



Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: Plan for Jobs and employment support, HC 600

Wednesday 25 January 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 25 January 2023.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Sir Stephen Timms (Chair); Debbie Abrahams; Shaun Bailey; David Linden; Steve McCabe; Nigel Mills; Selaine Saxby; Dr Ben Spencer; Sir Desmond Swayne.

Questions 152 - 216

Witnesses

I: Luke Price, Senior Research and Policy Manager, Work, The Centre for Ageing Better; Peter Murphy, Director, Wise Age; Dr Shriti Pattani, President, Society of Occupational Medicine; and Professor Kevin Bampton, Chief Executive Officer, British Occupational Hygiene Society.

II: Graham Whitham, Chief Executive Officer, Greater Manchester Poverty Action; Councillor Kieron Williams, Chair, Central London Forward; and Councillor Toby Savage, Vice Chairman of the City Regions Board, Local Government Association.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Centre for Ageing Better](#)

[Greater Manchester Poverty Action](#)

[Society of Occupational Medicine](#)

[British Occupational Hygiene Society](#)

[Central London Forward](#)

[Greater Manchester Combined](#)

[The Local Government Association](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Luke Price, Peter Murphy, Dr Shriti Pattani and Professor Kevin Bampton.

Q152 **Chair:** Welcome, everybody, to this meeting of the Work and Pensions Select Committee and an evidence session for our inquiry on the Government's Plan for Jobs and employment support. We are delighted to welcome the members of our first panel. Thank you all very much for coming. Can I ask each of you very briefly to tell us who you are, starting with Luke Price?

Luke Price: I am the Senior Research and Policy Manager for Centre for Ageing Better. We are an organisation that was set up in 2015. We are one of the Government's What Works centres. We do a lot of research and testing work around later life and particularly around employment support and age-friendly employment.

Peter Murphy: I am from Wise Age. We are a charity based in London that focuses exclusively on issues facing the over-50s for employment. We work with individual clients and also with employers. We do lobbying work and take part in conferences and so on. In various ways, we do our best to influence policy, but my focus has very much been on working with jobseekers over 50 in east London in particular.

Dr Pattani: I am here representing the Society of Occupational Medicine as their President. The society is the largest and oldest national professional organisation of individuals with an interest in occupational health. My other hat is as a national expert for NHS England in occupational health.

Professor Bampton: I am representing the British Occupational Hygiene Society, which is the chartered society for work health protection. For 70 years this year, we have been providing the scientific and practical support to prevent people from getting ill in work. I am also on the board of the Council for Work and Health and chair of the British Standards Institution's health and safety management committee.

Q153 **Chair:** Thank you all very much. I will put the first question to each of you. We know that inactivity for the over-50s has risen quite sharply since the beginning of the pandemic. Why do you think that is? Do you think that financial pressures are likely to force many of those who have become inactive back to work in due course or not?

Luke Price: In the 10 years preceding the pandemic we saw a very strong increase in economic participation among this age group but, as you said, that was stalled by the pandemic and has gone into reverse. We have about 3.6 million economically inactive 50 to 64-year-olds currently, although around 500,000 of them say they want to work—even though



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they are not engaged with the labour market, they want to re-engage at some point.

There are multiple different reasons for this and it can be quite complex, but essentially it boils down to a very turbulent labour market during the pandemic. Around two-thirds of those aged between 50 and 70 left their jobs earlier than they had expected, so at a younger age than they had expected. For some of these people, not necessarily a huge group, it was about re-evaluating their life, deciding that they did not want to work in the job any more or they were ready to retire. For those who were financially secure, that is fine and good and they have managed to do that.

We also saw large groups of people in this age group who had no choice. There were a lot of redundancies during the pandemic, of course, because businesses closed down permanently or temporarily. About a third of those redundancies, so quite a large number of them, were among the 50-to-64 age group. That is being forced out of work. We also know that people were forced to make a choice to leave work because they had health conditions or caring responsibilities. The new world of work and how it changed during the pandemic was no longer suitable to fit with their needs for care and health, so they took the choice to leave work. There was no support from employers or appropriate employment support and they are not engaged with the labour market now.

We also know that once this age group has left the labour market or left a job, it is much harder for them to re-engage. Talking about redundancies again, we know that younger workers who were made redundant during the pandemic were twice as likely to have a job within six months than workers in this age group, so there is an inequality there. It is much harder to get back into it.

We also know that older workers face quite a lot of ageism. There is quite a lot of ageism in society generally. At the Centre for Ageing Better we have done a lot of research looking at societal narratives and stereotypes that we see around older people, but also older workers, and they can come up against those attitudes among employers and employment support providers. You can also end up internalising that. You constantly hear these ageist narratives and ideas about workers not being as productive or taking more sick leave, which are often based on negative stereotypes that are not true, and you can start to believe these things. People might start to believe that they are past it or whatever.

Another big issue and reason why it has had such a big impact is the lack of suitable jobs. What older workers consistently say they need, particularly with health conditions and caring responsibilities, is flexible work. They need to be able to fit work around their responsibilities and their life. Some employers offer that but some don't, and it can be quite hard to work out who does and find those jobs. There is also a lack of health support from the employers. Some employers do good health



support and others don't. There is not as much access to occupational health as maybe there should be. We know that of those workers in this age group who left their jobs during the pandemic and did not return, they are much more likely to be on an NHS waiting list for treatment than those who did return. There are lots of people who may have untreated health conditions that mean they cannot re-engage with work.

Very quickly on financial resilience and whether they are able to support themselves, there is a consistent body of research that suggests that people at any age, not just in later life, underestimate how much they need to save for a pension and need to save to support themselves. It is likely that some people who think that they will be financially fine might not be. That is likely to be worsened particularly when you combine it with the cost of living crisis that we are currently in. We also know that there are gender inequalities. Women are much more likely to have done part-time work. We know that about a quarter of this age group of women are not eligible for auto-enrolment into workplace pensions, which has been a huge policy success and has meant more people saving more for years now. We can have a conversation about whether people save enough through that, but the point is that there is this gender gap there in who might be able to financially sustain themselves.

Finally, we know that around two fifths of people who left work during the pandemic and have not returned have debt of some kind. It could be mortgage debt, credit cards or something else. It is likely that they are going to have financial obligations that might be difficult to meet without getting back into work.

Q154 Chair: Thank you. You have given a very comprehensive answer to my question. I will ask the other panellists whether they want to disagree or add anything to what Luke has said, rather than going through it again.

Peter Murphy: Yes, Luke has said very well virtually everything that I had planned to say and I agree. The only thing I would add is that we have some ideas on how to address the issues. Is this the right moment?

Chair: We will come back to that.

Dr Pattani: Again, I agree with everything that Luke has said. The only thing I will add is that as it is harder to re-engage the older worker, flexibility in the workplace and putting in measures to make work more adaptable to the older worker will help the younger worker as well.

Professor Bampton: The only thing to add is that as well as the physical health dimensions that have been highlighted, the impact of the pandemic on mental health for people who have left the workplace cannot be underestimated. In certain sectors, the mental health impact of isolation because of lockdown and some of the trauma within the health service and other related issues are likely to be compounding factors.

Chair: Thank you all very much.



Q155 **Nigel Mills:** Luke has covered this comprehensively but there are a couple of other questions to ask. First, how much of this issue is that people physically cannot work because they are waiting for medical treatment—they need a new hip or a new knee or something—and there is such a long waiting list? If they could get that they might be fit to go back to work, but without that they are not. Is that a problem that is being seen in this area?

Dr Pattani: Yes, it is. However, where we have occupational health services we try to adapt the job to suit the worker. We will put in measures to allow the individual to work with adjustments. It may well be that we look at how in the interim we can make those adjustments to allow an individual to work.

I suppose the area where there is a bigger challenge is those who are out of work who might want to work but are waiting for further treatment because they will not necessarily have access to occupational health where they can get support and advice. Part of the role of occupational health is to support the individual but also to support the employer, and that communication can be very helpful in adapting a workplace for the worker.

Q156 **Nigel Mills:** If I look at employers in my area, we have a lot of manufacturing, warehousing, retail and even teaching or nursing. It is quite hard to adapt those jobs so you are not standing up a lot, isn't it? There are only limited things that you can do.

Dr Pattani: I agree. However, I have a nurse who is back working in an emergency department in a wheelchair—a nurse with a huge amount of expertise who we did not want to lose—so it is possible. Thinking and looking outside the box and using occupational health expertise can be very supportive in helping people with health conditions, whether they are chronic and not treatable or whether they are going to be treatable in the foreseeable future.

Q157 **Nigel Mills:** If you were advising the Secretary of State on his ongoing review, what should the Government do? We have seen stories floating tax reductions for over-50s to go back to work. Should we be incentivising employers to want to take over-50s? What is the solution that gets more over-50s back into work? Peter, you said you have some ideas.

Peter Murphy: Yes, we have come up with a few ideas on that, because—you are right—we have to encourage the employers as well. As part of our work with the London Assembly we have come up with a proposal for an older workers charter for the London area, which I could circulate. These things have to be done at a local level, city by city, region by region. It has to be well thought out and integrated and relevant to the local area. I think that an actual strategy for older workers that is implemented and well thought out in advance is the solution.



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Chair: We would certainly be interested in seeing the charter if you would let us have it, and then we can send it around.

Peter Murphy: Yes.

Q158 **Nigel Mills:** Luke, have you come up with any solutions to the problem?

Luke Price: Part of the problem here is that the gateway to employment support can be quite inaccessible. I think that you touched on this in one of the questions that you sent. For many people, you have to be claiming benefits—you have to be on Universal Credit—to engage with, say, the jobcentre, and lots of older people in the economically inactive group just aren't. Therefore, they are not engaging with employment support in that sense. Many of them also had quite negative experiences in the past or do not necessarily see that services them anyway, so it is quite likely unsatisfactory as well as being inaccessible.

