

Monday, 1 December 2005

(10.30 am)

LADY HALLETT: Ms Wilson.

MS WILSON: My Lady, the first witness today is Ms Sarah Elliott.

MS SARAH ELLIOTT (affirmed)

Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY

LADY HALLETT: Thank you for coming to join us on a wet Monday morning.

MS WILSON: You are Sarah Elliott; is that right?

A. Yeah.

Q. And you've provided two witness statements to this module, one with reference number INQ000656193, dated 26 September 2025, and another with reference number INQ000659803, dated 21 November 2025. Are both of those true to the best of your knowledge and belief?

A. That's true, yes.

Q. Thank you. And you're giving evidence today, Ms Elliott, in your capacity as the former chief executive officer of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations; is that right?

A. That's correct.

Q. A role you left recently but held for the majority of the pandemic?

A. That's correct.

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A. In part it was because ahead of the pandemic, they had been underinvested in for many years for lots of complex reasons. They often lacked the capacity to access grants from trusts and foundations, or indeed to access government funding.

Q. Thank you. The role of charities in response to the pandemic was significant, wasn't it? I think you say in your statement they were at the heart of the nation's response; is that right?

A. That's correct. Charities at the start of the pandemic did what charities do best: they stepped up to support communities to respond to the crisis.

Q. And you describe a core element of the NCVO's work was to assess the financial -- the ongoing financial health of the sector, and the impact on charities during the pandemic. Can you just provide an overview of what the pressure points experienced by your members were?

A. Yes. So charities really faced a perfect storm of declining income, and indeed declining resources more broadly in terms of volunteers, at a time of increased costs and increased need in communities. So just to go into a bit more detail on those elements, in terms of income, donations and fundraising were very severely affected upon lockdown. So for example, events were cancelled, it's well documented, the amount that was

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Q. And a bit of background on the NCVO, it's the membership community for charities, voluntary organisations and community groups in England; is that right?

A. That's right.

Q. Over 17,000 members, the majority of whom are small or micro organisations?

A. That's right.

Q. And the NCVO's role and responsibilities include working with government to ensure charities have the conditions they need to achieve their mission and roles, but also to ensure government understands the significant social and economic role of charities?

A. That's correct.

Q. Can I start with a brief overview of the charity sector. It's very diverse, isn't it?

A. Yes, it's a very diverse sector, and indeed, NCVO's membership reflects the diversity of the sector. So the majority of the sector are very small, often volunteer-led, often community groups, and the more sort of household-name charities that would be more familiar to the public represent a minority of the sector, but receive a larger proportion of the sector's income.

Q. And you say in your statement that the smaller and more specialist organisations were especially vulnerable to economic shocks. Why was that?

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lost just by the London marathon being cancelled but also all of those smaller community events.

And also in less obvious ways, so for example, door-to-door fundraising couldn't happen anymore and that's a really important pipeline for charities in securing those regular givers, those direct debits.

Investment income was also severely affected and another pressure point was public services. So charities deliver public services using public money and for many years ahead of the pandemic, those contracts were often underfunded, not keeping up with inflation, so charities were subsidising those but less able to do so with that fund-raised income cut off.

In terms of the increased costs, this included having to switch to remote delivery, so investing in digital costs, and also, for those who did keep delivering face-to-face, investing in personal protective equipment.

And then in terms of rising need in communities, some of this was about the immediate pandemic response but some of this might have been the well documented need for increased support for domestic violence, loneliness and isolation, charities providing mental health support. Just to give a few examples.

Q. Thank you. And you've described a moment ago that many

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of your members really stepped up and were able to continue operating during the pandemic. The Inquiry's listening exercise, Every Story Matters, heard similar accounts to that but also, for example, from a leader of a charity in England who described:

"As a not-for-profit company, we don't have a lot of financial reserves. We live fairly hand-to-mouth ... we were 100% self-funded. We weren't reliant on funding from anywhere. We earned the money that we spent and, obviously, when you lose the ability to earn that money it puts everything that you were doing on hold. So, it stopped out operations straight away."

Is that reflective of some of your members' experience, that the perfect storm you've described meant they couldn't continue?

A. It is, yes. I mean, as I said slightly earlier, the nature of the sector is hugely diverse and each charity will have a different make-up of income streams. Some charities will hold more reserves than others. We know a proportion of the sector came into the pandemic with no reserves. So the statement you just read out is reflective of a proportion of the sector that had no reserves to fall back on and, with income cut off, would have to stop all expenditure and operations as a result.

Q. You explain in your statement that charities required

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pandemic, even though their own investments were impacted, and they tried to continue to not only honour their existing grantees, but also, where they could, provide additional support, whereas other charities, perhaps those who were more reliant on face-to-face fundraising, may that have lost all their income overnight. So it was a very diverse picture.

Q. I want to ask you now about cooperation and joint working with the government on the economic response. How did the NCVO go about working jointly with the government and particularly which parts of it?

A. So the NCVO had longstanding existing relationships with DCMS in particular and what was then the office -- no, now it's the Office for Civil Society, then it was -- had a different name. Sorry, I forget. And we also had recently established relationships with officials in Number 10 in the relatively new government in Number 10.

And when the pandemic started, those -- we drew on those existing relationships, and our communications, both in terms of meetings and emails and letters, were more frequent, sometimes twice-daily meetings with officials in DCMS, from my recollection.

One of the biggest challenges we faced was we didn't have relationships across government in the way that we needed, given the cross-governmental nature of the

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targeted financial support during the pandemic. Can you elaborate on why you say that was?

A. Well, there were two main reasons. One was that, unlike businesses, charities were having to step up. They couldn't mothball like a pub or a cinema could. Many charities were most needed during the pandemic, and needed to step up to meet that increased need, and so actually required additional resources and additional funding to be able to do that.

But even for those charities that were not essential to the immediate pandemic response, we now know they are essential to the recovery from the pandemic and to the wider -- and to wider society and the economy. And so they needed to be able to stabilise because of those very severe and immediate economic shocks that they experienced when lockdown commenced.

LADY HALLETT: Can I ask you to slow down?

THE WITNESS: Of course.

MS WILSON: Did the operating or economic model of some charities mean that they in particular needed targeted support?

A. Every charity was different and every charity had a different make-up of income streams. Some of those were more impacted than others. We know, for example, that trusts and foundations really stepped up during the

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support that the sector requires, both in peacetime but also in a crisis. In particular, we had no relationship with the Treasury, which is where all of the major decisions were being taken in terms of providing economic support to the different sectors of the economy.

Q. So did you rely on the Office for Civil Society to pass on that information that you'd passed to them, to people like the Treasury or the other relevant departments?

A. We did, yes. That was our main way of communicating with the Treasury, via the Office for Civil Society.

Q. Did you think that message was passing on effectively?

A. Well, what we have to go on is what came out in terms of those support schemes and, as I'm sure we'll go on to discuss, they were often not designed with charities in mind and therefore difficult to access. And even the specific support scheme for charities was quite late in being announced, and probably not as substantial as it needed to be to respond to the need in communities that the sector was supporting.

We know officials in DCMS were working at pace and under immense pressure, and as I say, we had daily communication with them, but we often got the message back via them from the Treasury that they needed more data, more information, and they weren't -- seemingly

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1 weren't convinced by the case that we were making.

2 **Q.** Thank you.

3 You also say in your statement that you felt there
4 was an undue focus of government on charity closures in
5 order to make the case for support. Why did the NCVO
6 consider this wasn't an effective measure of the impact
7 on the sector?

8 **A.** Well, what we took from this was again a lack of
9 understanding about the nature of the voluntary sector.
10 Charities are founded by people that want to make
11 a difference in the world, and by our very nature, when
12 there's a crisis, we will step up and we will help as
13 much as we can. And so many charities that faced
14 a shortfall in income chose -- made really difficult
15 decisions about long-term financial sustainability or
16 immediate needs, so many drew on their reserves which
17 are there for a rainy day and for when there is
18 a crisis. And even those that didn't have reserves
19 perhaps just chose to reduce or even cease all of their
20 operations, perhaps go into almost hibernation for
21 a time rather than choose to close.

22 And we know from the data from that 2020-2021 year
23 that we didn't see a significantly higher number of
24 closures than normal. And so we didn't feel that
25 closures would happen quickly, if indeed they did happen

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1 long-term sustainability of the organisation or reduce
2 quickly. So it was not quick enough, in my opinion.

3 **Q.** As part of his announcement, the Chancellor said that he
4 couldn't stand there and save every single job, protect
5 every single business, or indeed every single charity.
6 And in your statement you say the NCVO viewed the
7 comparison between business and charities as
8 misinterpreting the contribution charities make. Why do
9 you say that?

10 **A.** Because at the same time as we were hearing that
11 statement from the Chancellor we were also being asked
12 to step up and support the response to the crisis, which
13 made us very different from businesses that could
14 mothball for a time.

15 So, just to give one example, we were asked for
16 lists of charities in local community areas which could
17 distribute to the pandemic response. We were supporting
18 them with the mass mobilisation of volunteers. And so
19 we felt the comparison just misunderstood the nature of
20 charities, which were not profit-and-loss businesses,
21 but absolutely kind of vital to the -- to the health of
22 communities.

23 **Q.** Your organisation did welcome the support package being
24 announced at that time as I understand it but you
25 identified some concerns with it. Would you outline

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1 at all and we thought there would be a delayed effect
2 and charities would do all they can to keep going for as
3 long as they can.

4 **Q.** I want to ask you now about the economic schemes which
5 were available to your members. I'm going to start by
6 looking at the sector-specific support but we'll come
7 back to the pan-economy measures afterwards.

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** So the main package available, as I understand it, to
10 your members was the £750 million financial package to
11 the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector;
12 is that right?

13 **A.** That's correct.

14 **Q.** This was announced by the Chancellor on 8 April 2020.
15 Was that announcement and that support soon enough for
16 your members?

17 **A.** It was not soon enough. Many charity leaders in those
18 first few weeks of lockdown were facing impossible
19 decisions. It takes time to reduce the size of an
20 organisation in terms of making staff redundant, and
21 charity leaders were calling me on an almost daily basis
22 asking when support was coming, was support going to be
23 announced, because they and their boards were facing
24 impossible decisions, as I've already outlined, about
25 whether they draw on their reserves and put at risk the

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1 what those were, please.

2 **A.** Yes. So, in the run-up to the £750 million being
3 announced, we said the scheme needed to be three things:
4 it needed to be substantial, swift and simple. And in
5 my view, it fell short on all of those counts. In terms
6 of swift, as I've already outlined, we thought it took
7 too long. In peacetime it would have been an extremely
8 fast announcement of funding.

9 **Q.** Could I just ask you to slow your answers down
10 a little --

11 **A.** Yes, of course.

12 **Q.** -- so the stenographer can keep --

13 **A.** In peacetime it would have been a very quick piece of
14 work, but given the crisis, given the impossible
15 decisions charity leaders were making about their
16 organisations, it wasn't fast enough.

17 In terms of substantial, at the time, we welcomed
18 the support. We didn't want to appear ungrateful as
19 a sector. We knew the amount of work that had gone into
20 the fund by colleagues in DCMS and Treasury. We knew
21 the political capital that had been expanded by
22 politicians. But compared to, for example, the arts
23 sector, as a proportion of the sector's overall income,
24 it was not enough. It was too small.

25 We also -- as well as the announcement being slow,

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1 it took a long time to distribute the funds. On
2 average, I think it was 61 days for a decision, and that
3 compared to an average of around a month to access
4 support if you were a business applying to one of the
5 business schemes.

6 We felt that, in making decisions, other DCMS
7 sectors were perhaps prioritised over the sector at the
8 start of the pandemic.

9 And in terms of simple, we felt the scheme was
10 perhaps unduly bureaucratic. We totally understand the
11 need for proportionate due diligence, but charities are
12 already a highly regulated sector by the Charity
13 Commission for England and Wales. There was lots of
14 detail required in applications, many of which were
15 unsuccessful, and so wasted energy by charities that
16 were trying to respond to the pandemic. And then, at
17 the beginning of the scheme, there were additional
18 checks requiring by PwC. This was actually changed so
19 only grants over £10,000 were required to have those
20 additional checks. But we didn't understand this
21 because the National Lottery Community Fund is a very
22 experienced funder and we felt they were able to do the
23 checks.

24 I think the final thing I'd say is this was a crisis
25 response fund which was, as I say, welcome and needed,

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1 element of the package was the £200 million Coronavirus
2 Community Support Fund, which was distributed by the
3 National Lottery Community Fund; is that right?

4 **A.** That's right.

5 **Q.** Which conducted their own checks --

6 **A.** Yeah.

