Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Uncorrected oral evidence: Employment and Unions

Wednesday 22 November 2017

10.40 am

Listen to the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (The Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Baroness Eaton; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Newlove; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Lord Rowe-Beddoe.

Evidence Session No. 13 Heard in Public Questions 114 - 121

Witnesses

I: Fiona Wilson, Head of Research, USDAW; Katerina Rudiger, Chief Community Officer, CIPD.
Examination of witnesses

Fiona Wilson and Katerina Rudiger.

Q114 The Chairman: Welcome to you both, and thank you very much for coming along to talk to us today.

Lord Blunkett: Chair, I have an additional small interest. I wrote a recent preface for a City Year UK publication, so I thought it might be useful to note that.

The Chairman: A list of the interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available. The session is open to the public and is being recorded for BBC Parliament. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and put on the Committee’s website. A few days after the session, you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check it for accuracy, and it would be helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. If, after this evidence session, you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence or have any additional points you wish to make, you are most welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us. Could I ask you to introduce yourselves?

Katerina Rudiger: Thank you so much for having me. I am Katerina Rudiger and I work for the CIPD. We are the professional body for HR. We are also a charity and we have over 146,000 members who work in various HR roles, so it is not companies but individuals. I lead on all our social action volunteering programmes and am working on embedding this idea of professional citizenship within the HR profession, which I am looking forward to telling you a bit more about

Fiona Wilson: I am Fiona Wilson, head of research and economics at the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. We have 435,000 members, many of whom volunteer in a range of capacities. We focus on supporting them through training and skills development and we are very keen to encourage employers to do the same.

Q115 The Chairman: Thank you. Perhaps I can open up with a general question for a bit of slow bowling to get the match going, since we are starting the test match in Australia later today: how do you view the current state of civic engagement in the UK, and how does employment affect civic engagement?

Fiona Wilson: Civic engagement in the UK could definitely be improved. From an USDAW point of view, we want to see more of our members involved in society, in everyday life and in areas they can influence, such as public policy and other engagements. We have a view that well-paid and secure employment enables people to have more time to volunteer. Many of our members are low paid, moving on to the issue about employment, so some are chasing two or three jobs to make ends meet and feed their families, et cetera, so the opportunity for them to get involved in civic engagement is restricted by the amount of time they are spending earning their income. In terms of changes to the labour market, the gig economy meaning that people are not employed, the lack of
flexibility for workers and the levels of pay, which could be significantly improved to enable people to find more time to do civic engagement, are the issues that are reducing the ability of our members to get involved in civic engagement.

**Katerina Rudiger:** I would agree with Fiona that we can definitely improve things, but the second thing to note is that there is an issue around the recognition of what people do already, both on the employer side and by the Government. We see our role in driving this and we want to get our members to engage with their communities and volunteer, so we have a number of programmes where our members are involved in helping jobseekers in local communities, working with schools and promoting the benefits of the HR profession, and we have thousands of volunteers. We also, as I said earlier, want to embed this idea of citizenship within the HR profession because HR people have such a pivotal role in the labour market and are in a unique position where they can be responsible for somebody's working life. We want HR professionals to recognise that privilege and the responsibilities that come with it, so we do a lot of work around how HR people can use their skills for the benefit of the wider society and of individuals.

Back to the point of recognition, we also work with employers. Again, because HR professionals have such a pivotal role in organisations, we want them to drive civic engagement and volunteering among employees and embed this into learning and development practices. We have seen a lot of progress, but more can be done.

**The Chairman:** To ask you a question about the employers, what do they get back from it, as they will want to see what their rewards are? Do you do case studies about how you have created greater employee commitment and involvement in the business once they have had a chance to see something of wider society?

**Katerina Rudiger:** Yes, we do, and we do guidance for employers where we share those case studies, best practice, et cetera. The business case is very clear, so employers get a lot out of it in terms of staff engagement, health and well-being and skills development, such as communication skills and team working. There is lots of evidence that people would improve in those, so employers get something out of it. If you think back to the point about engaging with local communities, it is a great way for staff to understand the communities they are operating in and the customers, so there are numerous benefits for employers.