We need to start thinking about widening eligibility to services. There was an underspend in the Plan for Jobs, and one thing that could be done in the short term is to use some of that money in the Restart scheme to widen eligibility—I believe that it is currently only for people on Universal Credit—to people over 50 who are economically inactive and are not claiming Universal Credit, and then actively market to them. We know from our research that unless you think about actively marketing these services to people over 50, particularly economically inactive people over 50, they will not engage because they will not see it as being for them. They see these services as for younger workers or for other people.

The other thing that could be done in the short to medium term is that the UKSPF has a people and skills element, which is all about local employment support in areas. That funding is not due to come online until 2024-25, so bringing it forward to 2023-24 could have a big impact, not least because it would be funding locally context-specific services. The risk of not doing it sooner is that a lot of the infrastructure that is currently in place that helps those employment support services thrive could start to diminish and disappear if there is a year gap in that funding.

In the longer term, what we really need, arguably, is a national programme of employment support specifically aimed at those aged 50-plus. We have done a lot of work over the last few years in Greater Manchester with the combined authority and DWP to develop a pilot and an idea for what this could look like in Greater Manchester, which I could talk about in more detail or I could share outside of the meeting. It is a new approach specifically aimed at people aged over 50, not just economically inactive but particularly thinking about the economically inactive, which theoretically you could do in other areas of the country. It is underpinned by evidence-based principles and approaches. That could have a large impact and would probably complement the recent announcement by the Prime Minister about mid-life MOTs quite well and go alongside that.



Q159 **Nigel Mills:** Do you have data that suggests that previous DWP programmes did not work for the over-50s and you think you can get a better set of outcomes by having a targeted programme? Do you have data or estimates that show how much better you could do?

Luke Price: We know that previous DWP programmes have not been that effective for the 50-plus age group. They generally have poorer outcomes in getting jobs and poorer satisfaction. We consistently hear that this age group are not particularly satisfied with those services, especially those with health conditions and with caring responsibilities. They are often a harder group to support and they have more challenges.

As an example, the Work Programme, which ran between about 2011 and 2017, only achieved about one fifth of job outcomes for the 50-plus age group, which is the lowest of all the age groups. There is a similar pattern of outcomes in the more recent Work and Health Programme, which get worse as you get older. Around a fifth of 50 to 54-year-olds got a job after 24 months, around 18% of 55 to 59-year-olds, and just 13% of people aged over 60. You see that kind of gradation there.

We know that they have not been particularly effective. I do not have any concrete numbers on how much more effective our new pilot would be because we have not piloted it and tested it yet, although we are in conversation to do that in Greater Manchester. There are a couple of principles and things that you can think about putting into employment support for this age group that are likely to be more effective, based on all the evidence and research work that we have done.

Q160 **Nigel Mills:** Your business case for that programme does not have an estimate of what you think you might be able to do?

Luke Price: We do have a business case for it and a cost per head and some other figures. As far as I am aware, although I will double check and get back to you on that, we haven't done a return on investment analysis, no.

Q161 **Selaine Saxby:** You have probably covered my question in that one, but are there any other things that you think the DWP could be doing to reach out to people over 50? I am the North Devon MP and we have a quite elderly population and a lot of early retirees moving up there. I know from my local jobcentre that they are reaching out, and I also know that my social care teams are specifically reaching out to recently retired over-50s, because they feel that, while it is lovely to have young workers, they bring an extra skillset by having life experience when you are dealing with potentially the very elderly in my patch. Are there any other schemes or thoughts or ideas as to what the DWP could do to encourage these people either in the door or back to work?

Dr Pattani: Looking at the over-50s and Luke's reference to the fact that some of them are not claiming Universal Credit and, therefore, not coming in contact with employment services, one of the areas that the society is particularly interested in is joining up primary care,



occupational health and employment services. I think that link between health services and employment services is key to supporting those over 50 to get back into employment. I did some work with DWP a few years ago and spent some time in Jobcentre Plus to learn about what support there is. I was rather blown away that, as a GP and an occupational health physician at the time—a dual role—I was not aware of the range of services that were potentially available. I think that link is crucial.

Peter Murphy: We do quite a lot of work in local jobcentres. There is a strand of funding that Luke didn't mention. I totally agree that the programmes he has mentioned, like Restart and so on, get pretty poor results, but there is flexible support fund funding through DPS2. We have had contracts with those, and because we are an age-specific specialist organisation run by and for the older generation of workers, where they have given us programmes where they expect us to get people into jobs—people who are fairly close to the workplace—we do more like 40%, 45% and even getting towards 50% job outcomes for the people we enrol on those programmes.

The flexible support fund has a lot of options, from trying to get people engaged right through to support in work. In our experience, at the moment most of the bids being offered are only about removing barriers rather than getting people into work. We have just started a programme in Newham and Barking and Dagenham on one of those. I think that the flexible support fund could be more widely used to get these things under way, and I don't know why it is not being used more.

Q162 **Selaine Saxby:** Thank you. Was there anything else that you wanted to add, Luke?

Luke Price: I echo what Peter has just said. One of the issues is that it needs to be organisations that already exist in a place and are trusted by the local community delivering these services so that they will see it as something for them that they will engage with.

Professor Bampton: A lot of these schemes that are financially motivated work on the basis that people will go back into work if you give them enough money, but in certain industries—for example, welding—when you are young and have a young family, you are going there for money, but older welders will say, "I don't want to work in welding because I know it will eventually kill me."

A lot of the money is focused on trying to incentivise the individual and support the individual, but where there are opportunities for decent work, that can make a difference. For example, in building and construction work, which traditionally is an area that people leave in their 50s because it takes such a toll on the body and on lifestyle, a lot of the construction companies are now doing off-site construction. They are seeing, for example, steel fabricators who are working into their 60s when they would have given up in their 50s because there is on-site support. They can get physical and psychological support. They do not need to be away



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from their families. While it is good for the environment and it is a bit quicker, it is also really good. We heard in the Health in Construction Leadership Group numerous examples of 50-year-old women joining the heavy construction workforce because off-site construction was a safe and healthy way in which they could engage and contribute.

One of the things that needs to happen is a joined-up approach whereby the incentivisation is not just trying to throw money and knowledge at the worker, but highlighting and promoting opportunities for healthy working. There are some industries where no rational person would want to continue to work beyond the age of 50 when you are thinking, "I want to be healthy enough to play football with my grandkids."

Q163 **Chair:** Peter, I think that you want to come back, but I am just going to pick up a point you made a moment ago. Your organisation has a contract funded from the flexible support fund, does it?

Peter Murphy: Yes.

Chair: We know about the flexible support fund helping individuals. I did not realise that there were contracts.

Peter Murphy: Yes. I will tell you more about them later on in response to some of the other questions.

Chair: Was there another point that you wanted to make?

Peter Murphy: Another point following on from that is that in industries like construction, older workers could be trained to do training and mentoring and support for younger people. They have all that experience and knowledge and so on; why waste it? They could be passing it on to the next generation.

Q164 **David Linden:** A couple of weeks ago we had the permanent secretary in front of us talking about the annual accounts and looking at the staffing numbers. Specifically on work coaches, how effective do you think the support is from work coaches in jobcentres for over-50s?

Peter Murphy: It varies enormously. Work coaches are under a lot of pressure and they are quite driven by targets. That is in their job description. With the older ones particularly, there is a big variation in how empathetic and supportive they can be. I have to say that it has got a lot better in our experience in the years we have been working in east London jobcentres, but they do rely on organisations like ours to refer their clients to because they know that they are not doing enough and that they just can't. When you see a client for maybe 10 minutes every two weeks or whatever it is, how much can you really do?

Q165 **David Linden:** Does anybody else have anything to add to that?

Dr Pattani: I have been working with the work coaches up in Durham. I started doing some work with them pre-pandemic, very much in a voluntary capacity, because I believe they have quite a crucial role to



play. We picked up the project again last September and we have work coaches and disability employment advisers sitting in primary care, alongside GPs. Our initial results show that GPs are very much feeling the benefit of being able to refer those who are in work but perhaps have health conditions, people who may need adaptations, and people who are out of work. One of the reasons that patients are leaving the case load of the work coaches is that they are either back to work or they have found an alternative job or have just gone into employment. They are early results, but it looks positive where we have experienced work coaches sitting in primary care.

Q166 David Linden: That is helpful. How cognisant do you think Jobcentre Plus and work coaches are of digital exclusion for over-50s? How cognisant are work coaches of that with that demographic?

Peter Murphy: They are aware of it for sure and they do what they can. Quite a lot of their clients do not have any devices at home, so there are devices in jobcentres that the work coaches can support the clients who are digitally excluded in using. That is all they can do. They can literally sit them at a computer and show them once how to do it, but they have a workload to get on with. They are very aware of it, but they are limited in what they can do about it. Unless a lot more resources are going to be put in, that is not going to change. There was a scheme a few years ago in Germany where they did something like that, recruited a lot more work coaches and gave them half the workload, and it was only for over-50s as well. It was phenomenally successful but it cost a lot of money and eventually it was curtailed. It can be done, but it needs resourcing.

Q167 David Linden: Can I move on and ask about the role of self-employment in helping groups with higher rates of economic inactivity to re-enter the workforce?

Peter Murphy: We bring up that option with our clients, those who are interested. We are not running a New Enterprise Allowance scheme or anything. We are not funded to do that and we don't have that capacity, but we can do some preparation seminars and so on to take people through what it entails. A lot of people think that it is a nice idea until they realise that, for example, they will be doing two jobs. They will not just be doing the job that they think they are doing; they will be doing all the admin, all the finances and everything else. It is not for everybody and we do not want people to fail, basically. We go through all the ins and outs with them and then, for the people who want to do it, we go through what they will need to do for business planning and so on and get them to the point where they could be handed on to a scheme that will support them to take it to the next step.

Q168 David Linden: If I was an over-50 and I walked into my local jobcentre and said, "I am looking for help. Can you support me to set up a small business or to be self-employed?" how successful would that be? Do you think that they are resourced to do that at the moment?



