

# Summary of Responses to the In-Work Progression Commission's Call for Evidence

## ► 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Call for Evidence

In March 2020, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asked Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith to lead a Commission exploring how workers in low pay can be better supported to progress in work. To inform that work, the Commission issued a Call for Evidence on 12 October 2020.

The purpose of the Call for Evidence was to obtain available evidence on the challenges to progression in low pay sectors, deepen the Commission's understanding of what is happening across the United Kingdom, shine a light on existing good practice and identify the best ways to help people progress in the longer term. The Commission also sought to gather evidence on the benefits of progression to employers and the localities in which they are based.

The Call for Evidence invited submissions in response to ten question areas:

1. What are the specific barriers to progression in the areas of retail, hospitality, construction, business support services, and care work in different regions of the UK? Are transparent pathways to progression in place in these sectors in different regions, and if not, why not? What constraints, business or otherwise, hold employers back from prioritising progression in their business models? How has the impact of COVID-19 changed attitudes to progression, if at all?
2. Where progression pathways and other initiatives have been instituted, what impact has this had on a business, its productivity and the locality in which it is situated? We would particularly welcome case studies and examples.
3. What are the benefits to business of identifying and nurturing existing talent? What approaches [or methods] do businesses use to achieve this and which are the most effective?
4. How important for progression is enabling and empowering people to change jobs compared to ensuring established progression pathways within specific employers/sectors? What are the barriers to people in low pay progressing by changing jobs and/or sectors? What interventions would best empower people to overcome these?
5. What role does transport and connectivity play in workers in low pay not taking up higher paid jobs and other opportunities for progression such as training and apprenticeships? Similarly, do other considerations, such as childcare, play a role in not taking up higher paid jobs and opportunities that could be vital to progression?
6. Women, younger workers, older workers, ethnic minority background workers, and disabled workers are identified as most at risk of staying in low pay. What are the reasons for this? At what stages would interventions help each of these types of workers seek out and avail progression opportunities?
7. Do positive role models and mentorships offer those in persistently low pay the confidence and support to seek a way out of low quality, low pay jobs? We would welcome case studies and examples.
8. How can we embed a culture of lifelong learning in our workforce?
9. On the role of Jobcentres:
  - I. Could Jobcentres, in partnership with local authorities and other local agencies, play an enhanced role in supporting progression?
  - II. How could they/partners build trusted relationships and high engagement with low paid workers?

- III. How could they support workers to have the confidence needed to pursue progression opportunities?
  - IV. How could they work with employers to share progression good practice?
10. Are there employers, think tanks, third sector organisations, community organisations, or even individuals working on progression who you feel we should be speaking to as we look in closer detail at the barriers to in work progression?

Evidence responding to any or all of these questions was welcomed. The initial deadline for responses was 20 November 2020, later extended to 18 December 2020.

This paper provides a general overview of the number and type of responses received, followed by a more detailed summary of responses in each question area, identifying themes in the responses received.

## ▶ 2. Processing Call for Evidence responses

Responses to the Call for Evidence were logged and then reviewed by the In-Work Progression Commission.

The following information was captured as part of the logging process:

- The type of organisation that responded
- The relevant themes addressed in the response
- High level key points from the response

The Commission then analysed this information and reviewed individual responses to supplement the stakeholder engagement and the wider research undertaken to inform the report. Where responses recommended materials for further reading, where appropriate, the Commission incorporated this into the wider evidence base. Some respondents offered to discuss their submissions to the Call for Evidence in more detail and, where possible, the Commission held additional meetings with these stakeholders.

## ▶ 3. Overview of Responses Received

### 3.1 Type of organisation that responded

In total, the Commission received 60 responses to the Call for Evidence from a variety of organisations. The table below depicts the breakdown of the type of organisations that responded. Responses were received from employers, academics, employer and employee representative organisations, charities, think-tanks, local authorities, Devolved Administrations and government departments and public bodies.

| Type of Organisation   | No. of Respondents |
|--|--------------------|
| <i>Academic Institutions</i>   | 7                  |
| <i>Civil Society Organisations (e.g. Charitable organisations/think tanks/non-profits)</i>   | 21                 |
| <i>Public Sector Organisations (e.g. Local Authorities, non-departmental public bodies, Government Departments and Devolved Administrations)</i> | 13                 |
| <i>Companies</i>   | 7                  |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b><i>Representative organisations</i></b> | 10        |
| <b><i>Other</i></b>                        | 2         |
| <b><u>Total</u></b>                        | <b>60</b> |

Although some organisations fall under more than one type, (e.g. being both a sector body and a charity) the Commission categorised the respondents depending on the capacity in which they responded and each response has only been categorised under one type.

The final section of this report includes a complete list of organisations that responded (excluding those who expressed a wish to remain anonymous).

