesses have ignored older workers because they have been able to benefit from immigration, but I think it is going to bring it into sharper focus, because ultimately they are not going to get the skills and capabilities that they need. There is a very strong business rationale. There is also a strong rationale from the perspective of the employee, because for those who do not want to work, that is fine. I am not trying to get people working who do not want to work, but there are an awful lot who want to work, for the financial, social and intellectual stimulation benefits of working. Therefore, those two come together well.

Chair: That is very helpful.



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Catherine Sermon: I agree. The only context that I am aware of is that employers recognise that they have had it relatively easy to find and attract labour, and we have high employment rates. There have been some very persistent and long-term skills shortages. We know that they have endured that, regardless of immigration levels. The cost of employing people has never been higher, and the cost of technology and the ease and risks around implementation of that are getting lower, and greater in terms of reliability. Around that, what we are really starting to think about how to prepare employers for is this mandatory expensable transitions and workforce planning that enables them to think about making the right decisions that do not just, regardless of the age of the worker, lead to greater automation of the workforce.

Chair: This has been an incredibly helpful session. Can I thank both of you? I know how much time it takes to prepare and give up in your diary to come along, but we have really benefited hugely from your thoughts this morning. Also, thank you for all the work that you do outside of evidence sessions like this. It is very, very valuable.

Andy Briggs: For what it is worth, I am delighted you are focused on this issue; it is helpful. It needs focus, and businesses, people in the UK and the broader economy will benefit from us getting this right. As you can tell, we are pretty passionate about it.

Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much. Thank you for your time.