Peter Murphy: I gather that the New Enterprise Allowance scheme, as such, has been curtailed. I think that it was quite effective when it was running. Even if there isn't the grant that the New Enterprise Allowance provided, they could stay on their benefits, for example. I actually went through it myself. When I hit 50 and could not get a job, I decided that self-employment was the route for me. I went on one of those schemes and it was very good. I did not really know much about business planning or how to do profit and loss accounts and things like that, and I was taken through all that. It worked for me, but nobody warned me how much extra work there was going to be until I found myself in it. When I started, I thought, "Oh, goodness me, this is a lot more than I had bargained for." Thank goodness I made a go of it, but I think that people need to be aware before they go down that route just how onerous those first years will be.

Q169 **David Linden:** A number of organisations have told the Committee that they want to see the DWP move towards a more holistic approach for supporting employment. What would that supplementary support from DWP look like, in an ideal world?

Peter Murphy: That is a difficult one. Again, unless you are going to pour massive resources into it, there is a limit to what could be done. Probably the way around it would be to get a more joined-up approach, linking with other services. There are very good local services springing up now around social prescribing, for example. If that could be linked more closely to jobcentres and work coaches could refer their clients to social prescribers—at the moment, I believe it is only GPs who can do it; I may be wrong, but I think that is the case—that could possibly work.

Then there are the clients who have so many problems that with the best will in the world their ability to effectively search for jobs is badly impacted. If they are worried about debt or they are depressed and so on, we offer a life-coaching service with our provision. Something like that could be done through the jobcentres rather than just giving people a bad time because they are not effectively looking for a job.

Q170 **David Linden:** Is it fair to sum up your testimony on this to be that there is too much of a silo approach from jobcentres on a lot of these issues?

Peter Murphy: To an extent, yes, I think so.

David Linden: Finally, does Professor Bampton have anything to add to that? I know the peril of being on Zoom is that you sometimes get missed. Is there anything that you want to add? He is saying no. Thank you very much.

Q171 **Debbie Abrahams:** Good morning, everyone. I want to try to get an understanding of the support that is available to over-50s at different skill levels. As an example, I had a constituent who was a computer scientist—a master's graduate. He had a mental health episode and was off for a short while—well, about a year—covid, long covid. He is very



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highly skilled. First of all, how prevalent are people of that skill level in the over-50s economically inactive group? What is the percentage of the economically inactive that are highly skilled? Do you have that data?

Peter Murphy: I don't have a statistic. Do you, Luke?

Luke Price: No, sorry.

Q172 **Debbie Abrahams:** Does anybody have that statistic? I am conscious that we are treating everybody in the 50-plus economically inactive group as an amorphous mass, but they are not, are they? Anyway, to cut a long story short, he was offered completely inappropriate employment support. Are we saying that we have limitations in providing appropriate employment support depending on the skill level? Is it a bit too broad?

Peter Murphy: It tends to be a bit one size fits all, doesn't it? I am sorry to keep banging our own drum, but it is only when they are referred to organisations like us, where we have the time to spend hours and hours over a 12 or 13-week period with individuals, that we can do something more tailored to what they actually need.

One of the problems with the constituent you mentioned is that his job is IT and the IT industry is quite ageist. Ageism is the big elephant in the room that we have not mentioned yet—ageism of employers and internalised ageism; actually, Luke did mention it a bit—which I think we need to address. We could have older worker strategies and so on, working with employers and decision makers and bringing this up, because it takes many forms. I won't bore you with it all now, but it is a big issue. You have really skilled people who could do the job just as well who do not get the interview because the CV gives away the fact that they are of a certain age.

Q173 **Debbie Abrahams:** Thank you. That is very helpful. I want to make a couple of points as well and see what you think. We know that, for example, excess deaths in the UK for working-age people are among the highest in Europe, and we know that they are unequally distributed. If you are living in a deprived area, or if you are of African, Caribbean or Asian descent, you are more likely to—and, of course, our healthy life expectancy, how healthy we are and our ability to work, reflects that pattern. I looked this morning for data on that and it is still not out, but I would put a pound to a penny that it will reflect that.

We have 2.2 million people living with long covid, one in four of working age. Do you think that that is adequately understood and reflected in the support that is provided for people who are of working age in helping them back into work through employment support programmes?

Peter Murphy: I am sure it isn't, is the short answer. I don't know what to add to that. I went through long covid myself—thank goodness I have more or less got over it—so I know what it is like. On days when you cannot do anything, you just cannot do anything. I found it quite difficult to explain what it was like, even with some of my colleagues, because it



is not just being tired. I don't think that there is enough appreciation of that. Particularly at the moment, I think that employers, with all the other problems they have, are not getting their heads around it either.

Q174 Debbie Abrahams: Can I ask the clinicians on the panel? Shriti, what is your view? Thinking about your Durham pilot example, which sounds wonderful, how familiar is that?

Dr Pattani: In addition to the pilot, we are starting, hopefully by March this year, to provide occupational health support, the idea being that when the work coaches or the GPs are dealing with complex medical conditions and fitness to work they have a process by which they can refer on to an occupational health clinician who can then provide input into doing that holistic assessment around functionality. In occupational health we look at the function of the individual—what they can do—and how we can support both the employer and the employee to work effectively and safely.

That has not started yet, but the intention is to demonstrate that if work coaches and disability employment advisers are working in primary care and looking at patients who have been referred by the GPs, by social prescribers, or by reception staff if they have somebody who is recurrently asking for a fit note—we are finding several avenues of referral into our work coaches and our disability employment advisers.

Q175 Debbie Abrahams: We know that disability employment advisers are few and far between. Again, it is great that you are doing it, but this is not everywhere. It is a bit of a desert out there for that support. What you are describing is great practice in support for employers and employees, but what I am trying to understand is this: if somebody who is economically inactive with long covid comes to a GP, how likely is it that, first of all, it will be a long covid clinic that does not provide unhelpful ME/CFS type treatment that has been disproved, and how likely is it that they will get the appropriate clinical advice but be provided with a route to the right employment support as well?

Dr Pattani: We know that there are not enough long covid clinics around the country, and they vary in the type of support they offer. I know that some have physiotherapists who can advise about work and occupational therapists. In some clinics there are also links with occupational health, but they are variable in the range of clinicians who are involved and can give that support and advice. We know that there are long waits for long covid clinics as well.

Q176 Debbie Abrahams: Professor Bampton, do you want to add anything to that?

Professor Bampton: Picking up on the initial question you were asking about how much we know—how aware we are—I do not know whether you have ever tried to navigate a personal independence payment form, which is probably harder to fill in than a professorial application.



Debbie Abrahams: I will use that example.

Professor Bampton: We gather a lot of data about people, but we do not ask anything to do with why they got ill. Right from GPs through the benefit system, we do not understand the link between occupation, work and how people get ill. Therefore, it is very hard to track how you get someone back into work, despite having that sort of thing. In healthcare you have continuity of care, you try to join the dots about the relationships between exposures and illnesses and things like that, so you get a whole view. We gather data for the purposes of assessment of eligibility, but we don't use this in a smart way that can help people get themselves back out of that particular hole.

There is a tremendous opportunity if every 50-year-old who went for a health check-up was asked one question: "What are you exposed to at work? Are you exposed to dust?"—and so on. Then we could change a whole series of different things. We ask lots of questions but we do not necessarily join up the cause and effect. For someone who might be dipping into the benefit because of long covid, understanding not just that factor but other factors that may have exacerbated this—there are co-linked factors that we need to understand. If we got that material together and thought intelligently, we could get a national strategy and also personal strategies.

Q177 **Debbie Abrahams:** That is very helpful indeed. Do you think employers understand the issues around long covid or other conditions that we get as we get older and, as a whole, provide the support that is needed to keep people in work? We need to be thinking about retention as much as getting people back to work, don't we? Professor Bampton, would you like to kick that off?

Professor Bampton: The simple answer is no, because these are complex things; they are intersectional. You mentioned someone who is highly skilled but has mental health problems. I know of graduates who are young who have mental health problems. Some employers really understand it, but if you look at our biggest employer, the national health service, and its understanding of the needs of its employees, it is still pretty primitive. It should be leading the club. There is an awareness problem, and I think that is one of the things about decent work. The more that we can support employers to understand some of the basics about decent work, the more effective we will be. We can throw as much money as we like at individuals, but the employer has to be supported to be able to enable people to engage.

Debbie Abrahams: Thank you so much.

Peter Murphy: Sorry for butting in. Another answer: while the employers are educating themselves on this issue, if they could just be more open generally. I know some employers do it very well, but the idea of flexible working is absolutely key here, for the over-50s in general but particularly now that we have come on to this issue. We just need a



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much more flexible approach to it rather than everybody being expected to do Monday to Friday, nine-to-five.

Debbie Abrahams: Lovely, thank you very much.

Q178 **Steve McCabe:** Good morning. I was going to ask about long covid, but we have heard quite a bit about long covid—David has covered that. How do you think the delivery of occupational health services have changed as a result of covid generally and, indeed, the growth in hybrid working that we are now seeing? I will go to Dr Pattani first and then come to the others.

Dr Pattani: Certainly the visibility of occupational health and what we can do has changed. We have gone from a reactive to a much more proactive stance and service, where businesses are beginning to recognise us as key for staff wellbeing but also organisational wellbeing, and central to productivity, retention and recruitment. From my experience in the world of occupational health, hybrid working has made occupational health a lot more accessible and much better recognised as to what we can do. Employers are beginning to recognise that being able to make adjustments in the workplace—adapting the workplace—can allow people to work and work effectively. There has been quite a lot of positive movement.

Q179 **Steve McCabe:** Thank you. Professor Bampton, do you have anything you want to add to that?

Professor Bampton: Occupational health and occupational hygiene are often used interchangeably, occupational hygiene being about preventing people from getting ill in the workplace. A few years ago, if you wandered around and talked about ventilation or PPE in the workplace, it would be a secondary factor. It is very clear from covid that being able to prevent people from getting ill is a lot cheaper and easier than dealing with the impact of illness. It has raised the importance of prevention. I mentioned the health service. That is a classic example. We do not have a preventive strategy to look after the health of our workers in the NHS, and hopefully that will change.