**Baroness Barker:** I am struggling here a bit. Do you think skilled volunteering and civic engagement are the same thing, or are they different? Could you give me an example of what you are talking about?

**Katerina Rudiger:** I am talking mainly about volunteering, which I believe is the key part of civic engagement. That can be anything from helping a jobseeker into work, using your skills from an HR perspective, or working with a school. We have a programme where our members volunteer to work with the boards of schools to embed careers education
into lesson plans, working with the Careers & Enterprise Company. We have our members supporting local charities with HR advice and guidance and we have things such as members campaigning for the living wage in their organisations. Fiona was talking about the challenge that many employees who are low paid probably find it difficult to engage, so we need to work on that. It is not just about the communities; for us, it is about the workplace as well and using your skills. If you think about the recent scandals around sexual harassment, it is standing up against this in your organisation and demonstrating that this is not acceptable and helping employees, so it is going over and above your day job, which is what citizenship means for us.

The Chairman: Ms Wilson, I am sorry, I cut you off.

Fiona Wilson: I wanted to add to the point that has just been made about the importance of training and development and how I see union members who come forward to be active in the union and then go on to stand for local office and are, hopefully, elected as councillors. They develop those skills very significantly and they become engaged in the community, they understand more about their community and they take all those skills and benefits back to the employer. The civic engagement side of it and becoming a councillor or a local representative enhances an individual’s skills, confidence and ability to take that back to the workplace to enhance the workplace as well.

Baroness Redfern: You talked about the workforce. Do you think there is a difficulty for small companies of fewer than five people to give time off for their employees, and do you think it is a barrier for people who want to get involved because of poor connectivity, probably in the rural areas?

Fiona Wilson: The larger the employer, the easier it is to give leave of absence. With small employers it is more difficult to give people leave of absence, but it depends on what is happening in terms of civic engagement and the benefit the employer gets back in community support for what they are doing. For example, if somebody is in a volunteer mountain rescue team or is a retained firefighter, employers will want to support that and, when there is an emergency, let people go, so it depends on the civic engagement and how often that might be.

In terms of connectivity, there is a significant problem in the UK in that broadband speeds and accessibility need to be significantly improved in rural areas. Certainly, where I live in quiet Cheshire, there is a great deal of difficulty with access to broadband, which needs to be improved, yes.

Q116 Baroness Morris of Yardley: Fiona, you referred to the change in the labour market, the gig economy and people having more than one job, and there have been other changes, such as in technology or people getting used to having more jobs than previous generations used to have. What impact have these changes in the way the labour market works had on citizenship and civic engagement—the good and bad, the opportunities and the problems?
Fiona Wilson: The key change from an USDAW point of view is that people have less time to give to civic engagement because they are either chasing more than one job or they are working in the gig economy where they do not know when the next time off will come and there are difficulties with flexibility in terms of shift patterns, et cetera. That means that it is more difficult to plan people’s engagement.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: You are the researcher, I am not, but, if you go back so many years, the number of hours we work cannot be more than it was then because it was pretty awful, especially in the jobs that you represent. Is it the pattern of work, not necessarily the total number of hours worked, and the way it spreads across the week?

Fiona Wilson: It is still both. We find that our members work longer hours to earn the wage to make ends meet, and that has not changed. Technology is impacting on the workplace in the retail sector, but they are still open all hours with 24/7 working in retail, which then expands into distribution because stores need to be stocked up. From an USDAW point of view, people work longer and harder than they ever have because of the pressure to earn a living.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Is it also the total amount of time? Overall, on average hours, perhaps we all think everyone is working longer, and it may be that your members are, but is there something about people having to stitch together a number of different jobs so that working 33 hours in a standard job is rather different from working 33 hours in two or three jobs? You both seem to be nodding to that, so that is important to bear in mind, is it not: that sort of insecurity and, as you said, the inability to plan—so perhaps it is not the total number of hours that is at issue?