### 3.2 Responses answering specific questions

Respondents could choose to answer any or all of the questions. The table below shows the number of respondents answering each question.

| <b>Question Number</b>  | <b>No. of Respondents</b> |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>Specific barriers</i>   | 40                        |
| 2. <i>Progression pathways</i>  | 27                        |
| 3. <i>Nurturing existing talent</i>   | 24                        |
| 4. <i>Empowering people to change jobs</i>  | 32                        |
| 5. <i>The role of transport/connectivity/childcare</i>  | 30                        |
| 6. <i>Women, younger workers, older workers, ethnic minority background workers, and disabled workers</i> | 31                        |
| 7. <i>Role models and mentors</i>   | 25                        |
| 8. <i>Lifelong learning</i>   | 34                        |
| 9. <i>Jobcentres</i>  | 30                        |
| 10. <i>Recommended further contacts</i>   | 5                         |

### 3.3 Summary of responses by question

Where appropriate, question summaries have been grouped to avoid repetition.

#### 1. Specific barriers

***What are the specific barriers to progression in the areas of retail, hospitality, construction business support services, and care work in different regions of the UK? Are transparent pathways to progression in place in these sectors in different regions, and if not, why not? What constraints, business or otherwise, hold employers back from prioritising progression in their business models? How has the impact of COVID-19 changed attitudes to progression, if at all?***

A range of barriers were mentioned in the responses, with a lack of skills, employer support and factors impacting personal motivation the most commonly cited.

In relation to a lack of skills and qualifications, responses often highlighted these both as direct barriers to progression and also indirectly through the impact on individual self-belief and motivation. Orbit Group's response, for example, suggested that some sectors 'tend to attract people who do not traditionally hold A to C [grades] in GCSE-level subjects who believe that they would not be able to undertake additional learning to support role progression.' Building on this, some responses also suggested that the public perception that many low paid sectors are low-skilled further hinders motivation to progress. Care England stated their belief that: 'due to low wages ([the] average hourly wage rate for [a] social care worker is £8.80), social care is often perceived as low-skilled work, when in fact, the complete opposite is true.'

Researchers from the NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce, King's College London, raised the lack of recognition and transferability of qualifications as a barrier given the multiplicity of providers, citing the Care Certificate as an example of this. In addition to the above challenges cited, responses also identified that accessing further education or training development to acquire skills requires confidence, transport access, funded time, and a household routine that supports it. Issues surrounding accessibility and arranging/amending childcare patterns were also highlighted.

In terms of employer support, many of the larger employers that responded emphasised the importance they place on supporting internal progression, citing the advantages they find this brings in terms of retention and performance. For example:

*'Internal progression has always been a priority within Whitbread PLC as there is a demonstrable advantage in terms of retention and performance when measuring internally developed talent vs externally recruited talent.'*

However, the Social Mobility Commission highlighted their research which found that 'leaders [they interviewed] did not see the business case for investing in a strong training and progression culture for frontline staff.' This view was also supported by some other responses which suggested that low-paying sectors lack a culture where investing in employees is considered a priority. Some respondents attributed this to the perception that the staff are seen as easily replaceable, while other respondents felt that high turnover rates made investment in workers hard to justify. The response from officials in the Welsh Government shared findings by the Wales Centre for Public Policy that indicate that 'employers can be reluctant to invest in job progression for low-paid employees, often because they don't recognise the value of harnessing their existing organisational knowledge within higher graded roles or because they assume that once better trained, employees will leave.'

Other responses commented on the challenges faced by small and medium-sized businesses to provide progression opportunities due to their organisational structures. Respondents gave examples that included the observation that responsibilities for tasks may be distributed without any increase of pay or a linked progression to a more senior role. The Association of Convenience Stores told the Commission: 'since the [national living wage] was introduced in 2016 we have seen squeezed pay differentials resulting in many retailers removing deputy manager or supervisor roles from stores and passing on more responsibility to stores colleagues.'

A further observation made in responses was that across organisations, regardless of size, there would appear to have been a hollowing out of management structures. Some responses attributed this to automation, others to squeezed pay differentials for senior roles. Where squeezed pay differentials

were highlighted, responses made a link to the belief that there is little financial incentive to take on the additional responsibilities and reduced flexibility typically associated with management positions. The response from officials in the Welsh Government included their experience that 'employees can also be reluctant to progress, if to do so results in slight financial gain but with an expectation of working additional unpaid hours.' More generally, a number of responses highlighted a perception that there are limited progression opportunities for part time, temporary and zero-hour contract staff and that there is a general lack of, or poor management of, flexible working. One respondent also shared their view that managers in low paying sectors can often see their managerial role as transactional rather than one which is focused on supporting the career development of frontline workers.