7 **Q.** -- of applicants. But an additional layer of vetting
8 was also required to be carried out by
9 PricewaterhouseCoopers; is that right?

10 **A.** That's correct.

11 **Q.** And you say that fund, in your statement you say the
12 fund lacked the necessary flexibility to be distributed
13 at pace. Are you referring to those additional checks
14 and vetting?

15 **A.** The additional checks and vetting but the application
16 process itself was, it was still lengthy, it still
17 required a lot of information about need and activities.
18 As I say, we understand the need for proportional due
19 diligence but we do not feel that businesses were
20 subject to the same level of scrutiny in seeking
21 financial support as the -- (overspeaking) --

22 **LADY HALLETT:** How long did you have the extra element of
23 the PwC checks, roughly?

24 **A.** I don't have that information to hand, but I know they
25 did reverse that decision and made it so only

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1 but many organisations needed to also stabilise. They
2 weren't responding to the immediate crisis and so they
3 weren't eligible for this scheme, but they were still
4 essential to the recovery of the country. And again, we
5 make comparison with the youth fund that was set up,
6 which was eligible for stabilisation funding. And so,
7 yeah, many organisations that needed funding to keep
8 running were not able to access this scheme.

9 **Q.** Just touching on a couple of points you've mentioned
10 there, one, about the size and scope of the £750 million
11 package, was the NCVO invited to provide feedback on
12 that before it was announced?

13 **A.** Generally, we didn't find out about announcements until
14 a little bit too late to provide feedback. So in the
15 case of the £750 million, in the run-up to it being
16 announced, we heard conflicting messages from different
17 parts of government, from different politicians that we
18 had relationships with. In the event, the former CEO of
19 NCVO actually had a phone call with the Chancellor just
20 hours before it was announced, so giving us very little
21 time to -- well, no chance to input into the quantum,
22 but very little time to prepare a response, and to ready
23 the voluntary sector for the response.

24 **Q.** And you mentioned a moment ago the additional levels of
25 bureaucracy in parts of the scheme. I understand a key

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1 applications over £10,000 would have those additional
2 checks.

3 **LADY HALLETT:** Are we talking days, weeks, months?

4 **A.** Weeks.

5 **MS WILSON:** Did the government explain why those additional
6 checks were required initially?

7 **A.** No, I don't recall having that explained to me. Other
8 than it's public money, and there must be some scrutiny
9 of the spending of public money.

10 **Q.** The final element of the funding, around a £360 million
11 fund, was distributed by a range of government
12 departments and also some external agencies, as you set
13 out in your statement, and you say they also experienced
14 some difficulties and inefficiencies. Were they along
15 the same lines or were those additional problems?

16 **A.** Very -- I mean, very similar in terms of needing to
17 apply for funding, often lengthy processes, sometimes
18 different requirements for different schemes. So,
19 similar.

20 **Q.** So looking ahead, in any future scheme, you would look
21 to see those additional checks, the vetting, those
22 aspects that slow down the money going to charities to
23 be removed or confined to as limited as possible; is
24 that right?

25 **A.** I think it needs to be proportionate. As I say, public

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1 funding needs to have some level of scrutiny, but given
2 we were in a crisis and charities were having to make
3 impossible decisions and needing to step up and respond,
4 it felt unduly onerous, the process that charities had
5 to go thorough to secure those funds, and for some of
6 them it was just too late.

7 **Q.** Thank you.

8 I now want to move to ask you about the wider
9 measures brought in, so not just those specific to your
10 sector. In your statement you say the government
11 adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to some business
12 support schemes. What did you mean by that?

13 **A.** One of the things that we continually came up against
14 was an assumption that because charities were
15 organisations, they were the same as businesses, which
16 is -- while there are some similarities, there are many
17 really important differences between charities and
18 businesses. And we tried throughout the early stages of
19 the pandemic to get this message across to different
20 parts of government, and given what came out in terms of
21 the business support schemes, we didn't feel that this
22 was always consistently understood.

23 **Q.** So can we look at some examples. Can we start with the
24 Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Did it work well for
25 some charities?

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1 continue to deliver those vital services.

2 **Q.** And I think one of the changes you proposed in
3 January 2021, or sought, was a targeted furlough-type
4 scheme for your sector; is that right?

5 **A.** That's right. We -- I mean, I think our primary
6 argument was that we needed a stabilisation fund that
7 was specific for the voluntary sector, but failing that,
8 the furlough scheme, we called for it to be amended so
9 that charities could continue to deliver.

10 **Q.** And what sort of response did you get from those
11 requests?

12 **A.** It's -- it's difficult to say, because I think that
13 probably speaks to the challenge in communicating with
14 the, kind of, decision-making heart of government during
15 the pandemic. It was always secondhand through the --
16 through DCMS, who, as I say, worked tirelessly, and
17 worked in partnership with us, but they were the ones
18 speaking to the Treasury and making these proposals for
19 amendments.

20 And, generally, we were kind of caught in this
21 circular situation where we would ask for something, we
22 would be asked for data on -- and evidence, we would try
23 to find the data and evidence, and then it wouldn't be
24 sufficient for what the Treasury needed, and so then
25 we'd go away to find more data and evidence. And that

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1 **A.** For some charities it did work well, and I think it's
2 fair to say we know, after the event, that many
3 charities did make use of the scheme. But the
4 fundamental flaw with the scheme was that charities,
5 unlike businesses -- so I've used the example of a pub
6 or a cinema, which could just close -- charities
7 couldn't just close their doors. It's not in
8 a charity's nature to close its doors when there is such
9 increasing need in communities. And so charities were
10 faced with the choice of furloughing their staff and
11 protecting their organisations, financial health for the
12 long term, or stepping up to meet the need in
13 communities, which is what most organisations did.

14 For some charities, some parts of the organisation
15 were quite suitable to the furlough scheme. So, for
16 example, organisations which run charity shops, which --
17 which couldn't open, could furlough those charity-shop
18 staff. And we know from our research that just under
19 40% of charities actually used the scheme.

20 One of the biggest barriers, though, was that
21 charities, when they furloughed their staff, those staff
22 could volunteer for other organisations, but they
23 couldn't volunteer for their own organisation. And
24 indeed, this was one of the changes that we proposed as
25 a workaround the scheme, so charities were able to

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1 would continue.

2 **LADY HALLETT:** Can I just ask a question. You say there's
3 a flaw with the furlough scheme. That is because people
4 who normally work for a charity couldn't volunteer for
5 the charity when they're on furlough. We all understood
6 that: that was to try to stop companies or businesses
7 from saying, "Right, you're on furlough, now come back
8 and work for us."

9 And I'm afraid there were companies that did that.

10 So is it necessarily a flaw with the scheme or is it
11 a flaw with what you say is the package of support
12 should have been available, because it depends, does it
13 not, on what your policy objective is with the furlough
14 scheme?

15 **A.** I completely agree with what you've just said. I think,
16 for me, it's just a demonstration of why the furlough
17 scheme wasn't really suitable for charities. We needed
18 to keep working. We couldn't really mothball in the way
19 that some businesses could.

20 In the event, some charities did choose to mothball
21 because they tried to preserve that part of the
22 organisation for the longer term. But in practice, what
23 the sector needed was something much more targeted and
24 specific that enabled us to continue our operations
25 through the pandemic.

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1 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.

2 **MS WILSON:** Moving to another scheme, please, the
3 Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme. I think
4 you say some of your members and charities had
5 difficulties accessing that scheme in particular. Why
6 was that?

7 **A.** So, in the first instance, it was challenging -- well,
8 if not impossible, for many charities to access the
9 scheme, because to access the scheme you needed to
10 deliver over half of your turnover from trading. That
11 would be quite unusual for most charities, to receive
12 over half of their income from trading, although there
13 will be some examples.

14 And so we lobbied quite strongly for this rule to be
15 lifted, and it -- indeed, it was lifted.

16 **Q.** Around the end of April I think it was changed?

17 **A.** Yes, that is correct.

18 **Q.** So in any future version of that scheme you'd like to
19 see that restriction for charities lifted from the
20 outset; is that right?

21 **A.** That's right. Although I think it's probably important
22 to say that any sort of loan scheme is not what we would
23 have advocated for for charities, first and foremost,
24 because many charities either cannot take on debt
25 because of what's written into their articles and

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1 rate relief, charitable business rate relief, and to
2 access the Small Business Grant Fund, you had to be in
3 receipt of small business rate relief, or I think there
4 was a rural rate relief, as well, that meant you were
5 eligible. So, it was -- so charities were not eligible
6 for that scheme.

7 **Q.** That position, following your organisation's feedback
8 and some other organisations, that was amended though,
9 wasn't it? And I think an additional discretionary fund
10 was announced in May '20 which charities were eligible
11 for; is that right?

12 **A.** That's correct, yes, there was a discretionary fund set
13 up that was for small businesses and specifically
14 included charities.

15 **Q.** So although that wasn't tailored to charities initially,
16 improvements, again, were made following feedback and
17 then government or parts of government listening to your
18 organisation and others?

19 **A.** Yeah, we were pleased to see that. Although in the
20 event, and we don't have robust data on the extent of
21 the use of the scheme, but from the anecdotal evidence
22 we have from members, the way this discretionary fund
23 was administered was that local authorities were asked
24 to identify priority organisations in their areas, and
25 although we know some members and some wider sector

23

1 governing documents, or they would choose not to,
2 because again, charities are not aiming to make a profit
3 and at a time of such crisis, for a board of trustees to
4 make a decision to take on debt would be potentially, it
5 depends on the circumstances, quite risky, not knowing
6 when operations would start again and when that debt
7 could be paid back.

8 **Q.** I think that's now the second example we've touched upon
9 where, as a result of feedback which you and other --
10 yours and other organisations has given, amendments have
11 been made to the schemes in charities' favour. Does
12 that demonstrate that government was listening?

13 **A.** I think parts of government listened to some of the
14 things that we said. As I say, we worked with some
15 very, very hardworking officials at the time who really
16 wanted to work with the sector and did understand the
17 role the sector were playing and the constraints, but
18 that was not universal across Whitehall or across
19 government.

20 **Q.** And the third scheme I want to touch upon with you is
21 the Small Business Grant Fund which was part of the
22 first cohort of business grants. And you say in your
23 statement that this fund inadvertently sidelined
24 charities. Why was that?

25 **A.** So charities pay a special -- have a special business

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1 organisations were able to access this fund, we know of
2 many more that were not prioritised by local authorities
3 and didn't have access to the scheme.

4 **Q.** Thank you.

5 The final part of your evidence I want to touch upon
6 are lessons learned and recommendations, and you set out
7 a number in your statement and I just want to touch upon
8 couple of those.

9 You ask that in any future scheme, or schemes, in
10 a pandemic, design features take into account the
11 economic model and also the needs of charities so that
12 there aren't those restrictions in accessing support.
13 How do you think that's best approached?

14 **A.** Sorry, could you just repeat the beginning of that
15 question?

16 **Q.** How do you think support schemes could be the best --
17 most effectively targeted towards the charity sector?

18 **A.** Well, I think the most important thing to underpin the
19 development of any charitable scheme is the development
20 of a much better understanding across Whitehall of the
21 voluntary sector, both in terms of what its value is
22 kind of economically, preventatively, socially, but also
23 understanding kind of the nature of how charities work,
24 how reserves work, what it means to be not for profit,
25 and governed by a boarding of trustees.

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1 So I think investing in that understanding and
2 therefore relationships would mean that, at a much
3 earlier stage, charities could be taken into
4 consideration, and understood in terms of the value of
5 the sector in supporting, responding to a crisis, but
6 crucially, in recovering from a crisis and in the longer
7 term in terms of the social and economic health of the
8 country.

9 **Q.** Which brings me to the second point I wanted to explore
10 with you. You say this foundational understanding needs
11 to be improved, both now and also in any future
12 pandemic, and also that your organisation wanted to work
13 with government as a trusted partner. How do you think
14 that's best achieved in a future pandemic? *Ad hoc*
15 communication? A more structured forum, for example?

16 **A.** A much more structured forum. And we're really pleased
17 that since the pandemic, and over the last few years,
18 there's been the development of a new Civil Society
19 Covenant, which is intended to underpin trusting
20 relationships between the sector and government so that
21 the sector can play all of the various roles that it
22 does play, both in terms of public service delivery but
23 also giving -- giving voice to communities. And my
24 understanding is there will now be a regular forum
25 between voluntary sector leaders and the Treasury, which

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1 (11.15 am)

2 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Wright?

3 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you, my Lady. The next witness is
4 Sir Oliver Dowden.