Fiona Wilson: The inability to plan is a key issue and it links back to the number of hours that people work. With retail, in particular, being a 24/7 service, people work different contracts and different hours and there is now that period of availability when you need to be available for work. With people chasing two or three jobs, if an employer says, “Can you come in and work tomorrow because we have a need to do that?”, somebody who is concerned about where the next three hours will come from will not say, “No, I’m going to go off and do something in the community”; they will work instead. It is linked with an issue about having a contract for the hours that you actually work. There are many people who work in retail who may have a contract to say they work 12 hours a week, but they work significantly more than that because they are asked to roster on and do more hours. One of our strong arguments is that there should be a right to request a contract that reflects the hours you actually work because that gives more security to the individual and they have a contract which reflects the fact that they work 30 hours most weeks, which gives security to ensure that income will be coming in. The flexibility side of things, linked in with people doing two or three jobs, is impacting on low-paid workers getting involved in civil and community activity.
Katerina Rudiger: To come back on the employment relationships, what is interesting for this Committee is the connection with identity and civic engagement, because you do not just identify with one employer any more; you will not be for 20 years with the same employer. That is why, having said that employers need to support and encourage civic engagement and volunteering, it is not all down to the employer. That is why we are so interested and we are still at the beginning of this idea of having a professional identity instead. If you think about an HR person working for one employer or as a consultant, we want to foster an identity of what it means to be a good HR professional and to tie that civic engagement to that identity.

As a professional body, we looked at what it means to be a good professional, which is having the right skills, keeping those skills up to date, having situational judgment—all the kind of things you would expect of someone to do their job well. Beyond that, we have identified social and ethical responsibility and commitment to something bigger than yourself, which is what we are currently developing: what does that look like, and how would you express that? If we tie a person’s social and ethical responsibility not necessarily to the employment they are in but to the identity of a professional, we can work with something here, which is the concept that we are currently embedding into all our professional standards and qualifications. We are saying, “What can you do beyond your day job to demonstrate that social and ethical responsibility and that commitment?” That is something interesting we can work with. In your terms of reference, it says that you are looking for new ways to bridge gaps within communities and to find new ways to foster civic engagement, and this is one good, new and innovative way in which we can do that.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: What we have heard this morning about longer working hours is certainly borne out by a lot of anecdotal evidence. The paper we had before this meeting says, “In terms of hours worked, the average worker worked 33 hours per week in the first quarter of 1995 and, as of the second quarter of 2017, worked 32 hours per week”. In other words, we have a problem to resolve between what we have in the paper here and what we have heard from you, which indeed is borne out by a lot of anecdotal evidence.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: That is the point I was trying to get at—that it is not just the total number of hours but how those hours are made up and the different sectors. You have partly answered the next question, whether those in low-paid work face additional barriers to civic engagement, and you have talked about time insecurity, but are there any other barriers over and above those for people doing low-paid work and, for the ones you have already talked about and any others, what can be done to reduce those barriers?

Katerina Rudiger: This starts within organisations with their HR practices. Quite often, somebody will say, “Well, if somebody needs to be on the till, we can’t have them out volunteering”. This makes complete sense, but it comes back to your resourcing strategy: do you plan for
100% or 80%? If you plan for 80%, you can have people going off to do volunteering because somebody else will cover it—so it comes back to embedding this into your HR practices.

In terms of the barriers, a big barrier that we see is confidence, where people think they do not have anything to add. A number of times somebody has said to me, “But I’m not sure I can mentor a young jobseeker because what can I possibly add?” “You’re working in HR and this person has never worked. You don’t even have to do anything; you just tell them about what it looks like from the other side”. This plays out in many different ways with lots of people where they do not think they have anything to offer, so it is about building their confidence. The mere fact that you are coming from a different point of view, you are giving your skills and time for free and are motivated to help someone to do something good is a huge contribution, so it is about building people’s confidence and sharing those stories as to what they can offer.

Fiona Wilson: I have already talked about the difficulties of low pay and people chasing many hours to be able to make ends meet, but there are some additional things that could be addressed, which would be very good for the Committee to consider. The first is the living wage or the national living wage and how much that is. An uprating would give people the need to work fewer hours if they were able to get more money from the national living wage or the living wage.

The carer’s allowance is set at £120 and, if you earn more than £110 a week, you will lose your carer’s allowance. There are a lot of people who are caring and volunteering in the community by the fact that they are carers and, if it could be uplifted for more people who are already caring, volunteering and doing significant things for their families or a family member, that would make a difference.

