

# Government should initiate a strategy on future work to reinvigorate and rebuild the economy in the wake of Covid-19.

Submitted by: Institute for the Future of Work

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In a rapid review: A Better Future for Work: the World after Covid-19

(<https://www.ifow.org/publications/2020/6/10/a-rapid-review-with-the-future-of-work-commission-a-better-future-for-work-the-w>

the Future of Work Commission, a cross-disciplinary body of experts brought together by the Institute for the Future of Work (<https://www.ifow.org/>), has identified a series of new policy challenges and opportunities to support a strong and robust recovery for the economy and future of work in the UK in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Anna Thomas, the director of the Institute for the Future of Work said:

“This report has been carried out at pace by the Future of Work Commission – a group of eminent experts in how work shapes and binds our lives and society. The Commission has identified the need to think in new ways about the roles of government, business, communities and people that reflect the changes to our lives and the way we work. The report identified high level objectives to guide policy makers looking to create a fairer, more resilient society. They are aimed at overhauling problems created by the pandemic – but also systemic issues that have been exacerbated by Covid-19 such as the displacement of jobs by new technologies.”

Recommendations include creating a national work strategy, guided by experts, that will encourage entrepreneurialism, improve infrastructure, build resilience among workers and tackle inequalities. The report also calls on ministers to consider ways to protect good work by enshrining a set of key rights for key workers – and raise basic protections.

In addition, the Commission also suggests the Government should announce a second wave of jobs support, which should focus on training on-the-job for new workers. Companies which hire people who need training after the pandemic should get a wage subsidy to support this skills development.

The report also recommends the creation of a Community Health and Work Corps to respond to local social and environmental needs, underwritten by Government, and aimed at supporting people (including vulnerable groups) through education, training and voluntary community work.

Other recommendations:

- Give key rights to key workers (including a real living wage); The Employment Bill should be brought forward, with consideration given to a dedicated Key Workers Bill of Rights as a schedule to the Act;
- Organise a public dialogue on creating a safety net as people move from defunct or shrinking sectors (this could be a form of universal or conditional basic income); evidence of costs should be established and local schemes should be piloted;
- Support groups moving between sectors through training, job matching, access to community work;
- Stimulate the creation of good jobs, prioritising work which serves shared social and environmental goals;
- Promote socially-responsible adoption of data-driven technologies, ensuring use puts people first and that adverse effects are assessed and addressed;

- Regulate digital giants which, as with utilities, are now an essential part of the infrastructure (protect competition principles, making the first moves towards treatment of some services as a utility);
- Shape policies on evidence by empowering and funding the ONS to gather data and assess the impact of work, health, the introduction of new technology, and inequalities on people and communities;
- Establish a Council to develop a dedicated and comprehensive strategy on the UK's future of work;
- Support development of new, place-based (local) Industrial Recovery and Rebuild Strategies;
- Implement a mini-furlough scheme to give financial support to companies which re-train people migrating into new jobs;
- Encourage good practice when supporting companies during the exit from lockdown (such as payment of real living wage), undertake assessment of equality/health/ environmental impacts of business decisions, discourage excessive executive pay and shareholder dividends.

Helen Mountfield QC, the Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, co-chaired the Commission:

"We must acknowledge that much work – previously seen as low-skilled and poorly rewarded – is in fact essential to our collective wellbeing and as our society changes, we must recognise that our prosperity is interlinked with the wellbeing and prosperity of our fellow citizens. If the economy exists for the benefit of society at large then we must ensure that it works for the benefit of society. Not doing so would increase poverty, deprivation, inequality, and poor health and would be a shameful legacy.

"This report calls for a strategy to take account of longer term structural changes to the economy that have been accelerated by the pandemic where people's jobs have been replaced by digital technologies – for instance robots in manufacturing or artificial intelligence in other sectors. It suggests ways to manage the huge shifts that have been accelerated by the pandemic and which threaten people's livelihoods and ultimately their health and wellbeing.

