

RECLAIMING WOMEN'S TIME
ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN A WORLD
WITH LESS WORK

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SUMMARY

This short paper commissioned by the Women's Budget Group's Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy assesses the prospects for gender equality in the UK in the pursuit of reduced working hours.

Working time is becoming a salient political issue in the UK.¹ The stubbornness of a low-wage, low-productivity economy² and growing care demands are prompting progressive policy-makers to critically assess the amount of time spent in paid work.

Forecasts for automation and technology-related unemployment have injected this agenda with urgency: estimates from the ONS suggest that 7.4% of jobs are at high risk of automation, with the majority of these being carried out by women.³ This presents the need for a large-scale reorganisation of work that UK trade unions such as Unite, CSEU, CWU, TUC are responding to by backing demands for a reduced working week as a proactive strategy to manage the impact.

Though not a silver bullet to solve gender inequality, moving towards a shorter working week as the 'norm' could help to change attitudes about gender roles, promote more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, and help recognise the value of 'feminised' labour in the core economy.⁴ In this paper, we argue that reducing the working week (with incomes largely maintained or improved) across an entire workforce, sector or economy at large could be a more transformative approach than pursuing improved flexibility alone – which has been a major progressive aim when addressing gender and the labour market in recent decades.

The challenge: how do we ensure reducing paid work time boosts gender equality?

Reducing paid working time across the economy whilst maintaining incomes presents an opportunity to recalibrate the sharing of unpaid, reproductive labour such as caring for children and relatives, as well as housework.⁵ It also has potential

¹ Stronge, W. & Harper, A. 2018. 'The Shorter Working Week: A Radical And Pragmatic Proposal' Autonomy and 4 Day Week Campaign. Available at: <http://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Shorter-working-week-docV5.pdf> and Harper, A. & Martin, A. 2018. NEF 'Achieving a Shorter Working Week in the UK' <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/Working-week-briefing.pdf>

² Stirling, A. 2019. NEF. 'Time for Demand'. Available at: https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF_PRODUCTIVITY-2019.pdf

³ The Probability of Automation in England - Office for National Statistics," accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/theprobabilityofautomationinengland/2011and2017>. Also, IPPR (2019), 'Women, Automation and the Future of Work:' For every seven men who work in occupations that are most threatened by technological change— that is, that have a 90 percent or higher likelihood of being eliminated by technology— there are 10 women in such jobs. Available at: <https://iwpr.org/publications/women-automation-future-work-exec-summary/>

⁴ Coote, A. 2010. 'The Great Transition: Social justice and the core economy.' London: New Economics Foundation.

⁵ Anna Coote and Jacob Mohun Himmelweit 'The Problem that has No Name' (2013) https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/Soundings_article.pdf

to increase the economic standing of women through providing opportunities for balancing senior professional positions in employment with commitments outside paid work - both by enabling more women with caring responsibilities to hold such positions but also by enabling men who hold such positions to undertake greater caring responsibilities.

But what will be the impacts on gender equality of a world with less paid work – either through a societal choice or economic necessity? Is there a version of this story that doesn't result in more low-paid, insecure work for women where benefits of increased automation are captured by others?

Beset by the triple shift of paid work, domestic work, and emotional work/labour, fostering more autonomy over working time for women is a complex endeavour. Women, and in particular women of colour and migrant women, are already at the sharp end of poor and insecure labour market conditions.⁶ Ensuring they benefit from a wider move to reduce working time across the economy means ensuring that exploitative employment practices of firms that rely on short-term, casual and outsourced contracts are stamped out and that we better value reproductive work, such as care work, in all its forms. Currently women are disproportionately plugging the gaps of a diminishing social security system through unpaid labour.⁷

We make recommendations for how government and employers themselves can ensure gender equality is enhanced, not threatened, whilst seeking to reduce (paid) working hours, including:

