

It's time to "stop the witch-hunt" against flexible working, says coalition of unions and equality campaigners

2 years ago



Unions and equality campaigners have condemned escalating attacks on flexible working.

A joint statement released on Monday 7th October – signed by organisations and campaigners including the [TUC](#), [Age UK](#), the [Fawcett Society](#), Anna Whitehouse (founder of Flex Appeal) and [Pregnant Then Screwed](#) – warns of a “witch-hunt” against workers being able to work more flexibly.

The intervention comes as the government prepares to publish its Employment Rights Bill which is expected to enhance existing rights to flexible working.

Highlighting the ongoing briefing against flexible working, the organisations say: “It’s time to stop the witch-hunt against flexible working. In recent weeks, we have seen relentless scaremongering about how new legislation on flexible working will harm UK businesses and productivity.

“These warnings couldn’t be further from the truth.”

Pointing to the recruitment and retention problems facing employers the organisations say: “There are 800,000 fewer people in the workforce than before the pandemic, and one of the biggest issues facing employers is recruiting and retaining skilled staff.

“Look at our public services. In the midst of a staffing crisis, health, education and social care workers are leaving due to a lack of flexibility.

“This is not an isolated example. Research published by the Charter Institute of Professional Development last year found that an estimated four million people have changed careers due to a lack of flexibility at work.

“Flexible working can bring more people back into the labour market and keep them there.”

Criticising the bad faith nature of the attacks on flexible working, the organisations say:

“Some have tried to claim flexible working is just about working from home.

“But there are there are many different forms of flexible working.

“For some people it means stable and predictable shift patterns so they can do the school run. For others it means compressed hours to allow for an extra day at home to care for loved ones. And for some it’s a job share to allow time for study alongside work.

“This is about developing patterns of work needed for a modern economy and a modern workforce.

“Flexible working is good for workers, good for employers and good for growth.”

Commenting on the joint statement, TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said: “Flexible working – and in particular working from home – is being misrepresented to attack the government’s wider plan to Make Work Pay. It’s time we called it out.

“Improving access to flexible working will benefit workers and businesses, whether it’s through increasing staff productivity or higher retention. And the same is true of improving workers’ rights across the piece.

“When people feel secure and respected at work, they have happier, healthier lives and perform better in their jobs.”

Jemima Olchawski, Fawcett Society Chief Executive, said: “We have to ask who benefits from parroting the fallacy that flexible working and flexible workers are bad for business – it’s just nonsense.

“What really holds growth back is rigid, outdated work practices that exclude women, older workers, and those managing health conditions.

“Offering flexible working options increases the talent pool and enables more people to work.

“While that may threaten those who are happy to maintain the status quo, it can only be good for our economy. We need to see all jobs advertised as flexible by default.”

Victoria Benson, Chief Executive of Gingerbread, said: “Too many single parents are locked out of the workforce or stuck in jobs beneath their skill level because of old fashioned, inflexible working patterns.

“Employers who don’t offer flexible working are missing out on an untapped pool of talent and single parents are missing out on jobs.

“We need to see single parents supported to thrive at work – not just because it’s good for them and their children but because it’s good for employers and our economy, too.”