"It is a manifesto for change. It puts people at the heart of our response to Covid-19 and the shifts in our economy – and should be required reading for policy makers."

Background to the recommendations:

A poll conducted by Opinium

(<https://www.ifow.org/news/2020/6/8/press-release-poll-shows-resilience-at-risk-among-uk-workforce>) for the Institute for the Future of Work in May demonstrated the importance of preparing workers for change and supporting them to boost resilience in the face of transformation to their working lives.

Concentrating on good jobs, better work and well-being will increase people's resilience and sense of security.

The report analyses five trends with implications for good jobs and for pay, terms and the quality of work across the country. These include:

- Accelerated technology adoption and automation

The report found that the accelerated pace of technology adoption and automation can support growth, new jobs and boost the economy but its adverse effects are unevenly spread. This Catch-22 cannot be ignored

and needs to be actively addressed by policy makers.

- Exacerbating inequalities of work and health

The pandemic has revealed inequalities faced by people during the pandemic – people in the lowest paid jobs are less likely to be able to work from home or to self-isolate. The report highlights how people from BAME backgrounds have a four times higher mortality rate than white people from Covid-19.

- Re-evaluation of the importance of place: the geography of work

Local authorities working with communities have created strategies to manage challenges thrown up for businesses by the pandemic. These localised responses will be increasingly needed to manage the shifts we are seeing for people, their employers, and local government such as less need for large offices, the ability to work remotely, and the virulence of the pandemic in urban areas.

- Accelerating transition for workers

The pace of automation is expected to increase in response to Covid-19. People will increasingly seek work in industries which are more secure or where there is work. Government will need to respond by empowering local authorities to innovate and pilot new policies.

- The march of the digital giants

The pandemic has concentrated market power increasingly in the hands of the digital giants which have been essential services for the public in lockdown. Tech firms are likely to be setting downward trends in pay and conditions that are replicated elsewhere. Regulation should mitigate the effects of this concentration of power in the interests of the people and communities who work for them and use them.

Future of Work Commissioners:

- Professor Sir Chris Pissarides, Regius Professor of Economics at LSE and Nobel Laureate, Co-Founder of IFOW

- Dr Anne-Marie Imafidon MBE, Founder of Stemettes

- Naomi Climer CBE, Co-Founder of IFOW, technologist and engineer

- Lord Robin Hodgson, Conservative peer and Chair of IFOW Founder's Circle

- Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director of UCL Institute of Health Equity

- Helen Mountfield QC, Principal of Mansfield College Oxford, Co-Chair of FWC

- Anna Thomas, Director and Co-Founder of IFOW, Co-Chair of FWC

- John Evans, Former General Secretary Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD

- Dr Daniel Susskind, Economist and author, Balliol College, University of Oxford

- Lord Jim Knight, Chief Education Officer of TES Global

- Professor Michael Sandel, Professor of Government Theory, Harvard University Law School, BBC's Public Philosopher

- Professor Michael Osborne, Professor in Machine Learning and Co-Director of Oxford Martin Programme on Technology and Employment

- Dr Nadia Danhash, CEO of RCAInnovation

- Kate Bell, Head of Rights and Economics at TUC

- Val Cooke, Retail Worker and Trade Union Representative, USDAW

- Tabitha Goldstaub, Co-Founder of Cog X and Chair of the AI Council

Notes to editors:

The report: A better future for work: the world after Covid-19 can be downloaded here

([https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aa269bbd274cb0df1e696c8/t/5ee731120714690a55c503dc/1592209690153/A+better](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5aa269bbd274cb0df1e696c8/t/5ee731120714690a55c503dc/1592209690153/A+better+future+for+work.pdf)

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The Institute for the Future of Work (IFOW) develops practical ways to improve the value, shape and experience of work. The institute advances understanding of the transformation of work and our working lives by technology. It brings together people with different perspectives and experiences to enrich understanding and ideas. And through this collaborative approach, IFOW aims to meet challenges with innovative, practical and inclusive solutions. It aims to shape policy and decision-making in government and business to share and implement approaches that put people first and help them thrive.

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