- **Redistribute wages within companies to fund a reduction in working time.** Large firms could be incentivised to initiate programmes of voluntary working hours reductions for those in management and senior positions, with the corresponding reduction in salary and wage bill savings ring-fenced to spend on improving work-life balance, pay, and security of lower paid employees;
- **Increase the sharing of paid and unpaid work over the course of a lifetime across all genders,** with increased statutory annual leave, improved parental leave, focussing on paternity leave in particular – for example through establishing a 'use it or lose it' model of paternity leave;⁸
- **Give greater value to unpaid reproductive work** by replacing the personal allowance with a cash payment in the region of £48 per week that extends to people outside of formal employment, alongside increasing child benefit and making childcare universally accessible.⁹

⁶ NEF analysis for Living Wage Foundation Report 'Living Hours: providing security of hours alongside a real living wage' 2018. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/Living%20Hours%20Final%20Report%20110619.pdf>

⁷ <https://wbg.org.uk/resources/the-impact-of-austerity-on-women/>

⁸ Rehel, E. (2014) 'When Dad Stays Home Too: Paternity Leave, Gender, and Parenting', *Gender and Society* 28:1 pp.110-132.

⁹ NEF 2019. 'Nothing personal'

CONTEXT: WOMEN HAVE LITTLE AUTONOMY OVER THEIR TIME

For most women, work doesn't stop when you clock off

In the UK we work the longest full-time hours in the EU.¹⁰ Women bear the brunt of this culture of overwork, as paid work is combined with the unpaid labour they disproportionately carry out.¹¹

As the number of women entering formal employment began to rise in the 1970s and 80s, feminist sociologists drew attention to the 'second shift'¹² of unpaid, unrecognised domestic labour. The contemporary labour market remains broadly unchanged; with 60% more unpaid work being carried out by women than by men.¹³ In 2015, for instance, women provided 74% of all childcare time in the UK and spent, on average, 26 hours a week doing unpaid domestic labour, including cooking and cleaning. Men, in comparison, spend 16 hours per week on unpaid work.¹⁴ More recently, feminist writers have discussed the 'third shift' of 'emotional work' performed both in the home¹⁵ and within paid roles themselves,¹⁶ which disproportionately falls on women, but is unrecognised and without remuneration. As Anna Coote and Jacob Mohun Himmelweit comment:

"Caring responsibilities leave many women with too little time to participate in the labour market in ways that are considered 'normal' - that is, full-time work, comprising around forty hours a week. In the UK, jobs involving less than thirty-five hours a week are

Replacing the personal tax allowance with a weekly national allowance' Available at:

<https://neweconomics.org/2019/03/nothing-personal>

¹⁰ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/british-workers-putting-longest-hours-eu-tuc-analysis-finds> and Eurostat Database (full-time employee hours Q4 2018)

¹¹ ONS (2016), 'Women shoulder the responsibility of unpaid work'. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

¹² A term coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in her 1989 [book of the same name](#)

¹³ ONS (2016), 'Women shoulder the responsibility of unpaid work'. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

¹⁴ ONS (2016), 'Women shoulder the responsibility of unpaid work'. Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/womenshouldertheresponsibilityofunpaidwork/2016-11-10>

¹⁵ Duncombe and Marsden (1995)

¹⁶ Hochschild (1979) distinguishes between 'emotion work' performed in the home, and 'emotional labour' demanded by paid roles themselves.

technically 'part-time' and routinely disadvantaged in terms of pay, status and advancement."¹⁷

Helen Hester highlights the problematic nature of the narrow definition of 'work' in mainstream economic thought, which frequently obfuscates this invisibilised labour, arguing that "analysts too often fail to understand the systemic and integrated character of our present troubles – how the crisis of "work"¹⁸ is also a crisis of the "home", and vice versa."¹⁹ Hester draws attention to the social reproduction which lies at the heart of this unpaid labour: nurturing future workers; regenerating the current work force; and maintaining those who cannot work. For women taking on the burden of this reproductive labour the boundaries of "work" are consistently blurred, not least as unpaid work seeps into paid roles²⁰ through the demands of emotional labour. Women workers are left with little time and space for rest and recuperation for themselves. Unsurprisingly, this culture of overwork has detrimental impacts for health and wellbeing,²¹ which are felt particularly acutely by women.²²

The world of paid work was not designed for us

The deep inequality in how paid and unpaid working time is currently shared is attributable to the fact that women have largely been incorporated into a world of work designed by men.²³ Despite the acknowledgement of a need for altered working patterns to accommodate unpaid labour alongside paid work, Deborah Hargreaves argues that "there has been little fundamental structural change" to working patterns in wealthy countries over the last 100 years due to the lack of power women wield in workplace decision making.²⁴ This power imbalance, alongside social norms and expectations and the lower salaries of women, has meant that women are more likely than men to leave the labour market when caring responsibilities increase.