5 **SIR OLIVER DOWDEN (sworn)**

6 **Questions from RICHARD WRIGHT KC, LEAD COUNSEL TO THE**
7 **INQUIRY for MODULE 9**

8 **LADY HALLETT:** Welcome back, Sir Oliver.

9 **THE WITNESS:** Thank you.

10 **MR WRIGHT:** Sir Oliver, you've provided a statement to this
11 module of the Inquiry, the reference is INQ000588159.
12 And you have also provided -- today, I think, a short
13 statement making a couple of corrections.
14 Can we deal with those first of all, and then this
15 statement will formally be entered into the Inquiry.

16 **A.** Yes.

17 **Q.** But just to deal with them, I think first of all, at
18 paragraph 103(e) of your original statement you refer to
19 a sum of money as £130 million but in fact should that
20 have been £310 million?

21 **A.** Yes, that's correct.

22 **Q.** Thank you. And then at paragraph 108 of your original
23 statement you refer to an instruction given to policy
24 officials on 18 March 2020. That should have been
25 18 November 2020?

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1 I think is absolutely crucial, because, in designing any
2 economic support measures, whether it's the regular
3 budget or in a crisis, the Treasury will be a key
4 decision maker. And not having those relationships, in
5 my view, really hampered our ability to influence the
6 development of those schemes.

7 **MS WILSON:** Thank you, Ms Elliott, those are all the
8 questions I had.

9 **LADY HALLETT:** And there are no other questions.

10 Thank you very much indeed, Ms Elliott, I'm very
11 grateful for your help. And don't worry about speaking
12 quickly, the stenographer is used to it because I speak
13 very quickly. But thank you very much indeed for the
14 help in providing the written statement and, of course,
15 coming along today.

16 Thank you, thank you.

17 **LADY HALLETT:** I wouldn't normally break but, Mr Wright,
18 I gather there's a reason I need to break at this stage?

19 **MR WRIGHT:** I think so, briefly, yes.

20 **LADY HALLETT:** How long?

21 **MR WRIGHT:** Only five minutes will suffice.

22 **LADY HALLETT:** Well, we'll do ten. I'll come back at
23 quarter past. Thank you.

24 (11.05 am)

25 (A short break)

26

1 **A.** Yes, that's correct.

2 **Q.** And then paragraph 110 of the original statement was
3 included in error, and should not have been read within
4 the context of that section of the statement because
5 that paragraph relates not to Coronavirus Job Retention
6 Scheme, but to the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme
7 which you've dealt with at paragraph 124?

8 **A.** Yes, it's a repetition, a mistaken repetition.

9 **Q.** Yes, thank you very much.

10 Well, those corrections having been dealt with,
11 I want to ask you questions about your role as Secretary
12 of State in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media
13 and Sport. And the first topic I'd like to cover with
14 you, if I may, please, is just to understand how,
15 operationally, you adapted the structures within the
16 department, particularly with a focus on the economic
17 response as it affected the sectors that you were
18 responsible for.

19 **A.** Yes.

20 **Q.** So if we can start by looking at that, please.

21 Now, we know that prior to 2021 that the Civil
22 Society and Youth Directorate was known as the Office
23 for Civil Society; is that right?

24 **A.** Yes, that's correct.

25 **Q.** And that that was responsible for policy relating to

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1 charities, volunteering, social action, and so on?

2 A. Yes, that's correct.

3 Q. And did the Office for Civil Society therefore continue

4 to feed into you as Secretary of State throughout the

5 pandemic?

6 A. Yes, it did.

7 Q. And did it feed into you concerns relevant into the

8 sector it represented relating to the economic response

9 of the government?

10 A. Yes, it did, yes. Alongside other parts of my

11 department as well.

12 Q. Yes, and I'm going to come on to those. There was also

13 a team known as the Strategy, Policy and Fiscal Events

14 Team; is that right?

15 A. That's correct, yes.

16 Q. And you describe that as really being the central

17 coordinating team for Covid-19-related policy and

18 commissions, is that --

19 A. Yes, certainly in the initial period. I think I then

20 set out how that subsequently changed as time went on.

21 Q. Yes. So was that a pre-existing team?

22 A. Yes, it was, yes.

23 Q. That had ordinary functions in ordinary times?

24 A. Yes, so essentially it was the -- sort of the principal

25 fiscal advisory unit, for want of a better word, within

29

1 including from my political advice -- or special

2 advisers, with their political opposite numbers in the

3 Treasury, and of course my personal engagement with

4 the -- with the Chancellor and others.

5 Q. Just so that everyone watching your evidence understands

6 the way the terms you're using, in terms of

7 "pan-economic" and "horizontal" measures, did you mean

8 by that that these were measures that the Treasury were

9 taking that were designed to provide support to the

10 economy in general? These were not sector-specific

11 measures; these were, if you like, the big-ticket items,

12 the big things that the Treasury was doing for the

13 economy as a whole?

14 A. Yes, that's correct. Very early on in the pandemic,

15 once the government had introduced all the restrictions

16 that everyone is familiar with, it was apparent that

17 the -- that would have a profound impact on many, many

18 parts of the economy, and so the decision taken by the

19 Chancellor, and indeed collectively by the cabinet, was

20 that the principal means of dealing with that should be

21 by measures that could be accessible to all or as many

22 as possible. So a pan across -- across the economy.

23 Q. Yes, understood, thank you.

24 Then you also speak in your statement about

25 establishing the Covid-19 Hub. Just so we understand,

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1 the department, so that would typically deal with the

2 department's engagement, for example, with the Treasury

3 in response to budgets and other fiscal events, and

4 other related activities. So it was -- there was a sort

5 of natural transition for its role during Covid.

6 Q. So there would be established channels that existed

7 before the pandemic for liaison with the Treasury and

8 interaction with the Treasury on economic matters that

9 affected the department?

10 A. Yes, that's correct, yes.

11 Q. And so, as you say, naturally, that was a good starting

12 point for liaison, was it?

13 A. That's correct, yes.

14 Q. Yes. And in the early stages, that team, did that team

15 engage with the Treasury about the design of general

16 support, economic support?

17 A. Yes, it did. As I'm sure you'll appreciate, the

18 Treasury, in respect of the pan-economy measures --

19 I think I sometimes refer to them as horizontal measures

20 in my witness statement -- was the principal -- or was

21 the decision maker in respect of those measures, and

22 then other government departments engaged with them as

23 appropriate, and my department did so extensively

24 through them.

25 I should also say it sat alongside other engagement,

30

1 that is internal to your department; is that right?

2 A. Yes, all of this is the sort of wiring of my department.

3 Q. Yes. And you describe that as having what you call

4 a cross-cutting function, coordination function?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Can you just expand a little bit and put that into

7 simple language in terms of what it was actually doing?

8 A. Yes, sorry, it's a slightly jargon -- jargon term --

9 Q. No, don't worry.

10 A. What I mean by that is that it was engaging across

11 different parts of the department, and indeed would also

12 work with other relevant government departments as -- as

13 appropriate. So it would pull together all the relevant

14 information and analysis.

15 I think it's also just important, if I may add, in

16 terms of my position as Secretary of State, I would tend

17 to commission advice and -- or advice would be given to

18 me. The key thing for me was the advice as requested

19 through the -- through my permanent secretary and indeed

20 my private office.

21 So there wasn't a huge amount of distinction as

22 to -- to which different bit of the department it came

23 from, the question I was always asking myself was: is

24 this giving me the information that I require in order

25 to discharge my duties as Secretary of State?

32

1 Q. I see. So there is a final filter -- it doesn't really
2 matter where it's originating from -- of the information
3 that then comes to you for decision making and direction
4 of policy; is that right?

5 A. Yes, so everything that I received as a minister in
6 a written format would come to my private office and my
7 private office would then take that advice, and they
8 would provide a cover note which would summarise the
9 nature of the decisions I had to take and so on. Also
10 additional advice would be provided both from the
11 private office in terms of their perspective on what the
12 key issues were, and almost always, except in a few
13 national security related issues, it would have advice
14 from political advisers, as well, on it.

15 Then the other forms of advice I would receive would
16 generally be orally in meetings or telephone calls. But
17 again, the private office would engage with different
18 parts of the department to determine who was the most
19 appropriate person to attend that meeting or to provide
20 advice over the telephone.

21 Q. So we've dealt with the Strategy, Policy and Fiscal
22 Events Team, pre-existing, had established lines of
23 communication with the Treasury and so a good starting
24 point. You established the Covid-19 Hub. But is it
25 right you also established the Economic Response

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1 respect of that.

2 The second thing is that I would engage in a number
3 of different ways. First of all, I've set out how
4 I engaged with the private office, so everything went
5 through the filter of the private office. So they
6 co-ordinated with the appropriate bits of the department
7 that I needed advice from.

8 I also met, on at least a weekly basis, with both
9 the Permanent Secretary and with the relevant Director
10 Generals, and in particular, Sam Lister as the Director
11 General sort of oversaw all these different
12 cross-cutting elements.

13 So I was confident that it went up a Whitehall
14 hierarchy that went through Sam Lister as the DG to the
15 Permanent Secretary. I met with both of those people,
16 and then there was the filter of the private office.

17 Q. All right, I suppose the important thing for you, as the
18 ultimate decision maker, did you ever feel that you were
19 getting conflicting advice from different teams, or that
20 they weren't working well together, or rather, did you
21 feel that each was complementing the other, doing
22 slightly different things but ultimately leading to
23 coherent advice to you -- how did it appear at the time?

24 A. And I think that's a very important question and I --
25 I assure(?) I never felt there was conflicting advice.

35

1 Directorate, known as the ERD?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And that was established on 23 March. And did that
4 have, as its name perhaps suggests, an economically
5 focused responsibility?

6 A. Yes, that's correct, and became one of the -- well, the
7 principal way in which we dealt with the Treasury.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. In respect of Covid-related interventions.

10 Q. Yes. But just looking at those different bodies, how
11 were they working together? We've got there three
12 teams: strategy, policy and fiscal events, Covid-19 Hub,
13 Economic Response Directorate, pre-existing fourth,
14 Office for Civil Society. How was that all working
15 together? It may sound that's four things doing -- four
16 different bodies doing similar things.

17 How did you see it?

18 A. Well, as I say, the first way in which I saw it was: am
19 I getting the right information? So, as I think I set
20 out in my witness statement, and I believe that
21 Sam Lister sets out in his witness statement as well,
22 the principal responsibility for the organisation of the
23 department and the delivery of what we are seeking to
24 achieve lay through the Permanent Secretary, and so
25 I would rely on the Permanent Secretary's advice in

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1 The -- one shouldn't view these as being sort of
2 different fiefdoms or baronetcies, they were all playing
3 their role, as the -- and I think it was also worth
4 appreciating that this was a function of the department
5 pivoting to the Covid crisis situation, where suddenly,
6 as a department, we were dealing with all these
7 different bits that the department was responsible for.
8 So the DCMS had -- and even more so at the time I was
9 Secretary of State -- had a very wide range of
10 responsibilities, going through telecommunications to
11 the newspaper industry, sports, civil society, arts,
12 culture and so on. And we were -- we were trying to
13 coordinate our response to all those different sectors,
14 all of whom had significant needs.

15 Q. And your experience of government, is -- that array of
16 sectors for which you were responsible, is that unusual
17 for a department, to have that sort of breadth of
18 different sectors, ranging from, say, the charity
19 section all the way through to telecommunications and
20 media?