Regarding personal motivation, many responses included the view that those in low pay often have periods of financial insecurity which makes it harder to consider 'longer term' actions to progress in employment. A response from the Better Placed partnership, run by the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, highlighted their experience that people in low pay 'will often seek more hours at the same pay, which is an immediate income solution' rather than taking time to undergo additional training for potential future progression as, in their view, the outcome was often considered too uncertain and 'in many cases too much of a risk'.

Another factor affecting motivation raised was the view that there is a lack of a 'real career pathway that is easy to explain' in some low pay sectors, such as for the care sector as explained by the NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce, at King's College London. Other responses highlighted the challenges they believe workers in low pay sectors can have in understanding potential progression routes. Additionally, some responses suggested that difficulties in knowing how to progress are exacerbated by some organisations using non-measurable and unquantifiable attributes, such as being the 'right fit' to determine whether a person progresses. Elsewhere, the view was offered that younger workers may see roles in these sectors as temporary, rather than as careers and so do not seek progression opportunities.

Separately, a few responses argued that the Universal Credit work allowance/taper rate can act as a barrier to people taking on additional hours or responsibilities. For example, the Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath shared findings from their research that 'contrary to...policy intent, some claimants found the 63 per cent taper 'demotivating'.

Regarding the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19), responses suggested that the pandemic has changed the face of learning. The Federation of Small Businesses explained their experience of small firms delivering online training directly via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or similar platforms, while others suspended training altogether. While a few responses shared a belief that the COVID-19 pandemic had required employers to rethink 'work from home' options, other respondents were keen to highlight that many low-pay jobs are not by their nature possible to do remotely. Additionally, whilst some respondents explained that they felt that the move to virtual/online opportunities has presented benefits, other respondents highlighted their experiences that people have struggled with accessing a device or sufficient data. Within care, respondents gave their experiences that the short-term impact of COVID-19 has further stretched a sector and workforce that they felt was already under significant pressure. More generally, where COVID-19 was mentioned across responses, there was consensus in the belief that the pandemic was forcing companies and individuals to concentrate on immediate pressures rather than focusing on future development, despite best intentions. Other COVID-19 specific impacts have been covered in the relevant sections below.

## 2. Progression pathways

*Where progression pathways and other initiatives have been instituted, what impact has this had on a business, its productivity and the locality in which it is situated? We would particularly welcome case studies and examples*

### **3. Nurturing existing talent**

*What are the benefits to business of identifying and nurturing existing talent? What approaches [or methods] do businesses use to achieve this and which are the most effective?*

### **7. Role models and mentors**

*Do positive role models and mentorships offer those in persistently low pay the confidence and support to seek a way out of low quality, low pay jobs?*

The Commission received responses relating to the benefit to employers and employees of having clearly defined progression pathways as well as the advantages of nurturing internal talent to enable employees to take up these opportunities. Responses also highlighted the challenges some sectors face in this regard.

The majority of responses relating to this theme highlighted the benefits they felt there were to business in supporting progression. Whitbread PLC shared internal research which found that their internally-developed managers perform, on average, 15% better than those externally recruited. A number of responses supported this view, pointing to improved motivation and commitment from employees. The Social Mobility Commission highlighted results from an [Institute of Fiscal Studies Working Paper](#) which found that ‘that the increase in productivity from training employees is around twice the size of the increase in their wages’. The Employment Lawyers Association shared their view that benefits of increased engagement and productivity as well as the increased retention rates that they felt many organisations experienced through the provision of clear routes to ‘different sequential or non-sequential opportunities within the organisation’. They added that, in their view, this worked best when accompanied by a clear understanding by employees of the skills and knowledge needed to progress, as well as the existence of active initiatives such as sponsorship, mentoring, networking, and specific training. Other respondents, including the Federation of Small Businesses and UK Hospitality, also highlighted their views on positive impacts on recruitment and retention.

Responses from UK Hospitality and the Equality and Human Rights Commission noted their view that investment in progression can lead to the retention of accrued expertise and organisational knowledge of more experienced employees who are better able to meet customers’ requirements, and that this can help drive higher levels of customer satisfaction and increased revenue. Tesco emphasised their belief in the importance of developing and retaining internal talent to ensure they have the right colleagues in the right roles, adding that having the right talent in leadership roles can, in their view, create a strong, inclusive culture and provide role models to more junior colleagues. Additionally, UK Hospitality felt that a strong common culture can be built on the back of progression pathways as managers who have ‘benefited from internal progression are much more likely to recognise its intrinsic value and make it a priority in their own department/site/region.’

As also explored under question one above, responses from the care sector highlighted experiences that there are continued difficulties understanding and articulating a progression pathway within the sector. Care England felt that a long-term people plan for the care sector, similar to that which already exists for the NHS, would help with the promotion of progression opportunities within the sector.