Public transport is massively expensive. If you are a low-paid worker and you want to go somewhere to assist in the community but you have to find the money to pay for your bus or train fare, that will put you off as well.

Childcare prices have shot up compared with inflation, and a lot of low-paid members struggle to meet the costs of childcare. If you are going to have to find childcare to cover you to be able to go and volunteer, it is another barrier. Low pay and all the things linked with low pay and the cap on the carer’s allowance all add up to prevent and deter low-paid workers from getting involved in civic engagement.

Baroness Newlove: I am interested because the work I have done in my previous role was about communities and volunteering, and I do not think there is a straight message here. It is quite interesting to learn about low pay, but we are looking at how we can get civic engagement and get the younger generation to engage with values and other community cultures. For me, one thing is missing, and I do not know what the evidence shows, but we have young people going to the jobcentres looking for work, and I know from personal experience—and it
is something the Committee should look at—that, if they cannot find work but they are skilled graduates in IT, Jobcentre Plus asks them to go in and train people for free. That could be looked at as volunteering, depending on how it is interpreted, but that gives low morale to that individual with the skills when they are not getting paid and they sit at a computer, so how do we bring that on? Low pay adds an issue to this, I agree with you, and transport is an issue to get to jobs, so it is how we engage.

I do not know if your members could transpose those skills to start their journey of work and feel part of the community, which is making them feel low when they have gone to university or they have come out of a job and have gone expecting to get a support package and they do not, so perhaps you could add a bit to that. Volunteering with those skills—I have worked with the Civil Service—is not just about painting a shed, which is not what this is about; it is about transposing your skills. As you say, you train professionals for templates, but I have faced the other side where employers will not let them go or some government departments have specialised HMRC people and say, “You go in that area. Go out and tell them about tax”—which does not help reach communities as they do not want that help but rather other skill sets to promote them. We are not going for the basic here where you get people coming into low-paid jobs who do not feel self-worth, and I am trying to tease out how we raise aspirations to go in a workplace in the first place.

Fiona Wilson: From an USDAW point of view, we focus on encouraging our members to take part in our lifelong learning programmes, which is another thing the Committee could support us on, because lifelong learning funding has been successively cut by the Government, which is reducing the programme of support we can give. One of the most popular courses for young people in particular is learning British sign language to enable them to support and communicate with colleagues and friends in the community, which is a real skill and benefit. People also like to learn languages and train to be representatives in the workplace, which then helps signpost other people they work with to sources of help.

Moving on to the issue about mental health in the community and the difficulties that everyone is having with mental health, we cannot counsel or deal with mental health issues, but we can signpost members at work to be able to go to get support where they need it, so it is about training and developing—the confidence point that Katerina mentioned earlier—and about raising people’s self-worth.

Baroness Newlove: But if they are not available for jobs and they want to go off and do something, that stops their payments. There are lots of ducks to line up here and it is not just about political parties or funding but nurturing that person to want to engage. How do we bring that forward?

Fiona Wilson: I agree. At the end of the day, if somebody is unemployed and they have a skill that they can bring to the community, I do not believe that person should be forced to work for nothing, and
nobody should be forced to work for nothing; their labour is worthy of hire at the end of the day. If someone has a skill that they are passing on, there should be some ability within the benefits system or the support to enable people who are contributing to receive some support for doing it.

**Katerina Rudiger:** I am glad you are asking this question as it is so important. It is why we have been running for five or six years a programme called Steps Ahead Mentoring, where we get our members to work with young jobseekers. We work with 570 jobcentres across England, Scotland and Wales and we match the jobseekers with a mentor, who is one of our members, so an HR professional, and they give them advice on how to do a CV and how to do an interview, and it is also about that self-worth, that confidence, which is always coming through. We now have over 3,500 people mentors supporting young people and we have reached over 5,000 young people. We now also have a programme of ambassadors where 40 of our members promote this programme with jobcentres and say, “There is some help out there”, and we have had huge success where seven out of 10 of the young people on the programme have found employment. For us, it is not about getting any old job but about that person’s career and their aspirations, so our support is personalised, tailored and face-to-face, and it is volunteers doing it. We also work very closely with the Step up to Serve #iwill campaign, and you probably know that this week is #iwill week, where we encourage people to do volunteering as well because it is a good way to hook them into volunteering and to gain skills—so it is joining those two up.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** You mentioned the cuts in lifelong learning and your written evidence said something about the impact of austerity on civic engagement. Could you say a bit more about how you see the impact of austerity on civic engagement?