Hopefully we are moving away from the notion that you just wait until someone gets ill and then you call the occupational health people and they will either fix them or give you a reason to dismiss them. Hopefully we understand that if we do not prevent and manage illness in the workplace, it can be economically catastrophic for individual companies and indeed to the whole economy.

If we did not have the expertise that we have in the UK in occupational hygiene, in personal protective equipment, in ventilation control, the experts you have in HSE who are able to quickly roll out a strategy to prevent people from getting ill and keep British industry working, we would have been in a lot worse a position. The occupational hygiene profession, the people who are experts in prevention, were key to getting



us back and to keeping us able. Brilliant medical advances, wonderful roll-out of vaccines, but while we were waiting, if we had not had the expertise and the science to get the ventilation and all the things that were needed to manage, we would have just been sitting back and suffering. I think it has highlighted the importance. I notice even Parliament has a new air ventilation system going in there.

Steve McCabe: It doesn't work—only kidding.

Professor Bampton: But hopefully we move away from waiting for the worst to happen and see whether we can quickly come up with a treatment.

Q180 **Steve McCabe:** Is it more expensive for employers to have hybrid working? We are hearing about some of the equipment that might be necessary that might assist. Do the employers have to foot the bill for that in the individual's home as well, or is there some kind of compromise arrangement? How does it work?

Professor Bampton: The burden falls on the individual a bit more. The tax benefits, or tax breaks, that were available have changed, so the individual picks up a bit of that but then perhaps saves a little bit on travel. It may be that everybody is slightly better off, but I worry about the long-term cost, because if you have people working at home, there is every chance they will not be using proper equipment. There is every chance their musculoskeletal conditions will get worse because their backs are not properly supported, and that they will be working longer and more diffuse hours.

I think we might be storing up a mental and physical health problem through distance working, and there really isn't any good advice out there. I was trying to look for really good advice for my own staff. HSE is normally tip-top on stuff, but even its material was not fit for purpose for where we are. I think there will be a mental and physical health cost and that will be the big cost of the change to home working.

Q181 **Steve McCabe:** That is very helpful; thank you. That might be one to watch, I suspect.

Dr Pattani, I noticed that you were in favour of the idea that more occupational health should be available, I think particularly for small employers, through the NHS. I was tempted to ask you how on earth that is going to work, given the current state of the NHS, but I see that you suggested workforce expansion as a way of trying to address that. Is that your main solution?

Dr Pattani: That is one of several. I would like to mention the NHS Growing Occupational Health and Wellbeing Together programme, which was launched last year. It is a five-year strategy and it is a very good example of how we can do transformation in the NHS to increase workforce capacity but also capability, using a multidisciplinary workforce and technology. We are already beginning to reap some benefits of that



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and there are good examples of work going on across Cumbria and the Isle of Wight, where we are working across a system to provide expertise rather than providing it at just one trust level. We are doing it across a whole system and also using technology to drive up efficiency, so there are solutions, in addition to workforce of course.

There are not enough clinicians in occupational health and that has been a long-standing issue, but through this programme there has been investment in clinicians and support staff, but also transformation. These are early good examples of what is already happening across a system to support NHS staff and small and medium-sized businesses.

Q182 **Steve McCabe:** Is the main problem the shortage? Is that like other medical professionals, the lack of training places?

Dr Pattani: Yes. There has been for many years a lack of training positions in occupational health, but also lack of awareness early on in a medical career about the speciality of occupational medicine. It is not part of the undergraduate curriculum, so there is still quite a lot of work to do to highlight that as a speciality. It has changed somewhat on the back of covid, as we are now recognised much more as a speciality of interest to doctors and nurses and also OTs, physios and other colleagues.

Q183 **Steve McCabe:** Thank you. Do you have anything to add, gentlemen?

Professor Bampton: When you start up a new business, nobody gives you the additional information about how to stay healthy and safe. If you start up as a craft baker, nobody tells you about baker's lung. If you are a ceramicist, you don't understand. Education so that people avoid getting ill will always be better than having more people to cure people and public health education for the self-employed so they can manage stress. It has been adverted to that running a business on your own is hard work and nobody is looking after your health and safety. You do not have an occupational health adviser to hand to tell you about how to manage stress and all of that kind of thing. A little bit of education for entrepreneurs about how to manage their health could go a long way for them and for microbusinesses, for their employees. It is not rocket science, but nobody tells you this stuff.

Q184 **Steve McCabe:** Dr Pattani, I was attracted by this idea of the centre for work and health research, but amazed to discover we don't have one or the universities don't have one. Is that the case? Are you suggesting something entirely new or would it duplicate work that is happening in other institutions at the moment?

Dr Pattani: We are setting up a centre for work and health in London and that will be providing support and research. The funding for it is currently limited, but there is a recognition that it is desperately required and so it has been launched now.

Chair: That concludes the questions we wanted to put to you, but I will



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make the point that if anything else occurs to you afterwards that you would like to have said or that we ought to be aware of, please email us. Mr Murphy, you were going to send us the charter. We would be keen to see any material along those lines from anybody. Thank you all very much for being willing to join us this morning. We are very grateful to you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Graham Whitham, Councillor Kieron Williams and Councillor Toby Savage.

Q185 **Chair:** Welcome to all of you. Thank you for all being here in person. Can I ask each of you very briefly to introduce yourselves to the Committee, starting with Councillor Toby Savage?

Councillor Savage: Good morning, everybody. I am a Vice-Chair on the Local Government Association City Regions Board and I am also the leader of South Gloucestershire Council.

Councillor Williams: Good morning. I am the leader of Southwark Council. For those who don't know Southwark, we stretch from the Tate on the river in London down to Dulwich. I am also Chair of Central London Forward, which is the partnership of the 12 councils within central London.

Graham Whitham: I am Chief Executive of Greater Manchester Poverty Action. We are a not-for-profit organisation that exists to support stakeholders across Greater Manchester across all sectors with efforts to tackle poverty.

Q186 **Chair:** Thank you. Can you briefly say what you think the Government's priorities for employment support should be, starting with Councillor Savage?

Councillor Savage: Chair, thank you. I think there is an opportunity to work much more closely with local government as we seek to address the challenges that we know that we have in the workplace. There is a lot of support out there for people on out-of-work benefits and how they are helped back into the workplace, but for people who are economically inactive, which we have seen a significant increase in, there is an opportunity to join together in a much more effective way how national and local programmes inter-relate—an enormous opportunity to do more with the very significant level of resource that is in the system overall.

Q187 **Chair:** Are you suggesting that that is more important if we are trying to reach inactive people than it was when we were focusing on people claiming benefits?

Councillor Savage: We have seen changes within the economy that are new and in some cases there are growing issues that we need to collectively tackle. The Local Government Association is advocating a Work Local approach that would mean that there would be greater join-up and co-design between local government and national Government to ensure that we are better able to provide the support that people need, particularly with the growing complexity of problems that a number of people face in being able to access work. We believe that we have the



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evidence track record locally to be able to work more effectively with national Government.

Councillor Williams: I am going to echo much of what Councillor Savage has just said. We clearly face a large challenge with economic inactivity and that is the focus on helping people who have come out of work following the pandemic and back into work and, probably more importantly, making sure that we do not have even more people flow out of work in the short term. Given the current perilous condition of the economy, we need to be making sure we don't see unemployment rise again. We have very deep labour market inequality and that is particularly for those groups who we know long-standingly are most likely to be out of work, whether that is people with disabilities, the challenges we face for younger and older residents, those with long-term health conditions or others.

It is really important to think not just about employment support but about the quality of work. We know that for many people the reason they are leaving work is the quality of the work they were in. Either that has a direct impact on their health, or the choices that they are making in their life are about the downside to work outweighing the benefits for them. Those are all things that a simplistic employment programme cannot answer.

The real importance is, as Councillor Savage said, in having a joined-up response in local communities that stretches from education and skills provision through to perhaps crisis support that some people need—financial and otherwise—in their life, through to the work with employers as well as the tailored employment support itself. It is bringing those together in local areas and having much more trust in councils, in partnership with the voluntary sector and others, to put in place programmes that will help people stay in work, get back into work and start their careers.

Graham Whitham: I echo much of what has been said. There is an overarching point for me, and this challenge predates the pandemic. Two thirds of children and two thirds of working-age adults who are in poverty are in working households, so at least one person in that household is going out to work. We have a real issue there with the outcomes that work delivers for people—or often doesn't deliver—in that it is not lifting them out of poverty; it is not necessarily raising their living standards, or raising them much. There is an overarching point there around greater government direction and the role of employment support in moving more people into good-quality employment opportunities that help to drive down that in-work poverty problem.

Greater Manchester Poverty runs the Greater Manchester living wage campaign and there is a metro mayoral initiative in Greater Manchester called the good employment charter. Both of those are voluntary schemes locally or regionally that seek to improve the quality of



employment opportunities at a local level, but they can only do so much. They are effective. There has been a lot of impact in those areas, with the real living wage and the good employment charter, but those voluntary regionally and locally delivered initiatives can only do so much. There needs to be more central Government guidance and a very clear central Government priority for raising the quality of job opportunities in this country.

To speak to some of the specifics on that, we know that when employment support is delivered well it engages people with lived experience of poverty and people with protected characteristics in the design and delivery of services. One of the challenges that we have found as a locally based organisation in Greater Manchester, where we are creating spaces and other organisations are creating spaces that seek to engage people with lived experience of poverty in policy and service design, is that often DWP is not around that table. Obviously it is such an important stakeholder in those conversations and those spaces, but often it is not there and is missing. That sometimes comes, perhaps, from a lack of direction from DWP centrally about the way DWP should approach partnership working at that local level.

The final point on priorities is looking at a system overhaul. Our colleagues at the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation, which is a voluntary and community sector support organisation in the city region, hear from a lot of grassroots third-sector organisations who want to provide employment support to people in Greater Manchester who need it. They are often not able to get on to the DWP purchasing system and therefore get referrals through from DWP and provide the one-to-one asset-based employment support that they are often, as local voluntary and community sector organisations, very well placed to provide.