¹⁷ Anna Coote and Jacob Mohun Himmelweit 'The Problem that has No Name' (2013)

https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/Soundings_article.pdf

¹⁸ Hester points to the "rise of low-wage, temporary and precarious employment," "dramatic increase in income inequality," automation, and the "surplus population that has neither the means to survive outside of capitalism nor the jobs to survive within it" as being trends in the labour market which constitute a "crisis of work."

¹⁹ Hester, H & Srnicek, N. (2018) <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BBVA-OpenMind-Helen-Hester-Nick-Srnicek-The-Crisis-of-Social-Reproduction-and-the-End-of-Work.pdf> p3

²⁰ There are numerous studies into women's emotional labour in the paid workplace. See Arlie Russell Hochschild's '[The Managed Heart](#)' (1989) and this 2005 study by the American Psychological Society of altruistic behaviour in the workplace: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-05102-002>

²¹ Sparks, Kate et al. 2011. 'The Effects of Hours of Work on Health: A Meta Analytic Review', in Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, vol. 70, no. 4, pp. 391-408.

²² Stronge, W. & Harper, A. 2018. 'The Shorter Working Week: A Radical And Pragmatic Proposal' Autonomy and 4 Day Week Campaign. Available at: <http://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Shorter-working-week-docV5.pdf> and Health and Safety Executive. 2017. 'Work related stress, anxiety and depression statistics in Great Britain 2017'. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf?pdf=stress>

²³ Hargreaves, D. (2019) Women at work designing a company fit for the future

<https://www.friendsprovidentfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Women-at-work-Download.pdf>

²⁴ Ibid.

In the UK, average full-time hours declined steadily between the Second World War and 1980s, but over the last 40 years, they remained comparatively static.²⁵ Over the same period there has been a sharp increase in women entering the paid workforce.²⁶ A major policy intervention which has enabled this has been “flexibility” over hours. Flexibility continues to be a major progressive policy ambition²⁷ to ensure work is accessible and practical for both women and men seeking to balance paid work commitments with unpaid work such as caring for children, relatives and domestic work.

But flexible working can only go so far. For women on low incomes and in poor quality work, flexibility is often one-sided,²⁸ benefiting the employer and resulting in insecurity and unpredictability for the worker. Women, particularly migrant women, are overrepresented in forms of insecure work like zero-hours contracts,²⁹ which are often low-paid with poor working conditions and devoid of control over working time. Women are twice as likely to be stuck in jobs with low hours and low pay, unable to make ends meet.³⁰ 9% of women in employment are in jobs that pay less than the real Living Wage and are based on non-permanent agreements such as zero hours, casual and agency contracts, compared with 7% of men.³¹

Even when work-time flexibility is opted for in formal employment – with the agency in this choice questionable as women often have little alternative - it yields mixed results for the economic standing of women overall. Where it has been crucial to opening up paid working opportunities for women, it has also played a role in the proliferation of women reducing their paid working hours whilst their male counterparts continue to work full time, affording men the space and support to progress in their careers more effectively³² whilst women shoulder the burden of unpaid labour. One only has to look at the gender pay gap³³ to see that flexible

25 NEF 2019: average weekly hours fell faster between 1946 and 1979 than post-1980

<https://neweconomics.org/2019/03/average-weekly-hours-fell-faster-between-1946-and-1979-than-post-1980>

26 IFS (2018). The rise and rise of women's employment in the UK <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/BN234.pdf> p3.