Separately, the Employment Lawyers Association highlighted their view that there is an issue of ‘vertical fragmentation’ where in retail, for example, the Head Office function is often located away from the individual stores which, they felt, could lead to Head Office employees having greater visibility to decision makers meaning they then could enjoy increased access to training and progression opportunities.

Another idea raised was around the benefits to some employees’ confidence. The Sustainable Care: Connecting People and Systems’ research team at the University of Sheffield, the University of Kent and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine explained their view that job shadowing was found to be especially useful for people whose experience of formal education had been poor and/or who reported a lack of self-belief in their abilities.

Other methods of nurturing talent suggested by respondents included:

- Ensuring that each individual has a clear career plan that aligns with their aspirations
- Introducing low-cost development opportunities such as work-shadowing, access to networking and mentoring – strategically matching individuals according to ambitions
- Provision of a clear skills framework which teams can use to develop themselves organically over time
- Providing managerial support and skills verification
- Formal development programmes
- Informal development through day-to-day on-the-job learning i.e. ensuring senior staff find the time to explain, to encourage and to demonstrate methods to their workers

The majority of respondents on the question on role models and mentors noted their conviction in the positive and significant impact that a good mentor can have on mentees, including views that mentors can enable individuals to surpass their original career aspirations, challenge preconceptions, improve self-confidence, make processes transparent and make information surrounding progression easily accessible. However, some respondents cautioned that, in their view, employers should remain mindful that role models/mentors are not a solution in themselves to improving progression among those in low pay.

Many responses provided anecdotal evidence regarding mentorship success stories, for example, the Employment Lawyers Association stated:

*‘[There are] ...many examples of mentoring having left a significant impact on mentees with the result that they have progressed in their careers beyond their original aspirations. One contributor described her interaction with a law firm receptionist who left school at 16, without any A levels, to have a baby. The contributor encouraged her to study law through the legal executive route, and that individual is now a successful solicitor. Having mentors that will take the time to support and invest time and effort in developing their mentees is likely to have a significant impact on career progression.’*

A number of responses stressed the importance in their view of having the right type of role model. The Behavioural Insights Team provided evidence demonstrating that people are more influenced by those who are perceived as experts and stated that ‘respected figures in institutions could help motivate people [to] chart paths out of low-quality low-pay jobs.’ The Commission received some evidence that role models and mentoring are more important for some groups. For example, Business in the Community shared findings from their 2020 [Race at Work: Black Voices report](#) which found that in relation to ‘black employees – a disadvantaged group overrepresented in low pay – 31% [...] want to be mentored by a senior leader compared to 12% of white employees.’ Reed in Partnership told the Commission that, in their view:



*‘the best role models in an organisation are people who have been successful in being promoted from an entry-level role through to a team leader or supervisory role and beyond, particularly if they are from a demographic which is over-represented at the bottom end of the pay scale and under-represented further up, such as employees from an ethnic minority background or women.’*

Business in the Community also shared their experience that having role models that resonated with workers helped ‘validate someone’s own self-confidence or acceptance about their own situation and provided confidence to ask for adjustments where necessary [...and that] role models helped individuals to see what is possible for others ‘like them’.’ The Business Disability Forum’s response echoed this view, adding that they felt that ‘mentorships could also be targeted at individuals where specific barriers or concerns could be worked through in a structured way.’

Additionally, there was support for peer mentorship among the responses for similar reasons to those cited in support of role models. The Better Placed partnership, run by the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, explained that, in their view, this kind of role model ‘can sustain participant motivation as it involves a relationship with somebody with first-hand knowledge of a participant’s situation.’ Better Placed also felt that peer mentoring can be a mutually beneficial arrangement as mentors ‘are often motivated by the prospect of giving back, either to the organisation or the community’. Some respondents also felt that reverse mentoring gives senior management a better understanding of their workers’ experiences. Marks and Spencer shared their positive experience of their [ethnic minority] reverse mentoring group which has seen junior colleagues helping to improve business policies.

The Commission received a number of responses which detailed views on what good mentoring should look like, such as:

- supporting mentees to develop strong job applications, arrange mock interviews and work on feedback
- supporting mentees to develop any further knowledge or skills they may need for the role
- inspiring confidence to overcome specific barriers

While there was a lot of support for the role of mentoring in supporting progression, some responses emphasised the view that there is a need to ensure that this was part of a wider programme of support. For example, Reed in Partnership advocated that organisations must also take ‘active steps to remove more structural barriers and [invest] in workforce development.’