**Fiona Wilson:** The first impact is that people struggle to make ends meet. Our cost of living survey indicated that 21% of people regularly miss meals to save money for their bills, 44% have been late or missed a rental payment, one in five of our members has taken a payday loan, 78% of them struggle to repay the loan and 75% have cut down on other essentials to pay for transport costs to get to work. The direct result of austerity is that people struggle to make ends meet, which means that their everyday lives are around childcare, feeding the family, going to work and finding the money for transport. That is a direct result of austerity and is stopping people getting involved in community and volunteering activity because there are not the hours spare to get involved in community activity.

**Lord Blunkett:** I do not think it would be unfair, Chairman, to say that we have two of the most progressive representative organisations in the employment field in front of us today, both of whom have demonstrated some practical measures that they know about and are taking. We are after practical ideas. On the idea of lifting the carer’s allowance and the
issue of lifelong learning, perhaps Fiona could say a bit more about whether the Union Learning Fund still exists, which was set up almost 20 years ago, and whether it would be possible to combine what is already there with newer ideas that you have thought about and want us to recommend. For instance, USDAW was involved all those years ago in encouraging members to become special constables, which was not just about doing good in the community but was also about protecting small retailers who were facing racist attacks and all kinds of things, so there was a dual element of both the wider community being engaged with this and gaining as well as a direct benefit to the employers, small and medium-sized. Would both of you reflect on further things that you think practically we could recommend not just to the Government but to trade union and employer organisations?

**Fiona Wilson:** You have mentioned the Union Learning Fund. That is currently under threat and is being reduced, and we would like to see it being increased because it is that fund that enables us to train our reps and activists to become more engaged in the workplace and in society and builds the confidence that individuals do not always feel to get involved in community activity. I am not aware of any initiatives in terms of training special constables, et cetera.

**Lord Blunkett:** That was 15 years ago and you are far too young.

**Fiona Wilson:** You are very kind. We run the Freedom from Fear campaign and we have just had our Respect week, the first week in November, which is about tackling the aggression and violence in the workplace that our members face from members of the public. We work very closely in that campaign with our employers, who are obviously as concerned as we are about the levels of assault in the workplace. Those campaigning activities are often curtailed by the amount of money we can spend on them because of the Lobbying Act, which is one thing the Committee could look at. The Lobbying Act has meant that unions have to now look very carefully at the amount of money they can spend on campaigns that might have a political angle and, of course, the number of police on the streets is definitely a political issue. That is a practical thing the Committee could look at: how the Lobbying Act is constraining unions such as mine from campaigning on issues that members will be keen to get involved in where we have to be careful about the amount of money that we spend on those issues.

**Katerina Rudiger:** For me, it is about recognition and promoting what we do, and there is initial recognition at the macroeconomic level. Interestingly, the Bank of England’s Andy Haldane, the chief economist, looked at this a few years ago and said, “Roughly estimated, volunteering contributes 3.5% to GDP”. Why do we not hear more about this, why are people not looking into this and why is this not getting recognised, if that is what we want to promote?

The second point is around the HR profession. We have asked our members and 74% are involved in some volunteering activity, so that is hugely above the national average, which is probably around 30% or
40%. We have so many programmes. I mentioned our Steps Ahead mentoring programme, working with schools and our Enterprise Adviser programme. We have 52 branches which are growing in local areas where people work with the community, not just to promote the profession but doing all sort of things, such as supporting small charities, et cetera, and it is about recognising these contributions. As I said, we are working with 570 jobcentres, which has been a great delivery partner for us, connecting us with young people, because we have the mentors and the volunteers but we do not have access to the beneficiaries. It is still a struggle, because jobcentres will prioritise paid provision, and sometimes the evidence of the paid provision is not that clear. We are offering something that is free by skilled professionals, offering their skills and good will, and we want to see a bit more recognition and support and have the HR profession recognised as a force for good in society because that links to our purpose to champion better work and working lives.