27 The Labour Party recently announced a [new policy giving everyone the right to flexible hours from their first day in a job.](#)

Source: BBC News (Feb 2019): 'Flexible Working: Labour Pledges New Employee Rights

28 Low Pay Commission Report 2018

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765193/LPC_Response_to_the_Government_on_one-sided_flexibility.pdf

29 ONS 2018. Contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/contractsthatdonotguaranteeaminimumnumberofhours/april2018#ons-business-survey>

30 NEF analysis for Living Wage Foundation Report 'Living Hours: providing security of hours alongside a real living wage' 2018. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/Living%20Hours%20Final%20Report%20110619.pdf>

31 NEF analysis based on Labour Force Survey Data Q4 2018.

32 IFS 2019 'The gender pay gap in the UK: children and experience in work' <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/10356>

33 TUC 2018. Gender pay gap means women work for free for more than two months of the year, says the TUC <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/gender-pay-gap-means-women-work-free-more-two-months-year-says-tuc>

working alone has not led to greater gender equality.

Taking matters into our own hands: self-employment in the pursuit of autonomy

Increasingly women are turning to self-employment³⁴ in the pursuit of more autonomy over their time. The growth in self-employment across the economy prompts us to re-examine the very nature of work as the temporal and spatial boundary defining when we are working and when we are not recedes. Even in self-employment, agency over working hours is predetermined by income levels, gender, ethnicity and migration status, amongst other factors.³⁵ Workers with insecure migration status and women of colour are disproportionately forced into forms of work with low pay and little guarantee over hours,³⁶ due to racial discrimination in the employment market³⁷ which is both a cause and consequence of socio-economic inequality, and its 'transmission across generations'.³⁸

Self-employed roles often necessitate hours of travel between jobs which are unremunerated. For migrant women in female-dominated roles such as cleaning and caring in the gig economy,³⁹ they are required to balance unpaid labour, the demands of multiple low-paid roles, and unpaid time travelling between jobs,⁴⁰ which they often have to cover the costs of themselves: an 'insecurity premium'.⁴¹ Gig economy work rarely benefits from gains in rights that set boundaries around working time, as many workers are denied basic rights such as statutory sick pay, maternity leave, and holiday pay. If progress is to be made in supporting women to gain greater control over their working hours, it is essential that marginalised women are foregrounded and rights such as paid parental and sick leave apply to gig-economy, casual and other insecure workers alike.

³⁴ ONS Trends in self-employment in the UK (2018)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/trendsinsselfemploymentintheuk/2018-02-07> and IPSE 2017 'Exploring the UK Freelance Workforce in 2016.' "There has been a larger increase in the number of female freelancers than males between 2008 and 2016 – 55 per cent and 36 per cent respectively."

³⁵ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12586.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/bme-workers-far-more-likely-be-trapped-insecure-work-tuc-analysis-reveals>

³⁷ Li, Yaojun. 2017 'Persisting Disadvantages: Barriers to Ethnic Social Mobility in the UK' p9. in 'Minority Report Race and Class in post-Brexit Britain.' Class and Runnymede Trust. Available at http://classonline.org.uk/docs/Race_and_Class_Post-Brexit_Perspectives_report_v5.pdf

³⁸ Khan, O. 2017. 'Race and Class: From Analysis to What Next' in 'Minority Report Race and Class in post-Brexit Britain.' Class and Runnymede Trust. http://classonline.org.uk/docs/Race_and_Class_Post-Brexit_Perspectives_report_v5.pdf p25

³⁹ <https://connectpa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Women-and-Work-APPG-Annual-Report-2017-LR.pdf>

⁴⁰ Austerity has compounded the time and expense of public transportation, with women disproportionately suffering the effects – UNISON research showed how cuts to bus services have impacted on women more than men:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/06/On-line-Catalogue224222.pdf>

⁴¹ Term used by Martha Crawford, Living Wage Foundation in discussions with authors. 2019.