21 A. Yes, it is. I mean, I think the other -- the other
22 department that used to be much more like that was the
23 Home Office. And if one wants to get into the, sort of,
24 history of all of this, I believe that the department
25 was hived off of the Home Office at one point because

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1 the Home Office had such a wide variety of different
2 responsibilities.
3 And just fast forwarding slightly to the department,
4 the department acquired a responsibility for digital,
5 I believe, of business before I became Secretary of
6 State, and civil society has sat in other parts of
7 government, including in the -- the Cabinet Office.
8 **Q.** So, what I'm really trying to understand is whether it
9 was the breadth of the sectors that your department was
10 responsible for that necessitated different bodies
11 within the department feeding in advice on different
12 issues?
13 **A.** I think it was more -- in terms of the creation of these
14 different units, and particularly the Covid hub, this
15 was more a reflection of the department stepping up to
16 a new role, which was about how can we support these
17 different sectors, in two respects: one, the impact of
18 them from being locked down, or many of them from being
19 locked down? So then, what the rules meant and so on
20 and so forth. And then, secondly, the support that they
21 would need then from the government, principally
22 financial support.
23 **Q.** When it came to financial support and when it comes to
24 it, we're going to go on and I'm going to ask you some
25 questions about sector-specific support that was

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1 principal means of response was these pan-economic
2 measures. So at that stage it was making sure that --
3 that those applied to as many of our sectors as
4 possible. That certainly wasn't a given at the
5 beginning, so we wanted to make sure that was the case.
6 Once we then understood where it applied and where
7 the gaps might emerge, we then started to engage more in
8 terms of what sector-specific interventions might be
9 required, hence the charities support package, the
10 £750 million, the Culture Recovery Fund, and all -- all
11 the other sector-specific packages that we engaged with.
12 **Q.** Okay. So, in terms of those significant pan-economic
13 measures, we're talking, are we, about things like the
14 job retention scheme?
15 **A.** Yes.
16 **Q.** Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, loan schemes,
17 grants, and business rate relief, those sorts of schemes
18 that were applying across the economy?
19 **A.** Yes, PAYE deferral is another one, yes.
20 **Q.** Yes. So first focus is see what the Treasury is
21 delivering, and see how that might apply to our sector
22 and how we can try and ensure that it does apply to our
23 sector?
24 **A.** Yeah.
25 **Q.** And then look for gaps that are emerging or areas that

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1 introduced, but was your focus on that: identifying what
2 sector-specific support the department could offer,
3 funded by the Treasury if necessary? Or was it on
4 ensuring that the pan-economic measures that the
5 Treasury was introducing worked for your sectors? Or
6 both? I'd just be interested if you could help us with
7 your strategy for that.
8 **A.** Yes, both and sequentially. So, to begin with, it was
9 to understand what the lock -- what the -- sorry,
10 forgive me, the non-medical interventions that they used
11 for -- I forget the term, terminology --
12 **Q.** NPIs?
13 **A.** Yes, exactly, the non-pharmaceutical interventions.
14 What the non-pharmaceutical interventions meant for our
15 sectors. Then, as -- and there was a lot of engagement
16 with the sectors in respect of that.
17 Then, as it became apparent that lots of
18 non-pharmaceutical interventions would have potentially
19 an existential threat -- present an existential threat
20 to those sectors, it was understanding what that
21 actually meant and the scale of the support they needed.
22 Then it became apparent from our engagement,
23 particularly with the Treasury and the discussions that
24 we were having, including collectively as -- as
25 ministers in the government, that the first line and the

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1 might need additional support and see whether we can
2 land schemes that are specific to our sector, or
3 sectors?
4 **A.** Yes, that is correct, yes.
5 **Q.** Okay. Now can we look, first of all, at some of that
6 sector support.
7 **A.** Yes.
8 **Q.** And in particular, support for the voluntary, community
9 and social enterprise sector.
10 I'm just going to ask, please, if we could have up
11 on the screen INQ000623471, and it's page 1. There we
12 are. Thank you.
13 **A.** Yes.
14 **Q.** I think this is from 18 March of 2020, so this is
15 a submission to you, as Secretary of State. And if we
16 could just focus on the recommendation, that this was
17 a recommendation on 18 March that essentially you should
18 request, of the Treasury, £2 billion of funding, to
19 deliver a proposed package of support, which was (i):
20 "a £1 billion UK Community Mobilisation Fund to
21 ensure mission critical parts of the voluntary sector
22 are able to respond to this emergency"
23 And (ii):
24 "£1 billion Stabilisation Fund to prevent large
25 scale closures of charities that provide direct support

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1 for the most vulnerable people in our communities, such
 2 as hospices."
 3 Just so we understand this, this is coming to you
 4 from the Office for Civil Society; is that right?
 5 **A.** Yes, it is, yeah.
 6 **Q.** And it's essentially a suggestion that you should be
 7 going to the Treasury at that stage and saying, "Can we
 8 have £2 billion of funding", split in that way --
 9 **A.** Yes.
 10 **Q.** -- to be delivered by the department? So this is
 11 funding, so we're clear, is it, that was being suggested
 12 you should ask for in addition to all the pan-economic
 13 measures that you've touched on?
 14 **A.** No, I don't believe it was. And I think if you look at
 15 the sequencing of it, that is dated the 18th, I don't
 16 think the pan-economy measures were announced, I think,
 17 maybe until the 25th, from recollection. So this was
 18 prior to the pan-economic measures.
 19 **Q.** I see, so this was a sort of early pitch --
 20 **A.** Yes.
 21 **Q.** -- as to what you should be going to ask for.
 22 **A.** It's worth bearing in mind, because things moved so
 23 quickly during the Covid crisis, we were -- we were
 24 simultaneously engaging with the Treasury about the
 25 pan-economy measures, not knowing exactly what the

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1 my special adviser, then I would write on that cover
 2 note, my response to that. We have been unable to --
 3 the department has been unable to track that down.
 4 However, my recollection is that I came back and asked
 5 for -- I would say it would almost always be the case,
 6 if I was given a submission like this asking for
 7 £2 billion of taxpayers' money to be spent, I suspect,
 8 I am pretty sure I went back and asked some further
 9 questions about exactly how we derived these numbers,
 10 who it was seeking to benefit, and so on.
 11 **Q.** You certainly say, I think it's paragraph 84 of your
 12 statement, that you had concerns on that submission, and
 13 were those essentially the concerns: that this was a lot
 14 of money to be asking for at that stage?
 15 **A.** Yes. I mean, it was a lot of money to be asking for
 16 full stop, and certainly as the Secretary of State, I
 17 would not want to sign off on such a large request, even
 18 though it was essentially the first stage of going to
 19 the Treasury, until I had full confidence in it. So
 20 I believe, and as I set out in my statement, as you say,
 21 I asked questions of this because it was a significant
 22 amount of money, and to get further detail.
 23 **Q.** Now, at any time, what sort of things are you balancing
 24 as Secretary of State when requests for funding,
 25 particularly in that sort of level, are being made

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1 pan-economy measures looked like, but also the Office
 2 for Civil Society was engaging with the charitable
 3 sector and others, and this is them coming to me and
 4 saying, through my private office and so on, "This is
 5 what we would recommend as a package of direct support",
 6 in the way described in paragraph 3(a).
 7 **Q.** Okay. So this is Office for Civil Society engaging with
 8 the charity sector, this is the -- if you like, the
 9 early --
 10 **A.** Yes.
 11 **Q.** -- bid --
 12 **A.** Yes.
 13 **Q.** -- of what they are telling them --
 14 **A.** Yes.
 15 **Q.** -- they think they are going to need --
 16 **A.** Yes.
 17 **Q.** -- and coming to you and asking for you to make that
 18 case to the Treasury?
 19 **A.** Yes.
 20 **Q.** What was your reaction to that, that? Your response to
 21 that request at the early stage?
 22 **A.** The first thing I should say is that unfortunately we
 23 haven't been able to get through the department the
 24 cover note. So typically this would come with a cover
 25 note with advice from my private secretary, precise from

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1 to you?
 2 **A.** So I'm considering the needs of the sector, I'm
 3 considering whether it represents value for money, I'm
 4 considering how we would distribute this, I'm
 5 considering is the deadweight cost, that is to say that
 6 there is some other scheme that is already providing it,
 7 so we could be replicating that; I'm also all the time
 8 thinking of my constituents and the people that elected
 9 all of us, who will end up -- it'll be their taxes that
 10 pay for it. Is this getting the balance right? Is it
 11 (a) effective and is it (b) proportionate to the need?
 12 **LADY HALLETT:** Presumably if you don't ask questions like
 13 that as Secretary of State you're going to lose
 14 credibility with HMT for any other funding requests?
 15 **A.** Yes, both with HMT and indeed with Parliament, to whom
 16 I'd have to justify almost all of these things. So you
 17 invariably end up being hauled before a Select Committee
 18 and so on. So I had to be very confident that this was
 19 the right amount of money that I was requesting.
 20 **MR WRIGHT:** Was there, from your perspective, an additional
 21 concern that this was a bid for a very large sum of
 22 money even before you knew what the Treasury was going
 23 to actually announce in terms of support and how that
 24 support would be delivered?
 25 **A.** Yes, of course. I mean, as I said, there was a sort

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1 of ... and it's a little difficult to recall exactly the
2 sequencing in my thoughts at the time, but I'm aware
3 that we were in parallel engaging with the pan-economy
4 measures so clearly it would have -- I think this is
5 what transpires in the subsequent piece of evidence
6 that I have submitted and the Inquiry has, that we then
7 took into account the effect of the pan-economy measures
8 in refining this number.

9 **Q.** Well, I think it was on 25 March 2020.

10 That's INQ000623559, please, and page 1.

11 If we look at that number 4 there:

12 "In light of the Treasury's comments, the economic
13 support package and other government announcements ...
14 we recommend seeking funding for a smaller package now
15 to which we could add later if needed. There is
16 a balance between going to HMT with a number that we
17 think they will agree and pushing for a larger number
18 that the sector wants. We recommend that an initial
19 package on this scale is deliverable."

20 Then it sets out a small allocation to a National
21 Emergencies Trust of 10 million, and a larger boost of
22 500 million new money to the National Lottery Community
23 Fund.

24 So that's a week on from the previous document we
25 looked at. But in that intervening week, you know more

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1 a lot of it was in response to what we saw as being
2 pinch points in respect of that.

3 **Q.** And the Inquiry understands that on 8 April 2020 -- so
4 we're moving forward a couple more weeks in a timeline
5 of rapidly moving events -- the Chancellor announced
6 a £750 million emergency funding package to support the
7 sector; is that right?

8 **A.** Yes, that's correct, yes.

9 **Q.** And you describe that in your statement as a figure that
10 had been reached by negotiation between your department,
11 the Department of Health and Social Care, and the
12 Treasury; is that right?

13 **A.** That's correct, yes. And of course it is also worth
14 noting for completeness that a package of this size will
15 also attract the interest of 10 Downing Street as well.

16 **Q.** Ah, yes. Thank you.

17 So that was £750 of additional monies and a support
18 in addition to the pan-economic support that you've
19 described?

20 **A.** Yes. 750 million, yes.

21 **Q.** Sorry, did I say --

22 **A.** You missed off the "million" bit.

23 **Q.** Well, what's a million between friends, I could say, but
24 no, that's an important correction, so thank you.

25 Can you assist at all in terms of how that figure

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1 about what the Treasury is doing; is that fair?

2 **A.** Yes, that is correct, yes.

3 **Q.** And so that became the advice. And how did you react to
4 that advice?

5 **A.** I seem to recall -- and again, I do have to say the
6 caveat that I would have liked to be able to have seen
7 my -- the actual physical box notes --

8 **Q.** Of course.

9 **A.** -- that it was sort of hovering in to broadly the right
10 sort of amount, given the -- the pan-economy measures.

11 The other thing that I recall at -- at the time was
12 that the -- the decision was taken by the Treasury but
13 collectively agreed across government that we would have
14 these pan-economy measures. So, therefore, the focus of
15 this became more: okay, so the bits of the charterparty
16 sector that are going to carry on delivering in response
17 to Covid, how do we support them in doing that?

18 **Q.** So was it that part of the equation that you were in
19 particular looking at supporting those parts of the
20 sector -- or prioritising, rather than looking to
21 support -- prioritising those parts of the charitable
22 sector that were going to be playing that part in the
23 response to Covid?

24 **A.** Yes. And indeed, if one looks at the -- the overall
25 package and the breakdown of that, as it transpired

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1 was arrived at? I mean, is it more scientific of -- you
2 pushed for what you could get, and that was, given the
3 other fiscal response of the government, that was what
4 was available?

5 **A.** So it was, I would say, a combination of three things.
6 So, first of all, as we have discussed, the -- the
7 interaction between the pan-economy measures and the
8 needs of the sector. Secondly, it was specific needs
9 from the response to Covid. So if one looks at the
10 breakdown, particularly with the other government
11 departments, of areas where we spent money, £200 million
12 was for hospices. There was an awful lot of attention
13 at the time about the pressure that was on hospices.
14 Even smaller numbers, I believe there's some money that
15 goes to zoos. There was a lot of pressure at the time
16 about how zoos were responding to this, this crisis. So
17 there was that kind of analysis.

18 And of course, in that context, a large chunk of it
19 from my department came from the engagement that the
20 Office for Civil Society had with the sector,
21 understanding the needs and so on, as set out.

22 And then, of course, finally, there is an element of
23 the art of the possible. That is to say, what the
24 Treasury is going to agree to. And I don't mean that to
25 be dismissive of the Treasury, because the Treasury is

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1 the only -- the only department across the whole of
2 government whose sole focus is on the totality of
3 government expenditure. So they have to make the
4 ultimate decision about how expenditure on individual
5 schemes sits -- sits in the context of the whole of
6 government expenditure and the -- how that's paid for,
7 whether that's through taxes, the -- bond issuance and
8 so on.