The Chairman: Could I pick up one point of Lord Blunkett’s inquiry, which was about practical examples of what is going on? I may be completely wrong, but might I draw the impression that you might have worked overseas and elsewhere and, if so, have you had CIPD experience of what other countries might be doing better than or different from what we are doing?

Katerina Rudiger: I have not, actually, but last year, with the Step up to Serve campaign, I went on a study visit to the US where we were looking at volunteering. Obviously, it is much bigger because the context is one where the state does less and it is up to individual citizens. What is striking is that they are quite pragmatic about it and, for them, quite often volunteering is mandatory—so, in order to get into university, young people have to demonstrate a certain number of hours, et cetera, so they have a very pragmatic approach. I am not sure that this would work in the UK or that we would want to promote it, but there are certainly lessons we can learn from that. They have been doing a lot of work around how volunteering changes you as an individual and an engaged citizen, so you start by doing something and then, as a result of having this disruptive experience, you become more engaged in general and change as a citizen. That is quite interesting for you to look at. I have brought it back to the HR profession to look at how having a disruptive experience can change HR professionals and make them operate better in their organisations and in society.

The Chairman: If you have any specific additional information on that point and can send it to us, it would be very helpful.

Baroness Morris of Yardley: This is possibly a question more for Fiona and it goes back to the question Baroness Barker raised about the breadth of the issues we are talking about. We talk about volunteering all the time and we talk about civic engagement in terms of taking an active part in democracy, working for change and the rest of it. The picture you paint of tougher times for working people might indicate that there are more people getting engaged in civic issues along that campaigning line.
Without going into legislation, my feeling of the trade union movement, reflecting on my own background, is that they are less successful at engaging their workforce in that wider involvement in democracy than they used to be a generation ago. Is that the case, or do you see a change in that? Forgetting the volunteering, what is the state of play in your world in terms of engaging people in that wider civic activity and democracy, so in being active citizens in keeping democracy vibrant and alive?

**Fiona Wilson:** We encourage our members to get involved in political activity, we support them to stand for local councils and to become Members of Parliament and we train and support individuals through our training programme. Personally, in the 12 years I have been in this job, I have seen that people are very keen to do that.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** Not less keen than 12 years ago?

**Fiona Wilson:** No, I do not think it is any different from when I first came into this role. We always find people who want to come forward and we always try to support those individuals, because people who work in retail, distribution and shop work are in the community. They are hearing all the time from the people they deal with at the tills, in the stores and on the doorstep, delivering groceries, of the concerns that people have. You hear the phrase, “Well, I’m not interested in politics”, but politics will find you out wherever you are and whatever you are doing. I do not think there has been a reduction and I could not say there had been a big increase, but we are still doing that sort of work and supporting individuals to stand for elected office.

**Q119 Baroness Pitkeathley:** You have talked a lot about volunteering and people having time off to do it, but what more could employers do to encourage both the volunteering and the civic engagement? I was quite struck, Fiona, by the two examples you gave us about mountain rescue and about being firemen. What about having paid time off for something rather less glamorous than that—to be a trustee of a mental health charity, for example? What more could employers do in that regard?

**Fiona Wilson:** Employers could see the benefit of their staff members getting involved and engaged in the community, both for the benefit it gives with their link back to the employer and the development of the individual, which is what Katerina was saying the CIPD is looking at. It is important to emphasise to employers the benefits that they receive in return both because they are engaged in the community and in their staff members getting experience from doing that. It is a question of talking to employers and making sure employers can see it other than as a cost to their business because that person is not there.

**Baroness Pitkeathley:** Who should be saying this to employers?

**Fiona Wilson:** The unions are doing it and we are doing it. We are encouraging them to be engaged and Katerina is encouraging HR people, so we have a pincer movement going on here.
**Katerina Rudiger:** It is for the Government as well. There was a debate a few years ago around three days’ volunteering, which has been scrapped, so it might be good to look at that again.

On your point around political engagement, looking beyond volunteering, we tested this a bit. We are a charity, so we have to be apolitical and quite careful about what we can do to get people to engage with the political system on important issues such as employment and education. In the run-up to the last election, we encouraged our members and prepared a tool whereby they could write to their local MP and raise the issues that we think are important, such as connecting employers with schools, helping disadvantaged jobseekers and working on other stuff, so we have done that and it had quite a good response. I am sure we can do more of it, but we have a fine balancing act with that.

