



Q81 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: My next question is going to be about the current redeployment issues in the Equality Hub and how they have impacted ongoing work. Marcus, what work has been halted or delayed as a result of 35% of Equality Hub staff moving to other Departments during this period to help the pandemic effort?

Marcus Bell: In the early months of the pandemic, quite large numbers of staff from the Equality Hub, including me, were redeployed to other parts of Government to help with what, after all, was a national emergency. A number of bits of work were paused at that time, but the great majority have been picked up since. The number of staff who were redeployed was around 50 in total, but all bar six of those have returned now. That was a temporary response to an emergency situation. I do not think it has had a lasting impact on capacity in the hub. It meant that some bits of work needed to be delayed while staff were redeployed to help elsewhere.

Q82 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Are you able to go into some more detail on any particular pieces of work that were delayed or halted?

Marcus Bell: For example, some of the work that we planned to do on the national strategy for disabled people had to go on pause from March to May last year. Plan A had been to put out that strategy in the first months of this year. Basically, the net effect was to delay it three or four months because some staff were redeployed elsewhere. That is one example. I cannot think of anything that we have dropped altogether because some staff were not around for three months.

Q83 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: My final question is to the Secretary of State on the same issue. Given the equality issues that emerged during the pandemic, why was it felt necessary to deploy such a large proportion of the Equality Hub? We understand that we are dealing with an unprecedented situation, but there were so many issues for those with protected characteristics. Could I also ask who took that decision? Do you believe at the end of it all that that was the right decision to take?

Elizabeth Truss: I am very proud that so many of our staff stepped up to the plate to deal with real emergencies. For example, staff helped British people get repatriated to the UK in very difficult circumstances. It was the right thing to do. It was an emergency situation. If you remember back to this time last year, it was very difficult. It is just important to understand the nature of what we do. Generally speaking, the Equality Hub does not provide operational immediate support. We are fundamentally a policy Department that makes sure that policies are in place across Government, looks at data and analysis, persuades other Government Departments to act, and raises issues with other Government Departments. We are not fundamentally an operational Department.

When some of our operations were under strain—and I am talking about issues like getting Brits back here during the pandemic, helping get PPE