Q188 Shaun Bailey: I want to look a little bit more at the structures of how this support is delivered. With the devolved model that we have in place—and I am just thinking of the combined authority model—I am conscious that we have sub-regional economies underneath that. Certainly the pushback I have had in the West Midlands is that, from a provider perspective, that doesn't work. When you set a regional benchmark to meet and you have areas of particular affluence in one part and deprivation in another, if those areas of affluence are smashing through the benchmarks, particularly as we talk about support and things like that, but the areas of deprivation are being missed out, it effectively creates a false sense of things moving forward. Have you seen that reflected? You are all in areas that have had that level of devolution. From a delivery perspective, do you accept that sort of anecdotal remark? From your perspective, how can we tailor this to better understand the more sub-regional economies that we have in areas?

Graham Whitham: There is definitely a balance to be found there. Greater Manchester is an area where there are, unfortunately, high levels



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of poverty across a range of different geographies and localities. For some of the challenges across the whole of Greater Manchester in those more deprived areas, there needs to be commonality in the responses across different areas.

It is very clear from our work that local authorities know their local area, understand their local economy, and are often working with the combined authority, since we have had devolution, to bring in employment opportunities and work with employers to consider how the employment opportunities they offer are of good quality. I don't think it is necessarily an either/or. There is definitely something there about finding the right balance between the role of the combined authority at city region level and the role of local authorities. The role of local authorities and their voluntary and community sector partners is particularly important.

The voluntary and community sector organisations that are either in this employment support space or would like to be are often seeking to respond to the needs of more deprived communities—lower-income areas where employment opportunities are limited. They are not necessarily active in more affluent areas where the economy is more vibrant and is delivering better employment outcomes for people. There is definitely a balance to be found in that respect.

Q189 **Shaun Bailey:** Kieron, can I get your perspective on that?

Councillor Williams: In essence, it needs to be operating at a number of levels and geographies, and I think that is the most important point. In London we have arrangements through the Mayor and the GLA through sub-regions—I am here representing a sub-region, the 12 central London authorities—and delivery by individual local authorities, and indeed individual authorities target within their patches. In Southwark we have more of a focus on those bits of our borough where we know we have high levels of economic inactivity. I think we have made that work well. We have our Central London Works programme, providing support for those with long-term health conditions across central London. That works well at that scale.

Within my borough, for example, we have a Southwark Works programme that is providing very targeted support for particular groups of people—younger people, older people, those who are exiting the criminal justice system—that is very rooted in individual communities. You sometimes get the counter-argument that doing it in these different levels is less value for money, but you just don't see that when you look at the cost of the programmes across the piece. On the one hand you are balancing a national programme, which is not connected with local health services, local voluntary organisations, local employers or local skills providers, with locally rooted programmes that can be connected very directly with all of those elements and the value is achieved in the other direction. I agree that if we had a one-size-fits-all model for London, for example, it would not work because the needs of central London are very



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different from the needs of outer London, but we are making it work in London very effectively right now.

Councillor Savage: I certainly echo the points that have been made so far. There will always be a balance to be struck around ensuring that there is a consistent level of provision and support, while making sure that you do not lose sight of particular pockets within particular communities, where their needs are different. I think local government and the combined authorities are able to be more responsive to those nuances locally.

To make an additional point, I think across the system we struggle to share data about what is going on with the DWP's programmes and how it operates within combined authority areas or local government areas. Being able to get the data to be able to show what is being done locally so that we are then better able to tailor what we are trying to do—that seems a missed opportunity and something that we should be better at to make sure that we can be as responsive as possible to the needs of individual communities.

Q190 **Shaun Bailey:** Picking up on that point, as the Government continue to craft their priorities in this space, would you say that the lack of data sharing that you have just picked up there, Toby, is a real blocker to building priorities that are effective in their delivery and the impact that they should be making in local communities?

Councillor Savage: Yes, absolutely. I think that there is a real missed opportunity where data sharing could make sure that we are more effective at a national, regional and local level in trying to join up, because there is a lot going on.

Councillor Williams: I think that is at both ends as well. On one hand, if you asked me—you might do later; I will answer now—how effective the DWP's programmes are currently, I would find it very hard to say for my community or for the central London boroughs because we simply don't have that level of data sharing. Of course that is very important, not just for knowing whether it is good value for money but for doing the iterative work to make sure, "If that is not working, how are we going to make sure that it works for those groups of people who we want to get to?" That partnership is very hard to do without the data.

At the other end, we are not getting information currently on those people who are on a range of benefits, including Universal Credit, consistently. We are also not able to target our programmes—currently, all of the 12 central London boroughs have their own employment programmes and I think about 91% of the London boroughs do too—as well as we could because we do not have access to the individuals who could benefit from that support in a way that councils used to have.

Shaun Bailey: That is very useful.



Q191 **Chair:** On the problem about data sharing with DWP, would you need wider data sharing with other Departments, like the Department of Health, for example, or is it DWP where the need is particularly clear?

Councillor Williams: This is something we always grapple with as the public sector, but I think it is particularly problematic with the DWP at the moment and in a way that it didn't used to be, if you go back some years.

Q192 **Nigel Mills:** I think it is fair to say that a lot of DWP programmes have had the aim of benefit off-flow rather than getting people into work. Yes, the way to get people off benefits is to get them into work, but that does not help those who are not on benefits in the first place. Do you think that there is a need to adapt programmes or schemes to look at people—not just those on benefits but those who are out of work but not on benefits but perhaps want to or should be in work as well?

Councillor Savage: Absolutely. If you take Jobcentre Plus, for example, it is very much focused around being a benefit claimant employment service. There is definitely an opportunity to broaden its remit out to being a public employment service so that we are able to help people across the spectrum, not simply those who are claiming benefits but those that we talked about earlier who are economically inactive. In a lot of cases rules are very tightly drawn and eligibility criteria are very tightly set, and more flexibility would allow us to be more responsive to being able to tackle a number of the challenges that exist.

Q193 **Nigel Mills:** Do you think the jobcentre can realistically do that? Say I am 53 and not in work and we are okay financially and the jobcentre rings up and says, "Hi, would you like to come and see us?" I am probably going to say, "No, I do not need to come and see you. I am not having any of your nasty conditionality or any of your silly threats and stuff." Doesn't that need somebody else with a different or better brand to engage me?

Councillor Savage: That is why the Local Government Association has been promoting its Work Local concept, which is how we can bring all of the various different organisations and individuals around the table. We heard earlier from my colleague that the DWP is often not able to be around the table. That will allow us to co-design a more comprehensive service that makes sure that we are able to point the right person to the right programme of support rather than having a one size fits all.

Graham Whitham: To go back to your first question, I think that there is definitely a need for employment support for people who are economically inactive. In Greater Manchester, as an example, around 10% of 18 to 25-year-olds are classed as economically inactive at the moment. That is a very sizeable group of the population, about 20,000 young people. I guess when we have a situation where employers are struggling to fill vacancies, particularly in certain sectors, it is hard to see how you can justify ignoring such large cohorts of the population.



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On your point about branding, there is a real issue around how people respond to Jobcentre Plus as a service provider. That might be based on perceptions or on previous experiences they have had, but there is a real barrier there. There is definitely something about the way people respond to services that are branded differently—services that are delivered by organisations that are not perceived as part of the public sector. It is very much going back to the role of voluntary and community sector organisations, but also something about the way that people navigate the support system over time.

If we can support people who are economically inactive, often they will go on to start claiming benefits and claim Universal Credit at that point. That is moving them closer to the jobs market, but there has to be a level of realism around the ability of the jobcentre to play that role effectively. It is hard to see how it would play that role effectively without some considerations around branding but also progress around partnership working in localities.

Q194 Nigel Mills: How do you make a business case stack up for providing support to people who are not claiming benefits? I guess when you are doing it for people who are claiming benefits you can say, "We are paying them £100 a week; that is £5,000 a year. If we can get them back into work we can save that, so it is worth spending a year's worth of that on a programme." For somebody who is not receiving anything and you are trying to create a cost-benefit around costs you are going to incur, but probably the only benefit is they might pay some tax if they get into work and earn a certain amount of money, does that inhibit this sort of programme being created or are there ways of getting that through the system so you can deliver this?

Councillor Williams: There are two important things here. There are very wide-ranging benefits of people being in work. For most people, if it is a decent job, it will lead to them being healthier in the long term and have clear benefits for our health services, clear benefits for their ability to pay their rent and, as you say, increased tax uptake and all sorts of other wide benefits.

I would also step back and ask what our employment services are for. Are they just about keeping the benefit bill down or are they about people being able to have high-quality lives, in the way that we have schools and a health service because we want people to have high-quality lives? If we believe—as we do, as I do—that for most people, having a career that they are in and enjoying and being rewarded for is good for their life prospects, we as a society should be investing in that and that should be open to everyone.

I agree at the moment, and long-standingly, that the jobcentre struggles to provide support for a lot of people. It struggles in that people see it, as you say, as being about conditionality and it is a place you go where you are penalised if you are not doing enough, and people who are actively looking for work feel that they are not supported enough. I am sure that



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the jobcentre could get better at that, but I question whether ultimately there will ever be transformation there, whereas I see people walking through the provision that local councils provide, which is in many cases—most cases—unconditional, certainly in central London. People come in and they benefit and they go on to jobs and apprenticeships and careers that make a real difference to their lives long term.

I want to pick up on the economically inactive point. Now about one in five Londoners are economically inactive. That will have huge consequences in the long term. The tax point is a very important one, because if we are seeing people leave the workplace in their early 50s, we will simply not have the tax income to pay for the social care and healthcare that we need for our population as we go forward.

Q195 Nigel Mills: Yes, I agree with all that. What I was trying to ask is if you went to your cabinets or your mayors or whoever makes these decisions and said, “I have this wonderful scheme that will bring 1,000 over-50s who are not currently paid benefits back into work and it will cost £100,000 to do it,” could you make that scheme score as high on an assessment as a scheme that is designed to get 1,000 people off benefits or get 1,000 young people closer to work or whatever? Can you make the system give a positive to that or do you always get beaten by other projects that have a bigger saving on the scale they can put in?