#### **4. Empowering people to change jobs**

***How important for progression is enabling and empowering people to change jobs compared to ensuring established progression pathways within specific employers/sectors? What are the barriers to people in low pay progressing by changing jobs and/or sectors? What interventions would best empower people to overcome these?***

Many responses noted views that moving employer is frequently seen as the best route to progression for someone on low pay, especially if they are on an insecure contract or looking to increase their hours. However, a number of responses also highlighted views that moving jobs was often challenging for those in low pay. Kumar and Jones, Manchester Metropolitan University, stated their finding that joining a new employer can feel like too great a risk, adding that this risk is even greater, in their view, for those with caring responsibilities as this could involve renegotiating a flexible working arrangement



that can feel like a ‘hard-won settlement’ agreed with the current employer. Additionally, Whitbread PLC pointed to their experience that the perception of ‘starting again’ can act as a blocker to moving employers, especially where someone has worked hard to develop their reputation and career with their existing employer. Responses also suggested views that moving jobs within the same sector could be easier where a sectoral career pathway existed. Professor Paul Sissons, University of Wolverhampton Business School, explained his view that within some sectors there is scope for developing clearer career pathways. However, some respondents felt that switching employers was not the only way to progress and that good employer support programmes (as outlined above) can also be effective.

The Commission also received submissions that highlighted views around the effect that automation and digitisation in the workplace, alongside other industry trends, may have in forcing people in low pay sectors to have to change sectors/jobs. The British Chambers of Commerce, among others, advocated for greater advice and support for individuals in low pay sectors to help them reskill either for new roles with their current employer or to move to a new employer or sector. A number of responses discussed the need to upskill low-paid workers in digital workplace skills, citing views that this is the most transferable skill in the modern world of work.

Some responses argued that one of the major barriers to people progressing, both within organisations and more widely, lies in the absence of necessary skills or a lack of confidence in an existing skillset. The Social Mobility Commission shared evidence from their research that ‘participants undertaking training were three times more likely to increase their earnings than those who did not.’ However, a number of responses highlighted perceived barriers around access to training and skills development, Reed in Partnership, for example, argued that ‘the Government’s plans to increase financial support for workplace learning are crucial...to address a long-running decline in workplace training provision and enable people to access training to progress or move occupations/sectors.’

## 5. The role of transport/connectivity/childcare

***What role does transport and connectivity play in workers in low pay not taking up higher paid jobs and other opportunities for progression such as training and apprenticeships? Similarly, do other considerations, such as childcare, play a role in not taking up higher paid jobs and opportunities that could be vital to progression?***

Responses in this area highlighted the role that both transport and childcare play in facilitating workers in low pay to take up wider opportunities. In relation to transport, a number of responses noted views that low-paid workers are more likely to be dependent on the local public transport system but have a lower income to cover potentially high travel costs.

A significant number of respondents highlighted issues around a lack of reliable and accessible transport. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), for example, raised their experience that some low-pay jobs are located out-of-town, away from local transport links. They felt that this situation would only worsen with the increase in online retail as warehouse and distribution centres are becoming increasingly located away from urban settings.

The West of England Combined Authority Bristol delivery team for Future Bright drew the Commission’s attention to their experience that shift patterns often do not align with local transport timetables, making commutes longer for workers. Additionally, a number of responses raised views around issues with the lack of suitable bus services in rural areas which can, consequently, restrict job choice. A few responses focused specifically on issues surrounding the impact of poor accessibility, availability and cost of transport on disabled people, arguing that many have to undertake extremely

complex journeys due to accessibility issues with local transport provision, limiting their ability to take up new progression opportunities.

Some responses discussed the extra responsibilities that come with progression. Whitbread PLC stated that “in our sector, and many like ours, access to career progression often comes with greater expectations around flexibility of the employee to work across a broader range of shifts, or to be available over extended hours” which can be a challenge for those reliant on public transport or balancing other commitments.

The majority of respondents to the Call for Evidence submitted responses which raised childcare issues as a barrier to progression. The British Chambers of Commerce shared their findings that some parents and carers have had to leave their jobs, or have asked for reduced hours, as a result of the difficulties in accessing good quality and affordable childcare.

Some responses showed that the issues of transport and caring commitments often interact for low-paid workers. Business in the Community shared research with the Commission that demonstrated that women are likely to undertake the majority of caring responsibilities in the home, which, when combined with a lack of flexibility at work, can limit their career options. Kumar and Jones, Manchester Metropolitan University, also linked this with evidence which shows that mothers are less willing to have long commutes, explaining that ‘the gap in commuting time between men and women increases significantly after the birth of the first child’, further restricting their progression opportunities.

Additionally, the response from Working Families cited evidence from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) that ‘the COVID-19 pandemic has made this situation even more difficult for many working parents, with estimates suggesting that 4-in-10 early years childcare providers are likely to face a financial deficit in 2021 owing to the effects of the pandemic.’