9 **Q.** Thank you.

10 Now, in terms of the number, the amount -- the
11 amount of money, we've heard evidence this morning
12 that -- that the sector considered that the amount of
13 money available was not adequate, it wasn't -- wasn't
14 a sufficient sum of money, and the Inquiry has received
15 evidence, for example, that it was estimated that the
16 charity sector would lose £3.69 billion of income within
17 12 weeks of the -- of the first lockdown.

18 Were you thinking about this package and the sum of
19 money in terms of what was adequate? In other words,
20 what would replace, pound for pound, the money that was
21 lost? Or were you thinking about it in a different way?

22 **A.** I was thinking about it in a slightly different way.

23 So -- and indeed, the position that was agreed with the
24 Treasury collectively was: the principal means of
25 supporting all organisations, whether they were

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1 respect of the comparisons Sarah Elliott makes with the
2 Covid recovery scheme for the -- sorry, the cultural
3 bailout, the Culture Recovery Fund, that that,
4 I believe, was allocated about three months later. So
5 at the time, we had more of a picture of where that
6 sector was. Remember that this, this package that we
7 agreed with the Treasury in respect of the charitable
8 sector was almost immediately after lockdown had been
9 announced. We didn't know exactly how things were going
10 to transpire over the coming months. Nobody knew how
11 things were going to transpire over the coming months.

12 So they were very different packages at different
13 times with different needs. And I mean, I could go
14 through the needs of the 1.57 billion, how that was
15 derived. It was a totally different set of
16 circumstances.

17 **Q.** Thank you. Can I just take a slight detour from the
18 theme of my questions, just to pick this up here because
19 I think it's probably as convenient a place to do so,
20 because I've just asked you a question about that
21 cultural sector. You established in May 2020 the
22 Cultural Renewal Taskforce; is that right?

23 **A.** Yes, yes.

24 **Q.** And you chaired that yourself, I think?

25 **A.** Yes, I believe I did, yes.

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1 businesses, charities, and so on, was through the
2 pan-economy measures.

3 So that was the, sort of, baseline.

4 And then I was thinking, in respect of this sum,
5 about how it would address the specific needs of the
6 sector, but specifically through the lens of those
7 activities that were required to support people, and the
8 hugely important role that the charitable sector played
9 in supporting people through the -- the Covid crisis.

10 **Q.** Thank you. It's been suggested in evidence from
11 Sarah Elliott from the National Council for Voluntary
12 Organisations, that the amount of money could or should
13 be compared to the amount of money that was being given
14 to other sectors, and that it fell below that being
15 given to other sectors, for example. Her statement
16 refers to the 1.57 billion that was provided to the arts
17 and culture sector.

18 I'll just give you an opportunity to deal with that.

19 Were you viewing -- you had a lot of sectors, were you
20 viewing this as a competition between sectors or an
21 allocation between sectors? Were you having to balance
22 one against the other? How were the amounts of money
23 being determined?

24 **A.** No, each sector was considered on its own merits and
25 according to its needs. It is worth noting that in

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1 **Q.** What was the remit of that taskforce? Can you just help
2 us with why you created it?

3 **A.** So I believe that I established that, first of all to
4 properly understand the pressures that the sector was
5 under. Remember, this was -- the culture sector was
6 very diverse, it spanned everything through film and
7 television and museums, galleries, the commercial
8 theatre sector, the publicly-funded commercial -- the
9 publicly-funded theatre sector. So to understand what
10 their needs were, both in respect of what financial
11 support they might need but also whether it was viable
12 for them to continue to operate, because, as you may
13 recall, at different times during the Covid pandemic we
14 had different restrictions, the 2 metres, the
15 indoor/outdoors, but helping them to find a way through
16 to see whether there was any cultural activity that
17 could happen in the context of the rules that stood at
18 the time.

19 **Q.** Having established it, did you think it was beneficial?
20 Did it assist you to do that?

21 **A.** Yes, it did, yes. I mean, I found all engagement with
22 the multiplicity of sectors that I dealt with helpful.
23 It's one of the sources of information that I drew on,
24 amongst many others, in making decisions that I had to
25 make as Secretary of State.

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1 Q. Can I pick that up, then, as a theme, the issue of
2 consultation. Again, Sarah Elliott in her witness
3 statement and touched on in her evidence, has raised the
4 issue that the sector really only became aware of the
5 support package shortly before it was announced, and the
6 details just hours in advance. And that there wasn't
7 really, she would say, sufficient consultation with her
8 organisation and therefore with the sector about the
9 design of the support. What would you say to that, as
10 a complaint, if that's the right word?

11 A. Well, first of all, I appreciate her concerns, and in
12 a normal world, when we were designing a £750 million
13 package like this, it would have taken months and would
14 have been the principal focus of my department. And so,
15 in normal circumstances, I would have expected us to
16 have several rounds of consultation and engagement to
17 refine it. We didn't have that luxury in Covid, and we
18 wanted to get the money out of door very, very quickly
19 and, as you can see from the chronology, there was
20 a very short period of time between the announcement of
21 the lockdown and their package being announced, it was
22 the first one out of the door.

23 It is also always the case, though, that the
24 Treasury is very reluctant to engage on the specifics of
25 proposals until they are finally agreed, because it's

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1 was going to be --

2 -- (overspeaking) --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- is that a fair summary?

5 A. That's a fair summary, yes.

6 Q. Okay, thank you.

7 Generally, did you find that the greater the
8 consultation, that the better schemes landed and support
9 landed or was that not your experience?

10 A. Umm, well, yes and no. So it's important to record that
11 engagement with the sector is just one way in which we
12 derive information. So we would derive information from
13 the experience and expertise of the officials in my
14 department, many of whom have either worked in the
15 sector or had been engaging with the sector for many,
16 many years. We derive advice and information from
17 reports that were prepared on the sector, official
18 statistics, so all of this came together. Of course, if
19 we had enough time, more consultation is always better,
20 but as a department and as a government we had to trade
21 off the time for consultation with the speed of the
22 response.

23 Q. Thank you.

24 Now the monies that became available, the additional
25 monies, were delivered through a number of different

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1 the nature of policy making, particularly with the
2 Treasury, that schemes change and then they change again
3 so they don't wish to set hares running or false
4 expectations that then mean that people don't fully
5 understand where they are in terms of the support.

6 It is worth noting, though, that there was
7 engagement. I was able to listen to some of
8 Sarah Everett's (sic) evidence. It was very kind of her
9 to make reference to my officials and how she and her
10 team engaged extensively with them. That, in turn, was
11 feeding through to me and feeding through to the
12 Treasury, both me directly and through the -- directly
13 from civil servants to civil servants. And it's also
14 the case that I did engage with the sector. I had
15 a roundtable with them, and crucially, I had an
16 excellent junior minister in Diana Barran, Baroness
17 Barran, who had experience of the charitable sector who
18 did a lot of the heavy lifting in terms of engagement
19 with them and was a very valuable source of advice to me
20 as well.

21 Q. So to summarise your answer, there was consultation, and
22 that was going on all the time, with the sector, but,
23 given the pace and the need for the Treasury to sign off
24 on the package and formally announce it, there wasn't
25 a blow-by-blow consultation on the precise shape of what

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1 schemes. I think seven in total.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Is that right?

4 A. Yes, yes.

5 Q. We can take it as read. Why deliver the monies across
6 lots of different schemes rather than have one central
7 scheme that could provide support?

8 A. Well, it was to reflect the different needs of the
9 sector. So the fund that was allocated to other
10 government departments was a reflection of specific
11 needs, principally that had already been identified by
12 those departments. Those departments had the existing
13 relationship. So, for example, DHSC had the
14 relationship with the hospices sector. To take another
15 example I've used, DEFRA would have had the relationship
16 with the zoos. So it made more sense for them, having
17 had those relationships, to get money out to those
18 specific sectors.

19 Additionally, if you look at the breakdown, there
20 was -- also we had match funding. So, for example,
21 I think we had the Big Night in Children in Need, so we
22 were aware that by providing that match funding, we were
23 able to get more money in, and then we also, for
24 example, had the funding for the VCSE, which was about
25 essentially lubricating the system in terms of

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1 understanding more about the sector, so they needed more
2 support for that.

3 Then we had the principal package which was the
4 responsibility of the department, which was the
5 hundred -- or the £310 million charities package.

6 **Q.** Do you think there was a danger in that approach to
7 delivering funding that different departments were
8 bidding for their own directors and effectively
9 promoting the interests of their own sectors and that
10 there was only lack of transparency about who made,
11 ultimately, the decision about what money went where?

12 **A.** No, I don't -- don't think that was the case, because
13 there were -- there were just certain sectors that very
14 easily sat with a given government department. Those
15 departments then put bids into this decision-making
16 mechanism that we set up, a sort of star chamber, and
17 then collective decisions were made in respect of those
18 bids by a combination principally of DCMS and the
19 Treasury, which -- which you would expect to be the
20 case.

21 In all of this, we were seeking to get money out the
22 door as quickly as we could to the sectors that needed
23 it most but, at the same time, trying to build
24 a structure around it that was defensible to the public,
25 whose money we were spending.

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1 government over the individual departmental interests.
2 That was even more so the case during this -- this
3 once-in-a-generation crisis.

4 **Q.** I've already touched on the sum of money that was
5 available, but just to give you an opportunity to deal
6 with the criticism that was made this morning that this
7 just wasn't enough money, what would you say to that?

8 **A.** Well, first of all, the number of people touched by
9 these various schemes, I believe, is about 21 million
10 people one way or another, so we managed to -- to use
11 a colloquialism, to get quite a lot of bang for our buck
12 from it.

13 Secondly, it was the case that, within a year or
14 two, contrary to many of the concerns that had been
15 raised, we didn't see a wholesale collapse of the
16 charitable sector. The number of charities ceasing to
17 exist, I think it declined by about 1%, which I think
18 was kind of roughly about where we would have expected.
19 Although what I would say is, of course, as the
20 responsible Secretary of State, I always wanted to get
21 more money for -- for the sectors for which
22 I represented and I was passionate about.

23 But I think it -- I feel reasonably comfortable that
24 it was a -- (a) it was a defensible package, but (b), it
25 did have a profound impact on -- on many, many people.

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1 **Q.** Now, if we think about it in ordinary times, and there's
2 a spending review and different departments make bids
3 for money from the Treasury, I mean, do you accept that
4 in ordinary times there is an element of competition, if
5 you like, between departments as to who can secure their
6 funding for their programmes going forward?

7 **A.** Well, I suppose there's an implicit competition but it's
8 not really how it feels from an individual department.
9 What you do for an individual department is go through
10 the needs of your department and make the case to the
11 Treasury for your department.

12 I was never particularly concerned in any spending
13 review or budgetary process about the bids from other
14 departments. That was for the Treasury to make the
15 decision on. I was -- I was concerned about the needs
16 of the department that I represented to ensure that
17 appropriate funds were -- were given to them.

18 **Q.** So, as far as you're concerned, this star chamber, as
19 you've called it, effectively worked as a way of
20 departments could come and identify sectors that were in
21 particular need, and then the funding could be
22 distributed?

23 **A.** Yes. And it's important to remember -- first of all,
24 it's always the case that, as a government, we are
25 interested in the whole interests of the nation and the

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1 **Q.** The Coronavirus Community Support Fund, can I just ask
2 a couple of questions about that.

3 Do you accept or recognise the concern that it
4 lacked flexibility?

5 **A.** No, I'm afraid I think is the short answer. I just have
6 to be honest with you.

7 **Q.** Well, we obviously prefer honest answers.

8 **A.** Well, every answer is honest, I should say.

9 **Q.** So why was it configured as it was, from your
10 perspective?

11 **A.** So -- is this the point about the alleged complexity of
12 it?

13 **Q.** Yes.

14 **A.** Right. So the -- I was very cognisant, at the time, of
15 the need to protect the interests of the taxpayer and to
16 make sure that we had rigorous mechanisms in place to
17 ensure that money was allocated properly. And indeed,
18 without wanting to comment on any of the other
19 allegations around that, I think, with the passage of
20 time, this has been one of the public's big concerns,
21 about was the money spent wisely.

22 So I'm glad that we took a rigorous approach to the
23 allocation of public resources. This was still a huge
24 amount of money, £300 million-odd, that we were
25 responsible for -- for distributing.

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1 Q. So if we took a compare and contrast, say, between the
2 support a business could get -- apply for a bounce-back
3 loan, minimal scrutiny, and furloughed staff -- as
4 against additional layers of -- not complexity, but
5 requirements that had to be met for this fund, would you
6 say that the introduction of requirements was a good
7 thing, in that it was looking after public money, or
8 would you say you're -- it's comparing two different
9 things, really, in terms of support?