Councillor Savage: I think that there is absolutely a business case that can be made. South Gloucestershire is part of the West of England Combined Authority and we are now several years into a programme called Future Bright, where we have been working with low-income individuals who are in work. We have emerging evidence to show that with some of the support and interventions that we have put in place to work with those individuals, they have gone on to be able to progress their careers, perhaps moving into completely different sectors, to earn more and to lead happier and more fulfilling lives. We are now able to show the evidence that those sorts of interventions can work. There are various examples of that in different parts of the country.

Q196 Nigel Mills: As a final question, I want to help the people who are not on benefits. How do I find where they are and who they are so I can get them interested in these support programmes? Is it easy to do that or is it quite a challenge?

Councillor Savage: This comes back to the data challenge that we spoke about earlier. A lot of these individuals will be known to local government, perhaps because of how they interface with our housing services or debt advice services or indeed health, but we will only ever see a proportion of them who are in need of that sort of support. That is the importance of being able to see the data from national programmes across Whitehall, not just within DWP. DfE, for example, is incredibly important in this agenda as well. There is more that we can be doing as a system to better identify the individuals who would benefit from this sort of support.



Graham Whitham: I think there is a role there for local health providers. There is growing interest in Greater Manchester in the health system's role in tackling poverty generally and greater recognition of the knowledge that local health providers have of individual circumstances and challenges they face, certainly post-covid, with the growth in people who are economically inactive because of health conditions—physical health conditions but also mental health conditions. There is definitely a role for the local health service in referring and signposting people through to employment support services where they identify somebody who is economically inactive and needs support in that direction.

Councillor Williams: To add to that point, there are particular groups of people that we know very well, even when they are not claiming benefits. With 17 and 18-year-olds leaving school, we work very hard to work out what their destination is and we can make sure support is going to all of them if we have the resource to do so. At the moment one of the very big challenges we are facing in London is the transition from European funding to the new shared prosperity funding, which is leaving a gap in our ability to fund employment support in the way the Government set it up. We are currently entering into years where there is no funding for that kind of support, which we have particularly focused on young people and preventing young people from ending up not in education, employment or training.

There are other groups. There are those with disabilities who are very often in contact with either health or social care or both services, and we can provide that joined-up response for them. There are ex-offenders who are working with our probation team. There are many groups we can access. Equally, local authorities working with our voluntary sector partners have very strong links into our communities, and we can open the door for people who are looking for that opportunity to move into work and make it accessible to them.

Debbie Abrahams: It would be very useful to get details of the in-work progression programmes. Councillor Williams, do you have a national figure on the European funding shortfall so that we can have an understanding, or could you provide it if you do not have it to hand? That is important for us to be able to ask those questions of the Government.

Q197 **Chair:** We will come back to that point later on, so if you are able to find a figure before we get to it, that would be interesting to hear. To both the local councils represented here, is the work that you are doing as local authorities in employment support funded by DWP, or are you adding to DWP funding with your own resources, or is some of it entirely funded from your own resources?

Councillor Williams: Both, is the short answer. The central London councils collectively spend about £22 million a year on support. Some of that is our own funding that we put in, and that is particularly for those programmes that are not conditional and are open to everyone, but we also receive some elements of funding that come through DWP. DWP



funding generally comes with a long and laborious process to agree what we can get, with a lot of strings attached, and things have been very complicated to get through and could be much simpler if there was more trust.

Q198 **Chair:** Is it the same picture in Gloucestershire?

Councillor Savage: It is. There is a blended approach to funding, so council funding, combined authority funding and then what the DWP is doing as well. The DWP had its local flexible fund that for a period allowed some co-design of support. We have a programme in South Gloucestershire called Works4Youth and that came about through a partnership approach between the DWP and our own local efforts, but then they tend to get overtaken by national programmes.

Chair: The flexible support fund was used for that?

Councillor Savage: Yes.

Councillor Williams: To give you some examples of local funding, looking at the councils across central London, some of that has just been from our own general funds. We have also worked very hard to secure funding from developers who are building in central London, making a contribution that helps to ensure that people on their sites are employed in the homes that they are building. We look for employer contributions as well as our own council contributions, as well as from the DWP.

Q199 **Selaine Saxby:** Good morning. From your experience, what are the key reasons behind the current levels of economic inactivity?

Councillor Williams: Health conditions, certainly, and a rise in people with long-term health conditions. That in part seems to be very clearly because of long waiting lists in the NHS, and in part it seems to be the lag from the pandemic and the impact that has had on people. They are the larger ones.

We have also had some people moving out of work as they have found it harder and harder to make the combination of the cost of living factors around work stack for them, the cost of commuting and the cost of childcare particularly. Childcare is the other really big one and particularly for women has been the big barrier for work to be affordable.

Q200 **Selaine Saxby:** Are you saying that they are better off staying at home on benefits and that is why they choose not to go to work?

Councillor Williams: For many people, if you are looking at lower-income jobs, childcare will cost you more than you will earn.

Graham Whitham: It is important to say that, even if you are not financially better off, you are making a judgment around, "I am going to be a little bit financially better off by working, but I also have to factor in travel to work time, getting back to pick up the children," all those other life factors and judgments that everyone makes when they take on a job.



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That is proving particularly challenging for people at the moment during the cost of living crisis. They see that the income they make from work is not stretching particularly far. A lot of it will be going to the cost of things such as childcare, and people are understandably making a judgment.

One of the things that we have found from speaking to people with lived experience of poverty, perhaps towards the end of their working lives, is that often people's confidence has been very significantly knocked by economic or other shocks—not by covid but by experiencing a period of ill health, not being able to access health services or mental health support, and long-standing challenges. I can think of certain communities in Greater Manchester where long-standing employers have withdrawn from the area and suddenly the career that a person envisaged, the place they imagined working for many years of their working life, has gone. That has a very profound impact on an individual.

Sometimes when we are debating employment support—we are going into some of the specifics around it today—we fail to recognise the other factors that are often more impactful on the experiences of individuals, the choices they make and the journey they go on in their working life.

Q201 **Selaine Saxby:** What would you like to see the Government do in tackling economic inactivity?

Councillor Savage: Certainly from the LGA's perspective, being able to back and pilot Work Local is an incredibly exciting opportunity. As we have heard, there is a number of reasons sitting behind the increase in economic inactivity. You need to have some kind of local structure, and councils are well placed to provide that convening role, to have multiple partners around the table so that we have a wide range of support that can be targeted at individuals and their particular reasons for being economically inactive.

Councillor Williams: To add to that, absolutely the Work Local model. Having a clear investment in a programme to support people that is delivered locally and rooted in the connections and the various kinds of support that people will need, must include a focus on people who are at risk of falling out of work at the moment. The evidence is very clear that once you have left the labour market and been out of work for some time it will be very hard to get back into work. We must focus on those who are at risk of falling out of work, not just those who are out of work.

We also need the wider things that step out beyond the role of DWP, working with local authorities. If we do not bring NHS waiting lists down, if we do not have a solution on childcare, there will not be a way to get many people back into work because they will continue to have a health condition that means they cannot work and they will continue to find that work does not add up for them.

Graham Whitham: For me it is about the point I made at the start—the overarching government agenda. We are talking about the role of local



authorities and the devolution agenda. Clearly there is always a role for central Government, and that begs the question: what is that role? I think we need greater clarity from central Government around driving down in-work poverty: what outcomes we want to achieve with levels of economic inactivity in the country, sustainability of work, and measuring progress and progression in work for individuals. All these things can drive local action responses and the delivery of employment support and give much greater clarity to jobcentres and their partners at a local level to get the outcomes they should be seeking to achieve.

A lot of the organisations that we speak to in Greater Manchester feel like they are caught up in a very transactional relationship that is about moving someone into employment, and not enough about moving people into good-quality, sustainable work that results in that person having a life free from poverty and with higher living standards. There is definitely something there for me, in response to your question, about the role of central Government in providing that policy framework and clear direction on the targets we should be working towards as a country.

Q202 Selaine Saxby: Are there any other factors that you think are feeding into why businesses are struggling to fill their vacancies?

Councillor Williams: There are clear skill shortages in some sectors and there is a lack of investment in the skills training to bring people into those sectors, whether that is health, social care or elements of hospitality. In London particularly, we have seen a huge impact from Brexit. The majority of employers with a skills gap in our city report that it is a result of a reduction in EU workers in the city. There are answers to that about visa systems and the ability to bring in workers, but there is an important bit that is about making sure that people in London who are out of work, or at risk of becoming out of work as their opportunities in their current sector go, can retrain.

We have some fantastic examples that we have delivered in central London—construction skills centres, setting up green skills centres and work around hospitality, some of which has been done in my own borough. All three of those we are able to do effectively at a local level because we have the relationships with the businesses to understand what they want. Indeed, some of those businesses are investing in skills centres themselves that link particularly to apprenticeships. Our local work services across all our boroughs are a direct door into apprenticeships that allow people to be paid to skill up into new professions, and I think they work very well.

You can only really knit that together at a pretty local level, to tie up the financial contributions from employers and the jobs that they have available, and then link that to the people who we know would most benefit, whether that is young people or older people who are thinking that they want to end the career they are in currently and do something different.



Graham Whitham: Because of the cost of living crisis and the pandemic, I think that people have different and higher expectations of employers. I think national data shows this and we are seeing locally in Greater Manchester that people are moving jobs more readily. They are looking for better opportunities and better terms and conditions, and that is as true at the bottom of the labour market in hard-to-fill sectors as it is in higher-paying jobs. There are definitely some more recent consequences of the pandemic and cost of living crisis that are creating challenges for employers in filling vacancies.