## **6. Women, younger workers, older workers, ethnic minority background workers and disabled workers**

***Women, younger workers, older workers, ethnic minority background workers and disabled workers are identified as most at risk of staying in low pay. What are the reasons for this? At what stages would interventions help each of these types of workers seek out and avail progression opportunities?***

In general, respondents agreed that the groups identified in this question were those who were more likely to face greater barriers to progression in work. Many interventions suggested by respondents in this section have been included in other answers above. To avoid repetition, they are not outlined again here.

Many respondents to this section highlighted their views that there are often systemic issues, unconscious bias, barriers and stereotypes towards these groups, which can affect the types of jobs and sectors that particular groups tend to work in and can limit progression support and opportunities. Responses also highlighted beliefs that in some organisations progression has been linked to the ability to demonstrate commitment through long hours, which can restrict opportunities for some employees, especially those with additional needs or caring commitments, for example. Some of the barriers raised were seen as more common to specific groups and will be discussed in turn below.

The perceived importance of flexible working, including modified hours, for both women and disabled workers, was mentioned in relation to supporting both retention and progression in work. The disability equality charity, Scope, told the Commission that in their experience many disabled workers continue to face difficulties agreeing a flexible working arrangement with their employer. The

Employment Lawyers Association shared their anecdotal experience that some women feel that they are expected to be “grateful” for flexible working arrangements, and [are wary] of “rocking the boat” when an arrangement works with their other responsibilities’ with flexibility regarded as an earned perk rather than standard working practice. The Equality and Human Rights Commission explained their view that ‘taking action to provide flexible working options at all levels will increase opportunities for women’ and that ‘flexible working can also be a reasonable adjustment that supports disabled people to stay in work and access development opportunities.’

Similarly, the perceived limiting nature of part-time work for progression opportunities was raised in a number of responses covering both women and disabled workers. For women more specifically, responses tended to link part-time work to findings that women generally carry the bulk of family caring responsibilities (for children and elderly relatives) and the negative impact this has on progression. For example, the response from the Scottish Government explained their view that ‘women are still more likely than men to take on the caring responsibilities in a household and their choice of occupation is often limited to work that allows them to balance work with caring commitments.’ This response also outlined the Scottish Government’s view that flexible working can ‘assist women to progress in the workplace without having to take on a lower paid ‘part-time’ role’ as well as their view that flexible working has been ‘shown to improve staff morale, loyalty and productivity.’ One response highlighted results from [Ipsos MORI’s International Women’s Day polling](#) demonstrating that ‘47% of female respondents...expressed a belief that taking on childcare responsibilities had materially and detrimentally impacted their career.’

For disabled workers, responses also highlighted views around the importance of having the right equipment to enable workers to play a full role in the workplace. Scope shared their experience that ‘disabled people are often given old-fashioned, clunky, and costly equipment which often does not meet the needs of disabled workers [nor] mainstream modern technology.’

Many respondents shared views that negative situations experienced by ethnic minority workers in the workplace had acted as barriers to progression. Some responses, linking to the effectiveness of role models, expressed views that ethnic minority individuals may be further disadvantaged by not having the same level of access to social networks and professional connections as their white peers. The Work and Equalities Institute, University of Manchester, also shared that ‘insights from organisational case studies suggest informal practices, like a reliance on recruitment from existing networks, can undermine formal equal opportunities policies.’

UNISON explained their view that:

*‘at employer level, there must be strong leadership and a clear strategy to tackle racial inequality, including improving data on recruitment, development, career progression, redundancies and disciplinary action, linked to action plans with measurable and timely targets.’*

Additionally, some respondents called for the introduction of mandatory disability pay gap reporting as well as mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting, to help with pay transparency and equality.

Numerous responses identified views that older workers are least likely to have received recent training and noted the impact on progression that this can have. The Employment Lawyers Association stated their experience that ‘employers may also be less likely to invest time and money in developing the skills of older workers or retraining them to enable them to progress to higher skilled and higher paid work’ and that negative stereotypes of older workers can impact their progression.

In relation to young people, one response highlighted TUC research which ‘found that young workers are concentrated in jobs where they struggle to acquire the skills that they need to progress their careers’, while another shared their belief that ‘younger workers’ lack of experience may also weaken their bargaining position in moving between roles.’

## 8. Life Long Learning

### *How can we embed a culture of lifelong learning in our workforce?*

Responses made links between employers investing in skills training and receiving positive returns from their employees. A common theme from the responses was a belief that in order to embed a culture of lifelong learning, learning has to be more flexible and accessible to appeal to an adult audience. The Social Mobility Commission argued that ‘there is no ‘one size fits all’ option for training and that flexibility in the training design, encouragement from employers (including senior leaders) and affordability are all key elements’. The West Midlands Combined Authority argued that ‘flexible and bitesize provision would enable maximum accessibility and help normalize lifelong learning.’ Tesco shared their view that ‘delivering relevant and bite-sized learning that colleagues can access in the moment and at the point of need, will help colleagues to continually grow and develop new skills’. Other responses made a link to the challenge of individuals in low pay having to meet the costs of training, including associated costs such as travel.