Increasingly, women are being pushed⁴² towards the insecure, in some cases criminalised,⁴³ economy, with one driver being the absence of an alternative with sufficient control and good working conditions.⁴⁴ Women forced to juggle informal work of this nature, have little autonomy over their time, which is likely to be further compounded by the increasing amounts of unpaid care work being taken on by women due to the cuts to social security since 2010.^{45,46}

Automation: a threat or opportunity for women in work?

Automation could and should bring gains for workers in the form of reduced working hours. However, as NEF has evidenced, since 1980 productivity gains aided by new technology have not translated into substantially better pay or more time off for workers.⁴⁷ In particular women, who have already experienced substantial automation of areas of work that they previously carried out such as in retail and customer services roles, have in many cases seen a devaluation of the remaining jobs – where roles are still among the lowest paid⁴⁸ - rather than receiving any material gain in terms of higher pay or shorter paid hours as a result of the improved productivity.

This trend risks repeating itself. Recent analysis by IPPR shows that “twice as many women as men work in occupations with a high potential for automation (9 per cent compared to 4 per cent of men), and that 64 per cent of jobs in these occupations are held by women. Migrants, and lone parents (typically women) are more likely to hold jobs with high automation potential.”⁴⁹ However women are also present in high numbers in caring and relational forms of work that face a lower risk from automation than other sectors, such as social care.⁵⁰ ‘The median pay of a care worker in the independent sector is £7.50 per hour,⁵¹ well below the real Living Wage,⁵² demonstrating that even in women-dominated sectors where society values

⁴² TUC (2017) ‘The Gig is Up:’ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/gig>

⁴³ English Collective of Prostitutes (2019) ‘What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Job Like This?’ <http://prostitutescollective.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Nice-Girl-report.pdf>

⁴⁴ The Guardian (July 2019): ‘How can the Tories’ moralising report on prostitution completely ignore austerity?’ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/29/how-can-the-tories-moralising-report-on-prostitution-completely-ignore-austerity>

⁴⁵ TUC 2011 ‘Women and the Cuts Toolkit:’ “Women are the majority of those providing unpaid care so are likely to be the ones picking up the pieces as social care services are cut” <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tucfiles/womenandcutstoolkit.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Development/IEDebt/WomenAusterity/WBG.pdf>

⁴⁷ “Today, and despite far higher GDP compared with 2007 – whether in aggregate, per capita or person in work – workers still earn £25 less per week on average than their equivalents did in 2008:’ Stirling, A. 2019. NEF ‘Time for Demand.’ Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/08/time-for-demand>

⁴⁸ Fabian Society and TUC, 2018. ‘Pathways to Progression improving progression rates for young retail workers’ Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Pathways%20to%20Progression%20report%20FINAL2.pdf>

⁴⁹ <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/women-automation-and-equality>

⁵⁰ PWC (2018). ‘Will robots really steal our jobs?’ Retrieved from: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/economicservices/assets/international-impact-of-automation-feb-2018.pdf>

⁵¹ National Audit Office. (2018). The adult social care workforce in England. Retrieved from: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The-adult-social-care-workforce-in-England.pdf>

⁵² Living Wage Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

human contact over and above the potential role for technology, this value is not reflected in higher pay.

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES: ASSESSING THE DYNAMICS OF WORKING TIME REDUCTION

As interest in the working time agenda builds among trade unions, businesses and the general public, we are examining the policies needed to maximise progress towards gender equality when reducing working time, taking unpaid work into consideration. The ways in which a shorter working week could benefit gender equality are numerous, as it leads to:

- **Creating the conditions for a more equal distribution of (unpaid) care work** as men have more time outside of paid employment in order to carry out this labour;
- **A more equal distribution of secure, well-paid employment:** as more men take on more unpaid work, this could prompt more opportunities for secure and well-paid employment to open up for women;
- **The stigma around part time work being lost:** as 'part-time' becomes the new 'full time' women are less likely to be penalised for needing to work reduced hours;
- **Improved health and wellbeing of women:** women are currently bearing the brunt of ill-health caused by overwork⁵³ which is unsurprising in a context where 'work' extends far beyond paid employment for women.