Q203 **Selaine Saxby:** I am quite keen to come on to the regional variances in all of these factors, from unemployment to job vacancies, but also to make an observation. I am the MP for North Devon, so it is a very different geography from yours and it is much more remote even than Gloucestershire. We are seeing very extreme skills shortages and skills gaps; in engineering jobs, there are 25% vacancies across virtually every engineering company. These are jobs that are paying £40,000 or £50,000 and there is only a certain amount that employers can do, if you have people whose lifestyle choice is that they would rather not go to work.

Are there any thoughts on the regionality of that? The experience in London seems slightly different from what my employers tell me—that they have local level jobs that they cannot fill, but it is very much the skilled jobs. You must have a certain get up and go to go from not having the skills to wanting to become an engineer, and I get that. I was a teacher, so I am always keen for people to upskill. In the regions, how do we learn from what you are doing in the city, and vice versa? Are there things that we are doing, or are there other regional drivers, that are impacting on the slight differences that we are seeing and is there more that we could do?

Councillor Williams: The thing that we have seen being most effective in central London is where it is a genuine partnership and employers are working with local authorities and the voluntary sector to provide the full route from being able to find and contact and be a front door for people who are looking for a new opportunity.

My experience is very much that most people would like to be in a job and for some of them it is just very difficult to make it work financially. The idea that there are lots of people out there who, for lifestyle reasons, do not want to work is not really a truth. There are many people, though, who find that things are stacked against them, whether it is the cost of childcare or commuting or the ability to gain skills that means that it is very hard to find a career pathway, or that the jobs that are open to them are low paid, poor quality, gruelling and have long-term impacts on their health. Those are the things that we are grappling with.

There are models that I have seen to be really effective. I have talked about our construction skills centre. That was a joint investment between the council and local businesses to train people up into construction skills, working jointly with schools and voluntary organisations to bring people



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into the centre, particularly focused on apprenticeships. It has had success in being a pathway into what was a growing centre in London; it is struggling in the current recession-not-recession that we are currently in, but it had real success in providing that pathway.

The reason it works is because it is at a level where there is a deep understanding, on the one hand, of what the jobs are, what the skills gaps are and what specifically employers want. On the other hand, the local headteacher will say to some young people at their school who are not quite sure where to go, "Have you considered construction and have you thought about all of the different jobs in construction? I am going to take you down there for the day," and then hand them over. The local voluntary organisation working with ex-offenders or people with disabilities is able to say, "We have done this work to get you to a place where you are ready to think about your career. We can hand you over to the centre that can help you skill up into the profession that you have chosen."

Councillor Savage: I think how we can be more responsive to local needs is a challenge for the system, and certainly the DWP's preferred way of contracting is a barrier to that. To take an example, one of their Restart providers must cover a patch spanning from St Ives to Swindon, which will include your constituency. How on earth can a provider covering such a large geographical area be responsive to the needs of the varying communities across that region?

The ability to move away from that kind of system to a more locally and sub-regionally responsive system means we are able to achieve more bang for the taxpayer buck. There is an extraordinary amount of resource within the system, but it is not as co-ordinated as it could be.

Q204 **Debbie Abrahams:** Councillor Williams, on your comment about the two categories or groups of people who are economically inactive, do you or anyone on the panel know the proportion of those who are in receipt of social security support? I think we must be careful here. There is a narrative that seems to be spinning out that people are lazy and choosing to do nothing and be in receipt of support, which, as you said in a later comment, is completely inaccurate. Do you have that?

Councillor Williams: I do not think I have that number. I am sure we could find something for you, but I do not have it with me.

Debbie Abrahams: That is really important.

Chair: We would be very interested.

Graham Whitham: I think the key point there is, as Councillor Williams said, there are factors that are stacked against people. It is not that people are lazy or do not want to work. There are so many factors—childcare costs, transport costs, quality of transport as well, which is a real factor. Thinking about regional variations, even in a place such as



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Greater Manchester and outlying areas, the quality of the transport links to many of the job opportunities are just not good enough. You can live a relatively short distance from job opportunities in miles—10, 15 or 20 miles—but you can't get there or you can't guarantee that you can get there. That is a challenge facing large parts of the country, including some of our bigger conurbations like Greater Manchester.

Debbie Abrahams: I cannot imagine with our conditionality regime that somebody on social security support would be not able to actively seek work, which would mean that they are not in that economically inactive group.

Q205 **Sir Desmond Swayne:** For those who are going to be most difficult to place, how effective have the Government support schemes—Kickstart, Restart, Work and Health—been, and how effective have the work coaches been, in your estimate?

Councillor Savage: There is a number of parts to answering that and I will not repeat my points at length. The data-sharing point that has come out already from colleagues is an important one to reiterate. We believe that there has been some success, but the ability to analyse the data and share it and interrogate it collectively at a local, regional and national level remains a challenge.

With Restart, a £2.9 billion programme to tackle long-term unemployed, we saw performance improve significantly, but that in turn meant that the programme underspent very significantly. That goes back to another point that my colleagues and I have made about the inflexibility of a number of these programmes—that with Restart and other programmes there is an opportunity to pivot, to be able to provide support for those who do not sit within the very strict eligibility criteria that underpin these schemes.

There is no doubting the level of ambition and resource that is being committed to these programmes, but the way in which they are being structured and the lack of proper co-design with local government and other partners within the regions means that we are not getting the value out of that investment that we might otherwise.

Graham Whitham: I do not want to repeat the points that have been made, but it is worth saying that DWP are too busy, frankly, and work coaches have a very high case load, dealing with 150 clients in some instances. A 10-minute interaction with people every fortnight is not going to be an effective way of supporting them into good quality, sustainable employment opportunities. We definitely have a fundamental challenge of capacity in the system to provide support to people from what DWP is delivering locally.

Councillor Williams: Restart has ended up being very expensive for what it is, and of course for the programmes that just have large numbers, the driver is there to focus on those who are relatively easy to



get into work. Equally, we are seeing at a local level in our local effective programmes that you need to drill down particularly to different cultures and providers for different groups of people. The work that the St Giles Trust, which we fund, does with young people is very different from the support being provided to someone in their late 50s who is looking to reskill, having been in a career but that career came to an end. You must have some specialism, not just generic providers.

Our Central London Works programme, which is a programme supporting people with health conditions, has been the most effective of the 11 programmes in the country. Joint working across the centre of London with our local authority partners has made that work.

Q206 Sir Desmond Swayne: Where should the balance lie in what is delivered centrally and what is delivered locally or regionally? What aspects of the Work Programme lend themselves effectively to local or regional delivery?

Councillor Williams: If we were looking at the right model for the country, we should have locally provided provision for all this work. That is because of the ability to join up with employers, skills provision and the community organisations that are the front door for many people into getting support, and design something that works for the different levels—in our case, London, central London and the individual boroughs. We could do that effectively and I strongly believe it should be the aspiration.

In the first instance, there are particular areas where local work is most important. Those furthest from the job market, those facing the most inequalities, who are most likely to need a range of responses—a health response or social care response as well as an employment support response—and those who are at risk of economic inactivity are two areas where I would start, and we have strong track records of delivering at a local level. Long term, we should aim for locally provided employment services, because they can be much more part of the broader picture of our local economies.

Councillor Savage: I echo those points. As part of the devolution to local communities and regions, that would need to sit within a national framework. It is absolutely right and proper that the DWP and the Government more generally should have oversight of that sort of programme, to make sure that ultimately we are delivering value to the taxpayer and we have the flexibility to be responsive to the individual needs of communities, given the differences and disparities that exist around the country. It would be for DWP to maintain the function of administering the national benefits regime but having a local first approach to employment support.

Graham Whitham: I agree with everything that has been said there. That national framework and clear policy direction from central Government, but locally delivered support, is key. It is about sitting



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employment support at a local level within wider support systems that people access locally. We are seeing more interest from the public sector locally across health, education and so on, around how they can support people to meet their needs more broadly beyond just the area of service provision that they exist in. Sometimes it feels that employment support can be separate to that, but clearly, locally based employment support can recognise other needs and challenges facing individuals and ensure that people access support, whether it is health support, benefits advice or debt advice, more readily than is the case at present.

Councillor Williams: Several things are sometimes set out as reasons not to have a locally devolved model. One of those is that, whether at combined authorities or the local council level, there will not be the same attention to ensuring that people are helped with support into work and therefore the benefits bill will rise. Another is that there is not the capacity to deliver these programmes in every part of the country. As I say, in London we already have 91% of councils providing employment support, but of course there is the other 9% that are not, and of course there are differences around the country. What I would say to both of those things is that I have not met a council leader who is not passionate about ensuring that everyone in their community has the chance to work and gets into work and that they have high employment rates.

There needs to be a trusted relationship. We have a shared agenda across all political stripes to ensure that in our communities people are supported into work. That is because we know it is so transformational for people's life chances in the round. Having provision everywhere is one of those chicken and egg questions. If there is no money, and local authorities have struggled so much financially after the reductions in funding they have seen over the last decade, of course there will be some councils that are not providing that support in some areas currently.

We absolutely know—we saw this in the pandemic in spades—that local authorities can step up to provide all sorts of provision at incredible pace, whether that was the humanitarian response to the pandemic or the work around public health advice to schools. Local authorities will step in to provide good quality services. There will, of course, be some variation in quality but there is huge variation in quality in the current DWP contracts, some of which have hugely underperformed. The risk there is not a real one. There is a much better model of delivery.

Q207 **Steve McCabe:** We have covered quite a lot of this, so I just want to do a little bit of mopping up on the issue of effective collaboration between central Government, local government and local organisations.

I will start with Mr Whitham. Greater Manchester Poverty Action said that, basically, what you required was collaborative working from the DWP. You cited three main obstacles: a centralised system that means DWP refers clients who are often not interested in the local offers made available, work coaches who lack local knowledge and do not know what is available, and overlap or duplication in the employment support offer



by different organisations. Is that broadly the problem, or is there anything we have not heard this morning that you can see and that you can look at as well?