10 A. Well, I can only really speak to the schemes for which
11 I was responsible, and I felt that it was appropriate --
12 particularly it's worth noting in the -- in this context
13 that many of the organisations that were receiving money
14 were receiving it for the first time. They weren't
15 experienced with receiving it. They had limited
16 experience of -- of managing government funds. There
17 were -- it included non-registered, new organisations
18 that were being given rapid emergency funding.

19 So the judgement that I -- I took was that it was
20 proportionate to have this additional layer. However,
21 as things transpired -- I was always mindful of making
22 it proportionate, and I received representations that,
23 for relatively small amounts of money, we should -- we
24 should raise the threshold to £10,000. I felt that,
25 on balance, that was a proportionate approach.

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1 Q. So why, if they were familiar with delivering that sort
2 of support, bring in external consultants,
3 PricewaterhouseCoopers, paying them -- I think the
4 estimate was over or about £1.4 million to do what the
5 fund already knew how to do?

6 A. Well, first of all, for the reasons I set out: that
7 these organisations had limited experience of managing
8 government funds, there were non-registered new
9 organisations. And secondly, because the scale and
10 speed of what we were asking them to do. I took the
11 judgement at the time that an additional layer of
12 scrutiny would be appropriate, and as I say, when that
13 proved not to be required in respect of those smaller
14 sums the department showed flexibility or we showed
15 flexibility in respect of it.

16 Of course it's always the case that as a minister
17 you're trading off things; you're trading off speed,
18 rigour, complexity. But I suppose -- I don't -- if one
19 looks at the evidence of the people that experienced the
20 scheme, their feedback, even afterwards, was that
21 three-quarters of them found this was a reasonably
22 normal level of scrutiny. And, indeed, £1.4 million,
23 although it's a large sum of money, in the context of
24 a £300-odd-million scheme, I think that would be broadly
25 in the sort of boundaries of what one might expect

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1 But again, I think that I personally felt more
2 comfortable with having more rigour to begin with and
3 then easing off on the rigour than the other way round.

4 And so one final point worth making is if you look
5 at the surveys conducted subsequently -- and I'm happy
6 to write to the Inquiry with the -- the details of
7 those -- I believe that about three-quarters of the --
8 those surveyed who applied for funds under the scheme
9 found that it was reasonably simple and straightforward.
10 So it wasn't out of the normal bounds of what -- what
11 they might expect for applying to a government scheme.

12 Q. Accepting that one person's rigour might be another
13 person's layer of unnecessary complexity, depending
14 about your perspective.

15 Can I ask you about the National Lottery Community
16 Fund. That was a fund that was long-established, do you
17 accept?

18 A. Yes, that's right.

19 Q. And had a long history of delivering grant funding; it
20 knew what it was doing in ordinary times?

21 A. Yes, but it is worth noting that the scale and speed and
22 volume of this was much, much greater than what they
23 would deal with in -- in normal times. So they were
24 being asked to take on an enormous new workload in
25 a very short period of time.

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1 around administrative costs.

2 Q. So did you view that not as adding complexity so much as
3 ensuring delivery in a time of massive increase in
4 applications and need?

5 A. Yes, well, I was very mindful of the fact that we were
6 giving lots and lots of money to organisations that we
7 didn't know terribly well, and that I wanted some more
8 reassurance, not for me personally, but for the
9 government as a whole, and indeed the taxpayer.

10 Q. Thank you. Can I move on, then, to the second
11 significant topic, which is your department's engagement
12 with and feedback on the pan-economy measures.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. We've dealt with the funds that were set up, the new
15 money. But your engagement with the wider measures that
16 are applying across the economy, please.

17 I think you had some particular concerns, is that
18 right, about different aspects of the pan-economic
19 measures so far as they affected your sector or sectors.

20 A. Yes, well, one of my responsibilities and the
21 department's responsibilities was to engage with all the
22 relevant sectors which were responsible, pick up their
23 concerns, analyse those concerns, and if we felt that
24 those concerns were legitimate and had merit, to engage
25 with the Treasury about those concerns.

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1 Q. Okay. Can I just pick up a couple of concerns, I think,
 2 that arose from the Job Retention Scheme.
 3 If we can have up, please, INQ000623481, page 3 of
 4 that.
 5 This was advice to you from the Economic Response
 6 Directorate of 27 March of 2020. And this was raising
 7 issues about zero hours workers who were not on the PAYE
 8 payroll.
 9 A. Mm.
 10 Q. "Arrangements for employers which are not able to cease
 11 trading or close down their services", and then give
 12 some examples, tourism companies.
 13 And then at the bottom there:
 14 "Charities which are delivering the same (or
 15 additional) level of services as they would ... in
 16 normal circumstances, but with significantly reduced
 17 income from an individual giving and grants."
 18 What did you do with that advice, to take forward
 19 those concerns?
 20 A. And again, I just have to put the caveat in that I don't
 21 have the covering box notes, but what I would typically
 22 do, and I'm sure and I remember some of these very well,
 23 would be to engage with the Treasury -- if I felt that
 24 those were legitimate concerns, probably my first
 25 response would be to ask for some more detail on some of

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1 couldn't be furloughed --
 2 A. Mm-hm.
 3 Q. -- and then volunteer within the charity that had
 4 furloughed you, although you could volunteer with
 5 another charity. And obviously that might sound like
 6 a good idea, but it might not match the skill of the
 7 charity worker with the --
 8 A. Yeah.
 9 Q. -- with the particular charity.
 10 Rather than looking back over that, can we look
 11 forward. If there was ever a need for another Job
 12 Retention Scheme, do you consider that a carve-out for
 13 the charity sector that would enable furlough of
 14 employees in the charity sector and volunteering within
 15 their own charity would be (a) a good idea, (b)
 16 deliverable?
 17 A. Well, I made the case at the time extensively that they
 18 should be able to volunteer within their own sector.
 19 The legitimate pushback that we had from the Treasury
 20 was that how would that sit in terms of fraud? So the
 21 concern that, probably less from the charitable sector
 22 but from elsewhere, that companies could furlough
 23 someone and then get them to volunteer for that sector
 24 and sort of get it -- get the benefit twice, both the
 25 furlough scheme, and then the benefits of the services

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1 these things to make sure we were on solid ground, and
 2 I might question: are there schemes available, had they
 3 thought about doing so, and so on. If I still felt that
 4 was the case, I would seek to engage with the Treasury.
 5 The usual sort of hierarchy of engagement with the
 6 Treasury would be that I would instruct or request my
 7 officials to engage with their appropriate opposite
 8 numbers in the Treasury to see if they could get some
 9 movement there. Then if they didn't have some movement
 10 there, I'd ask my political advisers to engage through
 11 political channels, and then I would engage both with
 12 the Treasury or, indeed, with Number 10 because it's
 13 worth noting that in Downing Street there are private
 14 secretaries and policy officials that roughly sort of
 15 cover each individual government department. So we
 16 would engage with them as appropriate as well.
 17 So we would always try and do our best by the
 18 sectors for which we were responsible, but ultimately,
 19 accepting that the Treasuries are the ultimate
 20 custodians, both of these schemes, they designed them,
 21 so they were responsible for them, and they were the
 22 ultimate custodians of public money.
 23 Q. Now, we heard this morning a concern raised about the
 24 fact that one of the features of the Job Retention
 25 Scheme, particularly in the charity sector, was that you

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1 of that person.
 2 Of course with the benefit of time, if we could
 3 design a scheme working with the Treasury with
 4 sufficient time that we could really test it, that it
 5 was robust enough, we could find a way of enabling those
 6 charities to allow their staff to re-volunteer. I think
 7 it would have to specifically be to deliver specific
 8 Covid-related functions, then of course I would like
 9 that to be the case. And indeed, we did try and find
 10 a way of doing it; we just never got to a point where
 11 the Treasury could be sufficiently satisfied that it met
 12 those concerns.
 13 Q. So you would say, and I don't want to put words in your
 14 mouth, but I think you're saying lots of good policy
 15 reasons generally why the Treasury would be concerned
 16 about that sort of ability to volunteer back for fraud
 17 reasons and so on and so forth, but the charity sector
 18 is a different sector, and if it could be done in
 19 a secure way that avoided the potential for fraud,
 20 that's something that you would support going forward?
 21 A. Well, yes, both -- the potential for fraud, but also,
 22 again, there is a need to protect value for money for
 23 the taxpayer, because if it was the case that across all
 24 activities of a charitable sector, they -- they were
 25 able to get the furlough -- the benefit of the furlough

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1 money and then have all of their staff working, then
 2 I think that would probably put excessive demands on
 3 the -- the public purse. So my inclination, what I had
 4 hoped we could try and get to a point was to have it
 5 targeted at those delivering frontline services that
 6 required it at the time of the Covid crisis.

7 **Q.** Yes, or any future crisis --

8 **A.** Oh, indeed, any future-related crisis, of course.

9 **Q.** Understood.

10 So those who were delivering services that were
 11 tackling the immediate crisis, whatever that may be at
 12 the time, in an emergency sense?

13 **A.** Yes. And I should say in defence of the Treasury on
 14 this, and the Treasury can speak for itself, there
 15 wasn't a sort of lack of understanding from them about
 16 the issue, we just couldn't get to a point where it
 17 worked.

18 **Q.** Was there -- was there any sense in which there was
 19 a concern within government that the more complicated
 20 you started to make these schemes, and the ability of
 21 businesses or charities to apply for them, that that
 22 would start to defeat the purpose of the scheme?

23 **A.** Of course, that was always a trade-off. And
 24 particularly when we were going back to the Treasury,
 25 once the pan-economy schemes had been designed, saying

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1 engagement with the Treasury on that?

2 **A.** Well, we were driven by doing what was right, and my
 3 belief was that this was a sensible change that would --
 4 would benefit the charitable sector, but it is also
 5 worth noting the -- the wider public benefit, then,
 6 of -- of those organisations being able to draw on
 7 additional resources.

8 **Q.** Can I, then, give you an opportunity to look ahead and
 9 share learning and reflections from -- from your time as
 10 Secretary of State during the pandemic. I know you set
 11 out in your statement that, generally, you consider that
 12 the department stepped up well and obtained funding from
 13 the Treasury. Can I just ask you, first of all, about
 14 the Covid-19 Analytical Hub that you set up, and whether
 15 there were particular benefits from that hub, and if so,
 16 what they were and how they might apply going forward.

17 **A.** Yes, so one of the challenges that we faced when Covid
 18 struck was that we had this very wide array of different
 19 sectors for which we were responsible. Some of whom
 20 we'd engaged with more, others we'd engaged with less.
 21 And most of them were putting new demands on us,
 22 rightly. They were asking us to provide support for
 23 them, to engage with the Treasury on their behalf.

24 So we did find, in respect particularly of those
 25 sectors that we didn't normally engage with in respect

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1 "Can we tweak this?" or "Can we tweak that?", every
 2 iteration means -- and this is how government works --
 3 a whole fresh set of guidance goes out, new rules, and
 4 it's -- you've already got organisations that are
 5 applying under an old scheme, then you put out -- put
 6 out new rules. It just makes things more challenging.

7 **Q.** Thank you.

8 Can I move on to the business interruption loan
 9 schemes. It's right, isn't it, that concerns were
 10 raised with you that some charities were struggling to
 11 access funding through the loan schemes?

12 **A.** Yes, that's correct, yes.

13 **Q.** And what did you do in reaction to that
 14 -- (overspeaking) --

15 **A.** Well, this was the point about I think the 50% of their
 16 income needed to come from trading, and that was one of
 17 the areas where we were successful in convincing the
 18 Treasury to -- to tweak the rules, which I think
 19 benefited a number of charities.

20 **Q.** We understand that, after engagement, the Treasury
 21 prohibited lenders requiring personal guarantees, for
 22 example, and changed other elements, as you've said, of
 23 the 50% rule.

24 And was that, in your view, a particular success for
 25 the charity sector? Was that what was driving your

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1 of that issue -- so, for example, in the context we've
 2 been discussing, charities, OCS wouldn't historically
 3 have engaged that much with charities about a direct
 4 funding package provided by DCMS to them.

5 So it's certainly a lesson for me that we need -- in
 6 future, it would have been better to have more
 7 information about the specific needs of those sectors,
 8 in respect of financial support that they might need.
 9 That, in turn, could have helped us in the earlier
 10 engagement with the Treasury but, more importantly,
 11 going forward, for the Treasury to have a sort of war
 12 book, as it were, of understanding these things in more
 13 detail. The analytic function was an attempt to -- to
 14 improve our understanding across the board. And indeed,
 15 I think I then subsequently appointed a director of
 16 analytics, I think, in March or something, of the
 17 following year. So that was one of the gaps that we
 18 sought to -- to close up.