There are, however, risks that those who stand to benefit most from working time reduction are those who are already in more privileged, high-status and high-paid positions. There are a number of risks to mitigate against:

- **Women are overrepresented in insecure work** which is uncontracted and therefore will not benefit from a reduction in contracted hours;
- **A reduction in paid working hours may have little impact upon unpaid domestic labour, care work and emotional work** as this requires a corresponding cultural shift. The fact that women currently take on the majority of unpaid work means that a widespread reduction in full-time, paid working hours could result in women simply taking on more unpaid domestic and care work at home. A corresponding disruption of the culture determining how men and women share unpaid labour is essential;
- **A reduction in working hours may have no positive impact on the invisible work women do *within* employment.** Even within "good jobs", women tend

⁵³ Health and Safety Executive. 2017. 'Work related stress, anxiety and depression statistics in Great Britain 2017'. Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/stress.pdf?pdf=stress>

to do more “invisible labour,” such as support and advice for junior staff, workplace ‘housework’, and filling in for colleagues, which inhibit progression into more senior and high-status roles.⁵⁴ This has added racialised dimensions for women of colour.⁵⁵ If women continue to take on a larger portion of invisible work, their time spent on activities that may progress their career will continue to be compromised, leading to persistent inequalities in mobility and progression.

The precise interaction of these countervailing forces in practice (towards and against gender equality at work) is difficult to predict and will depend on how shorter working week policies are implemented and the shape of the accompanying wider policy landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS A FAIRER SHARING OF WORK AND TIME

Given the disparities in experiences of work, how can we ensure a reduction in paid work time achieves greater gender equality? Here we lay out four recommendations for government and employer interventions to reduce work-time in a way that stands to improve equality between genders, and improve the sharing of paid and unpaid work between genders in the round.

1. Disrupt employer overreliance on insecure and low-paid contracts

Given that women are overrepresented in some forms of low paid, insecure work,⁵⁶ an important first step in reducing working time in a way that enhances gender equality, is to actively protect and improve the limits to working time that are already in place. This includes enforcing employment rights such as a minimum wage, maximum working hours, and holiday and sick pay for all workers, including gig economy and other precarious workers.

There are a number of direct policy levers for improving existing “time rights” in this way such as banning zero-hours contracts, for which there is a precedent in

⁵⁴ Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group, 2017. ‘The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments’, *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* Vol. 39, Special Issue 39: Diversity & Social Justice in Higher Education (2017), pp. 228-245 and Harvard Business Review (July 2018) ‘Why women volunteer for tasks that don’t lead to promotions.’

<https://hbr.org/2018/07/why-women-volunteer-for-tasks-that-dont-lead-to-promotions>

⁵⁵ Harvey Wingfield, A., Skeete Alston, R. 2013. ‘Maintaining Hierarchies in Predominantly White Organizations: A Theory of Racial Tasks.’

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764213503329?journalCode=absb>

⁵⁶ NEF analysis for Living Wage Foundation Report ‘Living Hours: providing security of hours alongside a real living wage’ 2018. Available at: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/sites/default/files/Living%20Hours%20Final%20Report%20110619.pdf>

Ireland,⁵⁷ and support in the UK from the TUC.⁵⁸ The Living Wage Foundation have put forward a new voluntary benchmark, “Living Hours”, that insists that, where the worker requests it, firms replace zero-hours contracts with contracts with a minimum of 16 hours, reflecting actual hours worked.⁵⁹ To qualify for the benchmark, employers must also pay the independently calculated “real Living Wage”.

Below we make a recommendation for improving work-life balance in a firm, whilst improving working conditions for those on low paid, insecure contracts.

2. Redistribute wages within companies to fund improvements to work-life balance

According to a recent survey, almost half (46%) of UK employers in larger businesses and the public sector believe that offering a four-day working week will be important for future business success.⁶⁰ It found that where employers already allow flexible working that includes a four-day working week, it is mainly available to staff in management positions.⁶¹

Below we outline a model for employers to improve work-life balance of their workforce, whilst also addressing low pay and security over working hours. These working-time changes could be self-funded by businesses, but we welcome the views of the Commission on whether there is a role for government legislation to catalyse and institutionalise these changes, for example through public grants or corporation tax reductions/penalties provided to firms adhering to improved standards.

