



Summit on the Future of Work and Levelling Up

Speakers

Lee Rowley M.P.,
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
(Minister for Industry), BEIS, and
Minister with responsibility for
Professional and Business Services

Amanda Fisher,
Chief Executive Officer, Amey

John Aldred,
Industry Director - Business &
Professional Services, Barclays

Carolyn Hicks,
Director, Consulting, Deloitte

Nicola Ihnatowicz,
Partner, Trowers & Hamblins LLP

Rachel Jones,
Director of Talent, Learning,
Engagement, Cultural Change,
Wellbeing, Inclusion, Performance, and
Organisational Design/Development,
Sodexo

Andy Hepworth,
Transformation Director,
Sopra Steria

Emily Davies,
Director of Social Impact, Amey

In March 2022, the BSA partnered with BSA member Barclays to discuss the Future of Work and Levelling Up at a virtual Summit.

Since 2020, changes in the economy, including moves to hybrid and flexible working, have accelerated. This Summit explored the implications of these changes for service and infrastructure providers, as well as how the business services sector and government can ensure that this new economy contributes to Levelling Up ambitions across all socioeconomic groups.

John Aldred, Industry Director for Business and Professional Services at Barclays, chaired the Summit. He began by introducing the BEIS Minister for Industry and Minister with responsibility for Professional and Business Services, Lee Rowley M.P.

Keynote Speech - Lee Rowley M.P.

Lee Rowley M.P. thanked the sector for its work during the pandemic before exploring what the changing nature of work meant for industry.

The Minister emphasised the Government's commitment to Levelling Up and, given the proportion and breadth of the population employed by the sector across the UK, the contribution BSA members could make to this agenda and, linked to that, to improving productivity.

To overcome challenges and seize opportunities related to the Future of Work, business and government must align objectives concerning productivity and skills gaps. Mr Rowley expanded on the Government's 12 Levelling Up missions and emphasised how different areas could work together.

The Changing Nature of Work and Implications for Levelling Up

Carolyn Hicks and Nicola Ihnatowicz, from Deloitte and Trowers and Hamblins LLP respectively, spoke about the implications of changes to the nature of work on Levelling Up.

Carolyn began by looking at how the pandemic, the Great Resignation and recent technological advancements presented opportunities to organisations. Post-pandemic, competition for hires and wage expectations have increased as employees demand flexibility. As such, 'whole-office mentalities' and divisions of homeworking and office presenteeism are over-simplistic. The conversation now focusses on the more complex, hybrid working environments where the needs of the business, team, and individual must be balanced. With regards to Levelling Up, virtual working not only allows organisations to broaden recruitment nets, but we have also seen that, with leaving home no longer strictly necessary in order to achieve career success, this has contributed to improved employee wellbeing, growing home economies and wider Net Zero efforts.

Carolyn described how private-public sector collaboration could overcome longstanding regional inequalities in finances, wellbeing and life expectancy. On skills shortages - a point raised by the Minister previously - Carolyn demonstrated that businesses collaborating with the education sector could drive a pipeline of skills demand, reducing regional shortages.

Nicola Ichnatowicz then outlined the differences that exist in new patterns of work. Regional, occupational and social variations in working from home, including differential pressures for disabled employees, younger workers and those with caring responsibilities, were highlighted over the pandemic. Nevertheless, work is still considered a 'place' for a large proportion of workers whose roles require physical proximity. Looking forwards, additional flexibilities for all employees means that there is an opportunity for employers to be more inclusive.

Nicola echoed the opportunities outlined by Carolyn for employers to recruit from much wider talent pools, as well as the contributions to local spending power of remote working employees. Nicola also explored the implications of homeworking for employers (who retain responsibility for the health and safety of remote employees) including insurance, cost and equality. She invited employers to reconsider how, and why, employees should be brought together, and to position these rationales against cost, time and skills.

Opening comments from Carolyn and Nicola were followed by a panel discussion focussed on how moves to homeworking impact smaller businesses and highlighted the resilience of younger workers.

The Role of Service and Infrastructure Providers

Amanda Fisher, CEO of Amey, delivered the Summit's second keynote speech. Amanda outlined how infrastructure could unlock socioeconomic opportunities by designing projects with wider economic and social benefits in mind. This commitment was demonstrated by Amey's work with underrepresented groups in social mobility projects, supply chain and SME support, and linking skills and jobs to improve access to employment. Amey has also partnered with local organisations to improve the organisation's understanding of communities' post-pandemic regeneration.

Following Amanda's keynote speech, Rachel Jones from Sodexo outlined the People-Places-Planet approach underpinning Sodexo's commitments to sustainability and social impact. She also highlighted how 'humanising' work, embedding compassion to make people feel more comfortable working from home, had been used in recruitment processes to attract talent as well as to retain existing employees. Rachel also described how Sodexo uses reverse mentoring and insight-gathering to understand how work will evolve.

Andy Hepworth from Sopra Steria then presented on the role technology plays in overcoming challenges related to employer-employee trust and visibility, as well as the dynamics between office and home workers. Specifically, data gathering has enabled organisations to collect strategic information about development and training opportunities, assess engagement with collaboration and wellbeing initiatives, provide insights on productivity levels and improve employee feedback.

Like previous speakers, Andy remarked on the opportunities presented by virtual working for recruitment and in challenging the presenteeism-promotion link. He also explored the challenges of hybrid working for organisations. He recommended that hybrid systems be simple to use, consistent across organisations, and not disadvantage anyone in the meeting, whether they attend virtually or in-person. Organisations should ensure employees have equal digital experiences by checking connectivity and network systems are consistent across employees' regions and demographics.

The panel discussion that followed covered the importance of, and approaches to, ongoing employee insight-gathering. This was exemplified by the experiences of Gen-Z employees, for whom virtual work was assumed to be preferable, but in many cases resulted in isolation from formal and informal networks. To rectify this, as Emily Davies outlined, Amey consulted with employees to develop hybrid, flexible approaches to protect employee wellbeing and progression.

Finally, John provided closing remarks and the BSA thanked speakers and attendees for their contributions.