The Open University highlighted the need for adequate signposting, linking roles to specific learning/skills as well as subsequent progression opportunities while the West Midlands Combined Authority shared their view that learning take-up is increased if people are able to see ‘clear, tangible and preferably quick returns that are directly linked to learning (i.e. visible career progression, increased salaries etc.)’.

The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) highlighted their view that ‘at present funding for education and training assumes a linear upwards progression in a narrow set of subjects’ and advocated for more support for individuals to take ‘horizontal’ learning opportunities– ‘for example, taking qualifications equivalent to those they already have but in different disciplines in order to retrain in a new sector.’

A majority of responses felt that support from employers is crucial in creating a culture of lifelong learning and that this needs to be backed up by appropriate learning and development offers. UK Hospitality stated their view that ‘the surest way of embedding such a culture is through senior leadership’ while Whitbread PLC argued that ‘the attitude of senior leaders in the business is key’ to actively championing learning and development. The Equality and Human Rights Commission also advocated for managers to be given suitable training and guidance in order to better support their teams. A few responses felt that employers could do more to ensure that training courses were organised either during an employee’s working day or through paid study leave, which, in their view, would encourage greater take up. However, a large employer also highlighted the difficulty for some employers in trying to balance the cost of labour with the desire to provide time for learning and development.

A number of responses in this section discussed the Apprenticeship Levy. Some contributions asked for increased flexibility in what the Apprenticeship Levy can be used to fund, such as allowing for it to cover apprenticeship costs outside of training, or allowing employers to use it to fund approved shorter courses as it was felt this would better support future business needs. Business in the Community shared research that apprenticeship starts by individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds reduced following the introduction of the levy by 36% between 2015/16 and 2017/18,

adding that policy levers such as the apprenticeship levy must effectively translate into the provision of learning opportunities that reach those who need it most.

Separately, the response from officials in the Welsh Government argued that ‘for individuals, obtaining qualifications does not necessarily lead to job entry or progression, when employers do not recognise and reward accordingly.’ The Social Mobility Commission shared their view that the key to beneficial training for those in low pay is to ‘involve employers and trade unions in the co-design of training and qualifications.’

A few responses also expressed their disappointment with the recent decision to end the Union Learning Fund which they felt had been effective in helping people undertake job-relevant learning and training and in improving business productivity.

## 9. Jobcentres

### ***Could Jobcentres, in partnership with local authorities and other local agencies, play an enhanced role in supporting progression?***

Across the responses in this section, there was a majority view that Jobcentres, in partnership with employers, local authorities, training providers and others, had a central role to play in supporting progression among the low paid. Professor Paul Sissons, University of Wolverhampton Business School, described Jobcentres as being:

*‘well placed to share and use labour market intelligence to inform other local agencies...[they can] help to develop and disseminate good practice around progression more widely drawing on links with local employers, sector networks, employer bodies and anchor employers.’*

The Department for Communities, Northern Ireland shared their experience of working with young people who are not in education, employment or training explaining what has ‘worked well in the past [to support people to progress in work is] when there has been an effective working partnership between [the Job Centre], youth organisations and the careers service’.

Responses also tended to express the view that Jobcentres are currently seen as only being for the unemployed. Many respondents expressed a desire to see an enhanced role for Jobcentres, where there was greater emphasis on supporting those in work to develop skills and identify new work opportunities which would enable them to progress out of low pay. City & Guilds Group illustrated this suggestion by explaining their view that Jobcentres must act as a ‘one-stop training and employment matching service’ where they can rapidly assess adults’ skills and development needs, provide support and signpost courses and opportunities to move into more meaningful employment. They should look beyond getting people any job available. Orbit Group argued that an enhanced role ‘would require a change in focus from the historic ‘into work’ priority, to ‘progression whilst in work’ by work coaches.’

A number of responses also suggested a role for Jobcentres in helping Universal Credit claimants to navigate the skills system. City & Guilds Group told the Commission that it is their belief that the current skills and funding offers are viewed as ‘fragmented’ and ‘complicated’ and suggested that Jobcentres should help make the skills training system more ‘coherent and intelligible’, both to those seeking employment opportunities and to local existing and potential employers.

Additionally, Kumar and Jones, Manchester Metropolitan University, cited a [study](#) by Jones et al. (2019) which showed that employers felt they would benefit from being made aware of conditions placed on staff claiming Universal Credit.