Employers enable senior level executives and employees in the highest pay brackets to take voluntary hours reductions with a corresponding reduction in pay, with the wage bill saving ring-fenced for improving incomes, security and reducing hours of lower paid staff (where women are likely to be overrepresented). There are various ways that these improvements to working conditions of lower paid staff could be achieved, whether aiming for “Living Hours” status or otherwise, with each company negotiating with its workforce, via the union where there is one, to establish a redistributive model. The changes could include:

⁵⁷ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/ban-zero-hours-contracts-victory-irish-unions>

⁵⁸ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/blogs/zero-hours-contracts-time-stamp-them-out>

⁵⁹ <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/news/living-hours-campaign-launched-tackle-work-insecurity>

⁶⁰ Henley Business School. ‘Four-day week pays off for UK’ 3rd July 2019. Available at:

<https://www.henley.ac.uk/news/2019/four-day-week-pays-off-for-uk-business>

⁶¹ Ibid.

- Where lower paid staff are working part-time, the fund could be used to boost their wage proportionate to a move from a full-time week to a reduced working week, meaning for example, that someone working 0.8 of a full-time post would receive the equivalent pay of a full-time role.
- Lower paid staff who are in full-time positions would be moved onto a reduced working week *with their pay maintained*, and could be given the option of distributing these hours as they choose.
- The fund could also be used to pay for other in-work changes that would support a healthier work-life balance which could include bringing outsourced workers “in-house” so they benefit from in work benefits such as a paid leave, replacing casual or zero-hours contracts with secure, permanent contracts that reflect actual hours worked; and/or an increase in annual and/or parental leave for all employees.

2. Increase the sharing of paid and unpaid work between genders over the course of a lifetime with increased statutory annual leave and improved parental leave policies

UK employees are entitled to among the fewest paid days off from work among advanced economies.⁶² We also are among the worst performing EU states on improvements to gender equality in recent years.⁶³ NEF has argued that, at an aggregate level, lowering standard working hours across the economy can be expected to increase demand, and in turn lead to a redistribution of paid time from those in full-time employment to those otherwise underemployed.⁶⁴ As such, a public policy aim should be to reduce working hours across the board by:

- Increasing annual leave – NEF has recommended that this is achieved through setting up an external body to make independent recommendations to government on regular increases to annual statutory leave entitlement, on a similar basis to the work currently done by the Low Pay Commission on minimum wages.⁶⁵ One result at an aggregate level, would be a reallocation of working hours from those in full-time employment to others, raising disposable incomes for those out of work or on low incomes.⁶⁶
- In order to recalibrate the balance between unpaid time spent caring and time spent in paid work over a lifetime across genders, we support the recommendation made by a number of organisations, including Autonomy

⁶² http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_235155.pdf and <http://www.qppstudio.net/publicholidays.htm>

⁶³ 2018 Report on equality between women and men in the EU

⁶⁴ Stirling, A. 2019. NEF. ‘Time for Demand’. Available at: https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF_PRODUCTIVITY-2019.pdf

⁶⁵ Stirling, A. 2019. NEF. ‘Time for Demand’. Available at: https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/NEF_PRODUCTIVITY-2019.pdf

⁶⁶ <https://neweconomics.org/2019/04/tackling-the-productivity-puzzle>

and IPPR, to increase statutory parental leave in a way that catalyses a culture shift in the gender sharing of caring responsibilities through focussing first on extending paid paternity leave with a “use it or lose” it feature reserved for fathers.⁶⁷

In addition to expanding parental leave, employers can further support the objective of sharing paid and unpaid time between genders by:

- Enabling more time out of work for employees to take up caring responsibilities throughout their working lives by allowing them to choose their preferred balance between improved wages or more time off during annual pay award processes. This approach works best in sectors where employment standards and pay are already good, a live example being among manufacturing workers in Germany where major union IG Metall won the right for the largely male workforce to reduce their hours to take up caring responsibilities. Two forms of working time reduction were agreed:
 - From 2019, a right for all full-time workers with over two years of service to reduce their weekly working hours to 28 hours for between 6 and 24 months – albeit with a reduction in pay. After this period is completed, workers have the right to repeat the process.
 - The option to take either an extra pay increase or receive an additional eight days of leave – where the monetary value of the extra days off is higher than the cash value of the wage increase. So far, the majority of workers have chosen to have the extra days off, over the cash. This option is only available for workers with caring responsibilities, or for those who work in shifts.⁶⁸

3. Better value unpaid and underpaid reproductive work with an ample social safety net and universal childcare

As we have outlined previously in this paper, women have been negatively impacted by the cuts to welfare to a far greater extent than men. There are certain improvements to welfare that stand to benefit women and improve economic equality between genders, such as enhancing child benefit and funding for childcare, and resisting the consolidation of family benefits being paid into a single bank account where the account holder is male (as is the case with Universal Credit payments). Below we outline the mechanisms for improved support for, and value of, the reproductive work disproportionately shouldered by women:

- NEF has recommended that the government introduce a “Weekly National Allowance” through abolishing the personal allowance of income tax and

⁶⁷ <http://autonomy.work/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Shorter-working-week-final.pdf> p55 and IPPR <https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/working-dads-need-a-paid-a-daddy-monthly>

⁶⁸ IG Metall (2018) New Collective Agreement for the workers of the German Metal and Electrical Industries. Found online at: <http://industriall-europe.eu/database/upload/pdf/IG%20Metall%20BW%20Feb%202018.pdf>.

replacing it with a weekly cash payment of £48.⁶⁹ Eligibility for the payment would be extended to everyone over the age of 18 with a UK National Insurance number. Introducing a universal payment that supplements, not substitutes, benefits in this way would lift 200,000 families out of poverty and redistribute income tax breaks to benefit people outside of paid work – the majority of whom are women. Alongside this, we recommend restoring child benefit to its real terms 2010/11 value (in other words, reverse the effect of freezes to child benefit since 2010).⁷⁰

- We propose that free, high quality childcare should be available for everyone. In 2014 NEF illustrated that a shorter working week of 30-hours could reduce the cost of providing full-time formal childcare for all children aged 6 to 36 months in England to £3,553 per child per year (from £6,390 for 40 hours).⁷¹ If childcare workers were paid a Living Wage (adjusted upwards to take account of their reduced working hours), this cost would be £5,111; and if childcare workers were paid at the same level as primary school teachers, it would be £10,041.⁷²
- As a step towards universal provision of free childcare, we propose shifting childcare funding from the supply side (parents) to the demand side (nurseries) ensuring that the working conditions of nursery workers, the majority of whom are women, are lifted alongside improvements to affordability for parents.⁷³ As we have evidenced, the government's 30 "free hours" policy had the reverse impact of incentivising low pay for the majority women workforce.⁷⁴ In addition, NEF is developing a model of low-cost childcare in South London where parents and nursery professionals empowered through democratic governance and ownership.⁷⁵
- An action employers can take in this regard is to offer subsidised or free on-site childcare to save time for working parents who would otherwise face a "double commute" between home, childcare and work. This could take the form of embedding workplace crèches within buildings.

⁶⁹ NEF 2019. 'Nothing personal

Replacing the personal tax allowance with a weekly national allowance' Available at: <https://neweconomics.org/2019/03/nothing-personal>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ NEF 'The Value of Childcare' 2014 <https://neweconomics.org/2014/02/the-value-of-childcare>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ NEF forthcoming paper, 2019.

⁷⁴ <https://neweconomics.org/2017/09/revealed-governments-30hr-childcare-scheme-force-nursery-workers-wages>

⁷⁵ NEF (2019): 'Parent-led childcare:' <https://neweconomics.org/campaigns/parent-led-childcare>. And NEF 'Co-produced childcare: An alternative route to affordable, high quality provision in the UK?' https://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/c142e402b391ed2097_z7m6ibzpa.pdf