Graham Whitham: There is something about the relationships that DWP holds locally—I think I have already mentioned this—and its interaction with wider conversations in localities about addressing poverty, and strategic and policy responses to poverty. Obviously, moving people into good-quality employment is absolutely central to the anti-poverty agenda and there is more of a role that DWP could play locally in being in those spaces, being part of those conversations and helping to design strategic and policy responses to issues around unemployment, economic inactivity and ultimately poverty, which unfortunately is far too high in many of our communities across the UK. Relationships at a local level are so fundamental in how we think about policy responses, how we develop strategic responses to these issues, but then in the delivery and service provision on the ground.

I do not want to repeat too much the point I made earlier, but I will say something about engaging people with lived experience of poverty and protected characteristics in the design and delivery of services. We see the value of that time and again across different areas of our work. We recently completed a project called the Tameside Poverty Truth Commission, which was all about bringing people with lived experience of poverty, many of whom have had challenges in the labour market, into a conversation with local decision makers across a range of services. We need to see DWP in those spaces and engaging in those conversations and creating an ongoing approach to engaging residents around how they can meet their needs and respond to the challenges that they are facing. There is not enough activity in that space at the moment.

Q208 **Steve McCabe:** That is very helpful. I will turn to you, Councillor Savage, in your role with the Local Government Association. You talked to my colleague Nigel Mills about pursuing decent work and getting people into jobs that pay the living wage. The LGA talked about having to extend the work to all residents so that it was not just confined to people who were classed as unemployed. You talked about the benefits of an integrated system. Are these the key lessons we need to learn if we are going to produce a better balance between local government and local organisations and central Government programmes, or is there anything that you have not had a chance to tell the Committee that you think is crucial to pick up on?

Councillor Savage: I think we have touched on the important points that we wanted to get across today. If I may pick up on a point that I have not had a chance to make, I would not want to give the impression that we do not have good relationships with local officials within the DWP and other Whitehall Departments locally, but importantly, those relationships are very much personal relationships. There is not any formal structure around that, so invariably, as those individuals move on, we must restart the relationship building. There is enormous passion and



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enthusiasm to make a difference within local communities, whether people work for councils or the local Jobcentre Plus or indeed other local offices of Whitehall, but there is not that national encouragement and culture shift happening consistently across the country.

Devolution is the opportunity, and we see that in a small number of cases. The levelling-up White Paper talked about a number of trailblazer new devolution deals, but they are relatively small in number. We would like to see that broadened out and accelerated so that we can have more of those conversations in more parts of the country as quickly as possible.

Q209 **Steve McCabe:** So local relationships work, but there is nothing within the structure to allow that learning to go higher up. Councillor Williams, you talked about Restart, but I noticed that Central London Forward made, I would say, quite a damning criticism of Kickstart. It is my experience that DWP officials and Government Ministers have been very defensive about Kickstart. Basically, you say you ended up with 16,670 placements out of a potential 41,000, but the DWP would not release any information and you only received it from press releases or responses to parliamentary questions. Good luck with that. What was your experience of Kickstart, and if you were telling us how to do it differently, what should have happened?

Councillor Williams: A Kickstart-type programme was exactly the right thing to do at that time. There needed to be an offer for young people to make sure there was a real opportunity to get into work as we were coming out of the pandemic. The reality of the programme is it was very centrally driven and there was very limited dialogue with local authorities across the country about how you deliver it well. To do it at pace it needed a strong dialogue with local employers about what kinds of jobs they could create, how we could get people into them and how we could make them work.

There are some national employers as well, and we need to be speaking to them at a national level, but most employers are local organisations. The DWP is not able to have those conversations at a local level, because it is a large national organisation and there are so many employers, and it put in place a very complicated process. Even for us as a council, working out how we could meet the requirements that were being set took months, when we were trying to get in place a programme that was aiming to get up and running straightaway.

I am absolutely confident that if that programme had been devolved to regions, sub-regions or councils it would have been much more effective. There would have been a real focus and a real passion in areas to get young people into work, to work with employers to do that and to find creative and flexible ways to do that that would have had the outcomes that we were looking for, rather than what ended up being a very bureaucratic approach.



I also want to quickly reflect back. I absolutely agree that on the ground we have some great relationships with DWP staff who are working very hard to make things work with us. What they do not have is a delegated authority to design things in a local area with local partners or significant delegated budgets to do that. They sometimes have smaller amounts of money that they are able to do that with, but generally speaking, if we are setting up a programme that will work well in central London, they do not have a route to go back to Government and say, "We are in this partnership. We are working on something together. Other partners, employers, councils, are putting money into this pot. We want to put some in too because we believe it will be an effective programme." Kickstart is an example of why that did not happen but could have happened.

Q210 Steve McCabe: I noticed that a couple of you referred to the need for a national framework but with localisation in it. I was struck, Councillor Savage, by the 2021 analysis from the LGA that said that the £20 billion being spent on employment programmes that was for 49 nationally contracted or delivered employment and skills services, it was over nine Whitehall Departments or agencies. That seems classically what you would describe as too many cooks spoiling the broth. Is that what you are saying happened? Was that money wasted because there was not a national framework but it was scattered through all these different agencies?

Councillor Savage: It is difficult to say the value that has been achieved through the current way that nationally contracted employment support programmes are delivered. As you say, it is an extraordinary amount of money. There is clearly ambition and intent to make a difference on this agenda, but the way it is currently structured is not delivering. There is a real opportunity, through thinking differently and creatively and having an open and constructive co-designing process with local authorities and combined authorities, to get much better value for the taxpayer and, most importantly, transform lives in the process.

Q211 Steve McCabe: Is that the message of the LGA analysis—that there was not value for the taxpayer? Is that what you are telling us?

Councillor Savage: The LGA is saying that we could achieve much better value through a Work Local approach.

Q212 Chair: A couple of final questions from me. We touched earlier on the fact that the European social fund is being withdrawn and replaced by the UK shared prosperity fund. What are the implications of the delay in the people and skills investment strand of the shared prosperity fund? It is delayed until 2024-25, I think, but once that has passed, do you expect the UK shared prosperity fund to provide comparable support to the European social fund or will there be major differences in the future?

Councillor Savage: It is difficult to predict the future. There will be optimists and pessimists across different parts of the local government



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sector, but we are doing that work now with councils to understand what we believe the impacts to be of that coming change. We will soon be completing that analysis and I am certainly happy to commit that the LGA will write to the Committee once we have completed that analysis of councils.

Q213 **Chair:** That would be very helpful. Within weeks? What is the timetable for that?

Councillor Savage: As soon as possible. I will take that message back to the LGA.

Q214 **Chair:** We will certainly be interested to see it. Councillor Williams, I think you said to us that Central London Works was the most effective of 11. Is that 11 Restart contracts?

Councillor Williams: In 2021 for Restart, yes, that is right.

Chair: If you have that data, we would be very interested to see that.

Councillor Williams: We can send it over. I want to come back to your previous question as well. My hope is that the UK shared prosperity fund will not be less resource but we are unclear, as has been said. You also asked about the impact of the gap. For London we are looking at an £8 million to £10 million gap in the support for young people to prevent them ending up not in education, employment or training, and a similar gap of £10 million to £11 million for excluded groups, so people such as offenders, carers and people who are homeless. That is a substantial gap for those people who need the most support.

Q215 **Chair:** Will things be shut down as a result?

Councillor Williams: There is a risk of reduction in provision. As I said earlier, boroughs across London are funding support in this area. It is not that it will become nothing, because we are looking locally to provide, but there will be less provision and less of a closing gap. Those are all worrying, but central London and the whole of London has had success over the previous decade in bringing down the number of young people not in education, employment or training. We do not want to go backwards on something as important as that, because we know that there will be an implication for the whole lives of those young people, not just short term.

Q216 **Chair:** One brief final, and very different, point. You have made a compelling case to us this morning for a local partnership approach involving councils, employers, skills providers and education providers. Shouldn't the NHS be a partner as well? If that is important, is there not a case, as this Committee suggested in one of our earlier reports, for the collaborations being on the same boundaries as the new integrated care service areas in the NHS, rather than other areas, to facilitate that partnership?



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Councillor Savage: You are absolutely right that the NHS does need to be around the table, and certainly, as we envisage local boards working, there would be an NHS presence there. The question around boundaries is an interesting one. If I take my own geography, the footprint of the West of England Combined Authority is not the same as the footprint of the integrated care board, and the footprint in which the Education and Skills Funding Agency works will be different again. I think that a much wider piece needs to be done around boundaries and how we can align them, so that there is that greater co-ordination. It is a challenge across the system with different boundaries for different organisations with different responsibilities.

Councillor Williams: Yes, absolutely the NHS is a fundamental partner. Many of you might remember it, but I would certainly encourage people to go back to read the old Carol Black report on health and work, which sets out a strong case for how that can be done well. I feel that we have not made the progress that anyone hoped for on the back of that report being published a decade and a half ago, I think, or maybe more.

If you want to prevent inactivity, we know one of the most important things is to prevent people falling out of work and often the most important thing for that is getting the right health support to someone at the early stages of them becoming ill, to the individual and to the employer, to help them stay in work. That is important, and that includes work in general practice as well as the bigger questions about bringing the waiting lists down.

The questions on boundaries are the same. To use my own geography, I am here today representing the 12 central London boroughs. From an economic perspective it is the right footprint to work on. When we are working with employers we have a shared hospitality sector, a shared construction sector in central London, and so on, as a real importance of working at that level, yet my borough is in an integrated care system for south-east London, which bridges a bit of central London and a bit of outer London. There are very different economies between them, but a different logic for why providing health services in that footprint works with how hospitals are configured. There will always be complexity in the systems and I do not think you can have a perfect answer on footprints, but on working with the health service, absolutely.

Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes our questions to you. We are very grateful to you all for the contribution that you have made. If there are any other points that occur to you subsequently, we would be interested to see those. That concludes our meeting.

Councillor Williams: If I can make just one last point, the wider point that we have talked about today—supporting people into work and to retain their jobs—is important. Many of the Government's current programmes are coming to an end very soon and we need a long-term plan for employment support in the country. The devolved model is really



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important, but you can only get people into jobs if you have jobs. We need a long-term plan for growth in our economy and that is fundamentally important too.

Chair: Thank you.