19 **Q.** Did you find generally that the -- first of all, that
 20 the analytical -- or the quality of the analytical
 21 product you were getting got better over time?

22 **A.** Yes -- broadly, yes. Yes. If not for the simple fact
 23 that we simply had more time to draw in more information
 24 and processes over time. In the very early days of the
 25 pandemic we were trying to do a huge amount in a very,

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1 very short period of time.

2 **Q.** And generally, did you find, as Secretary of State, that

3 the better the analysis, the better the decisions that

4 were made by the department?

5 **A.** Yes, I think probably the principal way in which that

6 manifested itself was I'd go back asking less questions.

7 So more questions would be -- have been answered in the

8 initial piece of advice, and so I'd -- I'd have to

9 request less -- less information subsequently.

10 **Q.** Did you think that there was a challenge in

11 communicating and engaging with a vast number of

12 businesses and sectors that fell under your remit? And

13 if you do, is there anything that can be done going

14 forwards to facilitate better engagement in a future

15 emergency?

16 **A.** I think it's difficult to see how one could sort of

17 square the circle, as it were, between having a very

18 wide, variety of different departments with areas for

19 which we were responsible and the short period of time

20 that we had to engage with them.

21 Every single one of them was making legitimate

22 demands of us in terms of communications, from the

23 newspapers that were worried that they were going to go

24 bust because there were no physical newspapers being

25 sold, to the broadband companies that thought that their

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1 organisations that are majority led, directed and

2 staffed and governed by disabled people as distinct from

3 charities.

4 **A.** Yeah.

5 **Q.** The National Lottery Community Fund guidance that was

6 used for the Coronavirus Community Support Fund

7 suggested that priority should be given to organisations

8 that are primarily led by people with lived experience,

9 and said this applies throughout the whole organisation,

10 including senior management and board representation,

11 and also priority to organisations that are currently

12 and historically underfunded, for example disabled

13 people's organisations. But that being so, that

14 intention wasn't actually within the guidance carried

15 through into the description of three priority

16 organisations that would be earmarked for that funding.

17 So my question is, did any reviews of that

18 Coronavirus Community Support Fund assess and look at

19 whether funds in fact went to representative

20 organisations, being ones such as DPO which are

21 primarily led by people with that lived experience as

22 distinct from charities?

23 **A.** I'm afraid I can't give you that answer now, but I'm

24 very happy to write back in terms of the reviews that

25 were undertaken in terms of the extent to which it

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1 infrastructure would crumble under the pressure of

2 everyone working from home and doing video calls and so

3 on.

4 So I think -- I think broadly, what we did was

5 correct, led by my very, very good permanent secretary,

6 we -- we shifted resources from all the different --

7 other different areas into the -- the front line of

8 dealing with the -- the crisis.

9 I think the risk is that if we put too many

10 resources into communications, for most of normal

11 activity, those will be surplus to requirements. So

12 I think that is just a -- in terms of any

13 recommendations the Inquiry would choose to make, it's

14 how one balances having too much idle -- or too many

15 idle resources that aren't being used outside of

16 a crisis situation.

17 **MR WRIGHT:** Well, Sir Oliver, thank you, those are my

18 questions.

19 I think there are, my Lady, some questions from

20 Core Participants.

21 **LADY HALLETT:** There are.

22 Ms Beattie, who sits just there.

23 **Questions from MS BEATTIE**

24 **MS BEATTIE:** Sir Oliver, I ask questions on behalf of

25 national Disabled People's Organisations, being

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1 manifested itself in terms of the resources that were

2 given to those disabled-led organisations. It

3 certainly, as you say, it was reflected in the criteria

4 that was provided for it, and it was something we were

5 mindful of as a government, and indeed, we were governed

6 in all our decisions by the Public Sector Equality Duty

7 to bear these things in mind. And --

8 **Q.** And I think did we also see it, actually, as part of the

9 grant management and reporting requirements that was

10 coming from the fund --

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** -- into the department about whether those organisations

13 were in fact receiving, applying, and being given those

14 grants? Do you remember seeing that kind of analysis

15 coming in?

16 **A.** Um, I can't recall. That's not to say that I didn't see

17 it. What I do recall, though, and indeed in the

18 conversations that we had around the designing of the

19 scheme, was first of all to make sure that the scheme

20 addressed those concerns and making sure, in terms of

21 discharging our Public Sector Equality Duty, making sure

22 that groups most in need had access to the schemes.

23 And it was also the case, I think, that when we

24 had -- subsequently as the crisis went on, the Cabinet

25 Office certainly looked at groups that required more

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1 support as well. So it was something that was front of
2 mind throughout the period of time.

3 What I can't refer you to now, and I'm happy to
4 write back on, is the specifics of how that may have
5 manifested itself in advice that I received.

6 **Q.** And do you think that grant criteria could have been
7 better designed to ensure that it does get to such
8 organisations?

9 **A.** I mean, I think it -- and I'm afraid without pulling it
10 up in front of me I can't say for certain, but I do seem
11 to recall that one of the criteria specifically dealt
12 with this. Of course, as I made the point in evidence
13 previously, there's always ways that we can refine this.
14 And if we had had more time to design it in more detail,
15 I would have liked us to have engaged more, with more
16 organisations, to make sure that we could ensure that
17 that guidance was absolutely bespoke to the needs of
18 those sectors.

19 **Q.** So in the event of a future pandemic, do you think that
20 both Disabled People's Organisations and the National
21 Council for Voluntary Organisations could be better
22 involved in helping to determine and shape that kind of
23 support package?

24 **A.** Yes, what I would rather is that they were -- and you
25 talked about a war book sort of plans for Covid going

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1 **A.** Mm.

2 **Q.** We understand from your statement that it was raised
3 with the Treasury by your department. Why was it that
4 ultimately there wasn't a deviation from the
5 pan-economic approach, or pan-economy approach, as
6 you've described it, in order to address the problem
7 with sector-specific support?

8 **A.** Well, I believe rather like the issue of volunteering,
9 when we covered off, it was finding a way that we could
10 do this that addressed the concerns of the sector. So
11 I think some of the issues related, for example, to
12 whether there were -- whether those people had been
13 trading for long enough to be able to provide sufficient
14 accounts to do so. There was also, I think, an issue --
15 separately, there was an issue around thresholds where I
16 believe there was a cut-off, I think at £50,000.
17 Ultimately, the Treasury took the view that in terms of
18 protecting public funds, they didn't want to raise that
19 threshold across the board.

20 What I should say, though, is that I was very
21 mindful of this, both in terms of the Cultural Recovery
22 Fund, and that's one of the reasons why we came to quite
23 a large sum for the Cultural Recovery Fund, I did try to
24 encourage in the distribution of that to see how we
25 could support the self-employed and the creatives and

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1 forward, that we had that engagement before in terms of
2 our general resilience planning. What I can't say is
3 that if we were faced with the same situation again, we
4 may well find the same problem of just the speed of
5 engagement, which meant that we did engage with
6 disability organisations but it tended to be more
7 through other representative organisations of different
8 charities. We just didn't have the time to engage with
9 every single organisation. It tended to be more
10 representative organisations of different groups of
11 charities. But I certainly think that that is an
12 important consideration.

13 **MS BEATTIE:** Thank you, my Lady.

14 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you, Ms Beattie.

15 Mr Jacobs.

16 Mr Jacobs is over that way.

17 **Questions from MR JACOBS**

18 **MR JACOBS:** Sir Oliver, some questions on behalf of the
19 Trades Union Congress.

20 **A.** Yes.

21 **Q.** As I know you were acutely aware, many in the creative
22 industries found themselves out of work but also because
23 of the nature of their employment, also ineligible for
24 support, whether under the Job Retention Scheme or the
25 self-employed scheme.

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1 why, latterly, I became -- I was very keen to get
2 sectors to reopen to create opportunities. For example,
3 we managed to do that with the film and television
4 restart scheme.

5 **Q.** Sir Oliver, you've helpfully pointed to some of the
6 causes of those gaps that were felt particularly keenly
7 in the creative industries. But that doesn't
8 necessarily explain why there wasn't a sector-specific
9 package for those working in the sector. Do
10 I understand that it was really a practical problem?

11 **A.** So I think principally, it was about -- when we engaged
12 with the Treasury, we -- we couldn't find a way of
13 making that work from a practical perspective.

14 But I would just like to pick up on the point you
15 made about the sector-specific scheme. There was
16 the £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund. Now, of
17 course, that was not directly aimed at creatives and the
18 self-employed, but by getting resources to those
19 organisations, it created opportunities for them.

20 So there was -- there was some indirect support that
21 way.

22 But of course, I mean, it's a regret of mine that
23 we -- we couldn't find a way of doing that, and I was
24 acutely aware of the pressures that those -- those
25 individuals were under.

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1 Q. And on this point, at paragraph 116 of your statement,
 2 you describe having raising this point with the
 3 Treasury. You say:
 4 "Ultimately, the collectively agreed approach was to
 5 take broad measures."
 6 And then you say:
 7 "In future resilience planning should develop a more
 8 detailed understanding within sectors of employment
 9 types so we have a clearer view at the outset."
 10 What would or should that more detailed
 11 understanding lead to, in terms of perhaps the war book,
 12 as you've -- to use your phrase?
 13 A. Yes, so the trade-off that we were making was between
 14 a simplicity and bespoke schemes. I think that if we
 15 had more time, and in designing it in future, with time,
 16 I would hope that we could find a way of designing the
 17 self-employed support scheme in such a way that it would
 18 capture more -- more creatives than we -- we managed to
 19 do. So that wasn't from a lack of will on the
 20 department's side, nor, I think, from the Treasury side;
 21 it was just how -- how we could tailor that scheme as it
 22 was at the time to meet those needs. With -- with more
 23 time, I would hope that we could find something that met
 24 those needs.
 25 Q. And with more time, might it be that, rather than,

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1 former colleagues unnecessary work, the Inquiry will
 2 contact you if it needs more from you, if that suits
 3 you.
 4 THE WITNESS: Great. Thank you very much.
 5 LADY HALLETT: Lovely. Well, thank you very much again.
 6 Really grateful.
 7 Very well, I shall return again at 1.35.

(12.33 pm)

(The Short Adjournment)

(1.35 pm)

11 LADY HALLETT: Ms Wilson.

12 MS WILSON: My Lady, the next witness is Kate Bell.

MS KATE BELL (affirmed)

Questions from COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY

15 MS WILSON: Ms Bell, you've provided a statement to this
 16 module of the Inquiry dated 15 July 2025 with
 17 a reference number INQ000587945.

18 Is that statement true to the best of your knowledge
 19 and belief?

20 A. It is.

21 Q. Thank you. You're giving evidence today in your
 22 capacity as the Assistant General Secretary of the
 23 Trades Union Congress, a role which you held during the
 24 pandemic alongside your role as the head of the rights,
 25 international, social and economic affairs department in

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1 perhaps, seeing the simplicity of a pan-economic scheme
 2 with a bespoke scheme, that actually, a bespoke scheme
 3 could be supplementary, it could overlay a national
 4 scheme?
 5 A. Well, I think the challenge with that is that one can
 6 end up in a situation where there's a myriad of bespoke
 7 schemes. So I did support the position that the
 8 Treasury took, which was to try to have a pan-economy
 9 scheme that did what it said on the tin, helped all
 10 sectors, because there's a benefit of that simplicity.
 11 So I would rather that the approach for doing it would
 12 be to design the pan-economy schemes in such a way as
 13 they captured more self-employed rather than overlaying
 14 the pan-economy scheme with a myriad of bespoke schemes
 15 for different sectors.
 16 Q. But the outcome either way should be narrowing the gaps?
 17 A. I would very much hope so, yes.
 18 MR JACOBS: My Lady, thank you very much.
 19 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much, Mr Jacobs.
 20 That completes the questions we have for you,
 21 Sir Oliver. Thank you very much indeed for your help
 22 and for coming back a second time and preparing
 23 a witness statement.
 24 You've offered, very kindly, to produce more
 25 information. To save you unnecessary work, or your

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1 the TUC; is that right?

2 A. I wasn't actually the Assistant General Secretary during
 3 the pandemic but I was head of our rights,
 4 international, social and economics department.

5 Q. Thank you. And it's right, isn't it, that the TUC
 6 represent 5 million members across 48 affiliated unions
 7 and as a Core Participant in this module, are working in
 8 partnership with your organisations across the devolved
 9 administration?