The other initiative we have just launched is around the living wage and all the points Fiona just made. We are asking our members to campaign for the living wage in their organisations, which is, in a way, going above and beyond HR because, in some cases, it might be difficult for the HR person to do that as they might say, “Well, why would I pay somebody the living wage?” As the people professional and somebody representing the interests of people in the organisation, the HR person has to stand up for this and say, “These are the reasons why you should pay the living wage”, so we have just launched a new initiative around that which I wanted to mention. You had a question around what employers can do.

**Baroness Pitkeathley:** Yes, and could you come back on what you said about the three days’ volunteering, which was an issue at one time?

**Katerina Rudiger:** We ask employers to do more around skills-based volunteering, which is very important, so that they are not painting a fence, unless that is their skill, and using their accountancy, HR or whatever skills they may have, and employers can do much more, as I said earlier.

On the three days of volunteering, it was a good tool to promote a debate on whether we necessarily want employers to offer three days. A lot of employers who believe in that would offer more anyway, so it is more around having a debate about the benefits, et cetera. It was quite helpful to have that at the government level and it somehow has disappeared now.

**Fiona Wilson:** If I can add one further point to the question you asked earlier, one important thing would be to have government support to encourage employers to develop a comprehensive public duties and community roles policy where they are encouraging staff to get involved in community activity by having a policy that states what will happen, including some element of payment and support for that or maybe some element of flexible working so that, if people want to volunteer to do charity work, they can flex their hours to enable them to do that. That is something that the Committee could encourage the Government to do so that employers have a very clear policy on it which enables employees to
be aware that there is support in their organisation for community work and volunteering, and they will be more likely to come forward to volunteer if they think their employer is going to be receptive to their request for time off.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Going back to your point that, if employers paid the living wage, lower-paid workers might not have to work so many hours and might have more time, you will be aware that, under universal credit, in-work conditionality will be rolled out, which could be pushing some people to work more hours than perhaps they want to. Do you think that could have a knock-on effect on people’s willingness to engage civically?

Fiona Wilson: I am certain it will do, yes, because, if you have to chase the hours you need to meet your universal credit commitment, you will be doing that first.

Q120 Baroness Eaton: We have talked largely about volunteering and civic and community engagement. My question is more about the workforce and the relationships within it, so what more should employers be doing to encourage integration through the workplace, which is rather a different take?

Fiona Wilson: The first thing employers could be doing is encouraging people to join their trade union so that they can engage in their workplace. At the end of the day, employers should be encouraging people to join the union. Many of our employers do and we have very good agreements with key companies which are very supportive because they see the benefit, which works both ways, of employees being engaged in the workplace and their union. Another example would be providing ESOL training to immigrant workers to remove the language barriers that see workers isolated in the workplace. Another is fostering an environment of respect and having a published grievance procedure so that, if people have an issue in the workplace, they know how to resolve that, which is particularly relevant at the moment with some of the issues that have been coming out recently, and having an equality and diversity policy which makes clear the company expectations of employees and contractors. Moving on, it would be encouraging voluntary sports and social clubs and other issues, but the key thing from USDAW’s point of view would be to encourage workers to join a union and work together to participate in union activity.

Katerina Rudiger: I am not sure if your question is about the culture or the make-up of the workforce. On the culture point, with what we have seen recently around sexual harassment, it is a good hook for us to investigate a bit more what we can do to have an inclusive and safe workplace culture. Again, it is up to all of us to create that culture where people feel that they can speak up. I want to see HR leading on this, but it is not just about HR; it is about everyone, line managers, the senior team, et cetera. Of course, there need to be good processes in place when something happens, but it is bigger than this.
If you are talking about the make-up and diversity of the workforce, it starts with outreach and recruitment, so what can employers do? They can go into schools and promote opportunities and they can look at their recruitment processes and at how inclusive they are. We did a huge piece of work a few years ago when youth unemployment was such a big issue, and it transpired that a lot of employers were not recruiting young people and that some of their recruitment processes were barriers to employment, and they asked about experience when young people did not have any, et cetera. We have challenged our members on this and said, “Look, there is a big problem. Sure, the Government could do better in equipping young people, but what can you do to adapt your recruitment processes?” This comes back again to this idea of citizenship, so going above and beyond your day job, even if it is a little uncomfortable, and saying, “We’ll reach out to more disadvantaged jobseekers, even if it’s a bit more hassle for us and for line managers, because it’s the right thing to do and because it gives us access to a different talent and skills pool”.