***How could Jobcentres/partners build trusted relationships and high engagement with low paid workers? How could they support workers to have the confidence needed to pursue progression opportunities?***

Some responses highlighted the view that Work Coaches need to invest in long-term relationships with Universal Credit claimants and partners. Orbit Group told the Commission that in their view 'the [Work] Coach would need to have the capacity to support that person throughout their entire work progression journey using ongoing/long term support, ensuring that agreed actions are followed up in a responsive and timely manner.' Sport England also stated their belief in the need to establish 'a relationship that is more than transactional'.

Some responses also felt that Work Coaches need to develop a better understanding of the specific needs and circumstances of individuals. For example, the British Retail Consortium stated their view that 'support needs to be genuinely tailored to individual needs' while Working Families felt that Work Coaches needed to understand that 'finding childcare and establishing a pattern takes time and once that pattern is established there is limited flexibility within it'.

Some responses gave specific ideas as to how Work Coaches could help to inspire confidence and motivate claimants to consider progression opportunities. Business in the Community, for example, advocated for Work Coaches to help workers understand how to 'create supportive networks' and to 'recognise their transferrable skills and qualities that make them the right candidate for progression.'

The West Midlands Combined Authority felt that 'advertising vacancies that show progression routes could unlock individual understanding of the journey they are embarking on with the employer'. They also highlighted their view that the support available should be presented in a transparent manner to help inspire individuals and that 'the economic and other benefits (e.g. personal /professional growth) should be presented to individuals'. The Commission was also told by some respondents that case studies that showed positive progression success stories among Universal Credit claimants could help demonstrate the benefits of progression and inspire others.

Some responses suggested that financial support for costs associated with progression could be a method of supporting claimants. For example, the response from Orbit Group expressed the view that people would 'benefit from access to various funding opportunities, which could be used to pay for/ towards courses, essential work related costs and any other service or equipment needed to help them progress their career.'

***How could Jobcentres work with employers to share progression good practice?***


Respondents generally believed that Jobcentres could help to develop and disseminate good practice around progression more widely by drawing on links with local employers, sector networks and employer bodies. For example, Tees Valley Combined Authority suggested that Jobcentres could engage 'with a targeted number of businesses who are already engaged on other programmes' as a pilot process to understand how to share good practice most effectively. Kumar and Jones, Manchester Metropolitan University, suggested that 'Jobcentres could champion 'Good Work' charters where they exist', to help wider efforts to promote good work within local business communities. They also raised the idea that 'consideration could also be given to providing a higher level of service to employers who meet higher standards in relation to the quality of work on offer.'



## ► 4. List of Organisations that Responded

Some respondents did not give permission to have their name and response disclosed publically.

1. Association of Convenience Stores
2. Behavioural Insights Team
3. Better Placed, London Boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark
4. Bowners, L., *Social Care Worker*
5. Brant, P., et al., The Open University
6. British Chambers of Commerce
7. British Retail Consortium
8. Business Disability Forum
9. Business in the Community (BITC)
10. Care England
11. Carebridge Staffing Ltd
12. Centre for Ageing Better
13. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)
14. CITB
15. City & Guilds Group
16. Communities that Work
17. Department for Communities, Northern Ireland
18. Department for Education
19. Employment Lawyers Association
20. Equality and Human Rights Commission
21. Federation of Small Businesses
22. Feeding Britain
23. Griffiths, R., et al., Institute for Policy Research, University of Bath
24. Institute for Employment Studies
25. Institute for the Future of Work
26. Kumar, A., Jones, K., Manchester Metropolitan University
27. Make UK
28. Manthorpe, J., Kessler, I., NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce, Kings College, London
29. Marks and Spencer plc
30. McDonald's UK & Ireland
31. Mencap
32. Money and Mental Health Policy Institute
33. Norfolk County Council
34. Officials from the Welsh Government
35. Orbit Group
36. Reed in Partnership
37. Rubery, J., Rafferty, A., Hughes, C., Velthuis, S., The Work and Equalities Institute, University of Manchester
38. Scope
39. Seetec
40. Shaw Trust
41. Sissons, P., University of Wolverhampton Business School
42. Social Mobility Commission

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43. Sport England
  44. Sustainable Care: Connecting People and Systems' research team at the University of Sheffield, the University of Kent and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
  45. Tees Valley Combined Authority
  46. Tesco
  47. The Scottish Government
  48. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW),
  49. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing
  50. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA)
  51. Trades Union Congress (TUC)
  52. UK Hospitality
  53. UNISON
  54. West Midlands Combined Authority (Productivity and Skills Directorate)
  55. West of England Combined Authority
  56. West of England Combined Authority - Future Bright
  57. Whitbread PLC
  58. Working Families