Lord Harries of Pentregarth: Fiona, from the USDAW point of view, are you relatively sanguine about integration at the moment in the workplace? Is it getting better, is it getting worse, or is it about what you would expect?

Fiona Wilson: Since the European referendum and some of the issues that came through as part of the discussions, we had a great deal of concern expressed by our members about some of the public things that were being said about immigrant workers. We organised our No Room for Racism campaign, which directly addressed the issues about racism in the workplace. It was a big campaign in which our members engaged significantly because they were concerned about the people they were working with and the way that people from Europe were being vilified in the media. We worked through lifelong learning on developing and supporting our members and reps to enable them to deal with racism in the workplace and, as a direct result of the European referendum result, that campaign was up and running immediately because of the concerns that were being expressed to us by our members. As I say, it has been very successful in addressing those issues, because our members are very concerned about the people who sit next to them and how that individual then feels—will they have to go home, will they stay?—and the unions responded very quickly to that. It was a very positive response and a very good campaign.

Q121 Baroness Newlove: What could the Government do to improve integration in the workplace and to get employers to do more to support civic engagement?

Fiona Wilson: There are a number of issues we have already covered, and I would emphasise the importance of getting paid for the work that you do, the living wage and the national minimum wage, and that it is very important that those issues are addressed and enforced. The national minimum wage is not always enforced, so there is more that could be done by the Government to enforce it. We have not discussed a
great deal something I mentioned earlier—the right to request flexible working, which is a key issue. At the moment you have the right to request it, but you do not have the right to have flexible working. That should definitely be looked at, which our members would benefit from, if they could request flexible working to fit in with, usually, caring or domestic responsibilities, so there is more that can be done there.

The second issue is the Union Learning Fund, which was mentioned earlier, and it has been cut and cut again. That is the fund that unions use to train, support and develop their members to be more engaged in a range of issues, including British sign language, learning other languages and other civic engagement. The apprenticeship levy, which is currently in situ with employers, if that could be expanded to include a skills levy, it links in with what Katerina has been saying about developing skills that, if people feel more competent and able to engage because they have the confidence to do something, they will be far more keen to do it with the other issues we have talked about of encouraging people through the workforce.

Baroness Newlove: Does that cause further barriers to integration in the workplace with the Government not seeing this? I am trying to get at integration in the workplace and civic engagement because it comes down to the individual. I was interested, when you said you went to the US, that the state does not get involved and it is down to that individual, and I think we are losing that, that it is about the individual and how they feel. Is there enough integration in the workplace for them, or are they saying that the Government are blocking them from doing that?

Katerina Rudiger: For us, it is more about promoting all these topics to our membership, getting it embedded into HR practices and then the Government supporting that, so supporting flexible, safe, inclusive workplaces and promoting dialogue around that, which would be key, and recognition when it happens of what “good” looks like.

Lord Blunkett: Fiona mentioned earlier the idea of trying to encourage employers to have a policy. Katerina, is there a lot more we could do with medium and larger companies to ensure that their corporate social responsibilities have to be built into their annual reporting system?

Katerina Rudiger: Reporting is an interesting one because, at the moment, the people issues are left out of it. This is not quite my area of expertise, but the CIPD is doing a lot around looking at how we can have people issues raised in annual reports and whether, when investors come to look to invest in organisations, they look at the people side. We need to do a lot more to have people issues represented at board level, which is hugely important, so it is not just about volunteering and what companies do as that will be addressing just one element of it, and we are looking at something way bigger, which is how we can make sure that people issues are represented at board level, are recognised and accounted for and that that is what investors are looking for because only then will all this be truly taken seriously.
The Chairman: Thank you very much for your very informative and interesting evidence.