10 A. That's right. Since we wrote the statement, we're 47
 11 unions now.

12 Q. Thank you. I want to start by asking you, please, about
 13 joint working with the United Kingdom Government,
 14 please. How did you go about representing your members
 15 and engaging with the UK Government?

16 A. Thank you very much, and thank you for having me here
 17 today. So we made frequent representations to
 18 government and I will say in this area of economic
 19 support, I think it was our most positive area of
 20 engagement. We'd published reports at the start of the
 21 pandemic and we'd been focusing on sick pay but also
 22 calls for a wage subsidy scheme.

23 We published a report on 18 March which set out what
 24 we believed to be a comprehensive response to the
 25 pandemic, and we sent that to government, and we very

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1 rapidly began engaging with the Treasury. So there was
2 a call with the Chancellor on 18 March. That was
3 followed with engagement with both the Chancellor and
4 officials, a round table the next day with ourselves and
5 business organisations.

6 And that engagement continued on this particular
7 issue throughout the pandemic so we were speaking to our
8 members, we held regular executive meetings to hear from
9 our affiliated unions about the experience of their
10 members, supplemented by calls. And we reflected that
11 both by publishing a series of reports which set out
12 what we believed needed to happen, and sharing those
13 findings with government, both with officials and at
14 a political level.

15 And as the witness statement set out, that included
16 a number of round tables with the Chancellor and our
17 affiliated unions.

18 **Q.** Because am I right in that there was no established
19 framework for partnership working prior to the pandemic?
20 So a lot of this positive engagement you've described
21 was really in response to the crisis on an *ad hoc* basis;
22 is that right?

23 **A.** Yes, I think that's definitely right.

24 **Q.** But I think it's described in your witness statement as
25 a very intense period of engagement?

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1 **A.** -- what it produced. I mean, I do think there are
2 a number of areas where that engagement of unions as the
3 voice of workers really made a difference to the type of
4 support that was provided. One of those was the
5 relatively generous level of coverage of the furlough
6 scheme at 80%. We'd shown evidence from across European
7 countries that showed that that level of support was
8 possible, deliverable, and worked.

9 I think we were one of the first people to raise the
10 issue of, about a month and a half into the scheme, that
11 people were needing to make statutory redundancy
12 notifications, because the scheme was due to come to an
13 end, and the real need to extend the scheme to prevent
14 that from happening.

15 We were also one of the organisations that pushed
16 really hard for the creation of flexible furlough.
17 I think that was already being raised by business but
18 again, showing the real value of that tripartite
19 engagement.

20 The inclusion of zero-hours contract workers,
21 multiple times where we pushed for clear guidance for
22 parents and those who were shielding. Again, that was
23 on an *ad hoc* basis. It was due in some ways to the
24 goodwill of officials and indeed the ministers they were
25 working to. But a regular structure for engagement

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1 **A.** It was a very intense period of engagement. It was very
2 welcome engagement. We had frequent meetings with
3 officials, frequent meetings with our own unions.
4 I remarked to a colleague earlier that I was reviewing
5 my pandemic notebooks and trying to work out where one
6 day went into the next, because there were so many pages
7 in each day of notes of the engagement we were having at
8 this point.

9 **Q.** You suggest in your statement any future scheme or
10 engagement should be via a tripartite panel. So given
11 what you describe as very positive, albeit *ad hoc*,
12 engagement at the start of the pandemic, why does this
13 need to be formalised, in your view?

14 **A.** Well, I think we need to be ready for any future
15 pandemic and I think, and I can go on to say more about
16 this if you want, but the results of our engagement were
17 really positive. I think it would have been easier for
18 everybody if such a structure had already existed before
19 we went into the pandemic, because although, as I said,
20 the engagement was positive, it was *ad hoc* and people
21 were kind of working at pace, let's say, to get those
22 forms of engagement established.

23 If it's helpful now, I can go on to say why I think
24 that engagement was so valuable and --

25 **Q.** Of course, yeah.

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1 would have made it easier to make those points known.

2 **LADY HALLETT:** Can I ask you to slow down.

3 **THE WITNESS:** Sorry.

4 **MS WILSON:** Going back to the beginning of the Coronavirus
5 Job Retention Scheme, your organisation called for
6 a wage subsidy scheme right at the outset, didn't you?

7 **A.** We did. I think -- and I think the first time -- we
8 should check this against the witness statement, but
9 I think the first time was when my colleague Paul Nowak,
10 who was then the Deputy General Secretary, gave evidence
11 to a select committee, and we press released the need
12 for a wage subsidy scheme.

13 We then, as I mentioned, had a report out on
14 18 March which called for that as our central demand for
15 the economic response to the pandemic.

16 **Q.** And I just want to take you and all of us back to when
17 that scheme was announced, if I can.

18 If I can have on screen, please, INQ000656362.

19 This was an email from Rain Newton-Smith, from the
20 Confederation of British Industry, to Dr Tim Leunig, who
21 we'll hear from shortly. Now, you weren't included in
22 this chain, but it's stated there, in real-time response
23 to the furlough announcement:

24 "It has saved jobs in real-time. We've had members
25 on the phone in tears. I'm not saying all the problems

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1 are fixed but immediate reaction from some of the very
 2 big employers [is] positive."
 3 Did you have a similarly powerful positive reaction
 4 from your members?
 5 **A.** Absolutely. We were hearing from -- we'd been hearing
 6 prior to the announcement of the scheme from big
 7 manufacturers in the automotive sector about the very
 8 real risk of redundancies, people being, you know, at
 9 real threat of being laid off immediately. And I think
 10 all of our -- you know, our members are quite well
 11 networked with other organisations across Europe, where
 12 these schemes are positive. So we knew that this was
 13 something that could work, and we knew it was something
 14 that was important. And I think our press release at
 15 the time was very warmly welcomed, the announcement of
 16 the scheme, and I think there was a hugely positive
 17 response.
 18 **Q.** Yes, I think your press release described it as
 19 a breakthrough.
 20 **A.** Yeah.
 21 **Q.** All right. And indeed you've reflected on the scheme in
 22 your statement and you've described it as the "most
 23 successful scheme in the pandemic"; is that right?
 24 **A.** I think that's right. We know it saved millions of
 25 jobs. That's what the evidence says. Millions of jobs

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1 The other issue I think we'd highlight, and I think
 2 there were some efforts made in this direction, but
 3 could have been more, was the provision of some form of
 4 training, proactive approaches to people being able to
 5 receive training while they were on furlough so that
 6 they could be refreshing their skills to return to their
 7 job. Or if their job did disappear, they would have
 8 a better chance of moving on to the next one.
 9 **Q.** Because, as I understand it, workers could receive
 10 training even though they were furloughed; is that
 11 right?
 12 **A.** They could receive training but we were pushing for
 13 a kind of cross-government effort to make sources of
 14 information about training possible, potentially for
 15 a duty on employers to tell their workers that they
 16 could be trained and to help with the sourcing of that
 17 training, and potentially to identify the skills that
 18 they needed for their business to support employers with
 19 gaining those.
 20 **Q.** Do you think it was widely understood amongst employers
 21 that they could offer training to their employers whilst
 22 furloughing them?
 23 **A.** I don't think so. It was something we continued to
 24 raise and our members continued to raise throughout.
 25 **Q.** Thank you. Another gap which we heard about last week

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1 and millions of people's livelihoods.
 2 **Q.** And notwithstanding that success, I think there are some
 3 features of the scheme that you would like to see
 4 refined or addressed in any future iteration; is that
 5 right?
 6 **A.** I think that's right. I can outline them if that's
 7 helpful now.
 8 **Q.** If you could outline the ones that would be priority for
 9 you, Ms Bell, please.
 10 **A.** I think -- and maybe we can go on to talk about this
 11 when we talk about the Self-Employment Income Support
 12 Scheme but the gaps between people who fell between the
 13 two schemes were really very difficult. Particularly,
 14 with relevance to people -- when it comes to the CJRS,
 15 people who are on multiple contracts, so had no single
 16 employer who would furlough them. That's a particular
 17 issue with this scheme.
 18 Maybe two other issues which we highlighted
 19 throughout and would want addressed in the design of any
 20 future scheme. We believed very strongly that people on
 21 the minimum wage should receive all of their wages
 22 protected and not have that dropped down to 80% of their
 23 wages. We think the minimum wage is what it says on the
 24 tin: it's a minimum you should be paid for your work,
 25 and we thought that was really important.

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1 was in respect of employees who were denied furlough by
 2 their employers and so they were effectively left at
 3 risk of redundancy. Was that a concern which your
 4 members raised with you or which you saw at the time?
 5 **A.** We did repeatedly hear concerns about people who were
 6 not able to get furlough. I think at times we thought
 7 about issues like writing to employers, encouraging them
 8 to make sure they were making use of the scheme where
 9 they could. We tried to make efforts to make sure that
 10 the guidance was as clear as it could possibly be about
 11 who could be furloughed. I think I mentioned before,
 12 particularly around parents with specific caring
 13 responsibilities and those who were shielding.
 14 So we were making efforts, our unions were making
 15 efforts, to make sure that workers and their employers
 16 understood that this was a scheme that could be used to
 17 protect their jobs.
 18 **Q.** One amendment or potential solution we heard last week
 19 was about a right to request furlough. Is that
 20 something which your organisation would support?
 21 **A.** I think it's something we could definitely consider.
 22 And again, we've talked about that tripartite engagement
 23 in terms of with unions and businesses. I think there's
 24 some situations, again, particularly for those
 25 shielding, where that would be really important. So

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1 I think we'd have to think through carefully how it
2 would fit with the fact that it's sort of the business
3 that triggers the furlough, and of course with the range
4 of other rights that workers do have.
5 **Q.** Can I move now to ask you about how the CJRS was
6 extended.

7 And can I bring up on screen, please, INQ000612664.
8 This is a letter to Mr Sunak of 24 April '20. And
9 in the second paragraph there, it followed a very recent
10 amendment to the furlough scheme, which you considered
11 to be at the last possible minute, and in the end, the
12 final sentence there, you're noting a period of
13 consultation around possible redundancies such that any
14 extension would need to be issued around 17 May.

15 So, as I understand it, you had concerns there
16 around the timing of the previous amendment; is that
17 right?

18 **A.** That's right, that's the point I was raising earlier
19 about the statutory period for redundancy consultation,
20 meaning -- I think it was -- we raised it and two days
21 later it was amended, but it was very close to the point
22 at which otherwise employers would have had to be
23 sending letters to people telling them, "You are at risk
24 of redundancy", and that would have been very, very
25 difficult for those workers.

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1 the decision to extend furlough in November, I think,
2 was taken very much at the last minute when it became
3 clear that lockdown was going to come back, basically.

4 That did have real impacts. You can see a spike in
5 redundancy notifications in the September prior -- when
6 people thought that furlough was going to end. And
7 I think maybe the desire for the pandemic to come to an
8 end and the desire for furlough to come to an end, and
9 I think to some extent there was a real concern amongst
10 some areas of the media and potentially within
11 government that furlough should not be extended, may
12 have slowed down the realisation that, actually, what
13 needed to happen at that point was the furlough scheme
14 just needed to be reinitiated, because the lockdown was
15 going to be back in place.

16 I think maybe another reflection and maybe it's
17 easier to have this in hindsight, is some clearer
18 criteria about the situations in which a furlough scheme
19 would apply or be triggered, would have helped with that
20 decision making and would have provided greater
21 certainty to businesses and to workers during that
22 period.

23 **Q.** So you would like to see, in any future pandemic,
24 a clear basis on which a government might withdraw or
25 extend furlough?

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1 Again, maybe just going back to the point you made
2 at the beginning about formal processes for engagement.
3 Perhaps if we had had those formal tripartite processes
4 for engagement, that might have been a point we would
5 have been able to raise earlier, recognising, of course,
6 that these were pretty exceptional times we were
7 operating in.

8 **Q.** And what you were asking government there, really, was
9 to take into account other labour market laws and rules
10 around redundancy and so the reality with which
11 employers and employees were operating?

12 **A.** Exactly that.

13 **Q.** And it also furthered further the objective of furlough,
14 which was of course to avoid large-scale redundancies?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** Do you think the later extensions of furlough took that
17 into account?

18 **A.** I think the point about redundancy consultations had
19 been made, and when furlough was extended that summer,
20 I think that point had landed. I think the period
21 between, I think, June and October of that year, I think
22 there was probably, including amongst ourselves,
23 excessive optimism about what might happen next. So we
24 at that point had called for the introduction of
25 a different type of short-time working scheme. And then

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1 **A.** I think so. We can't anticipate the scenario for any
2 future pandemic, but I think a sort of initial set of
3 guidelines about the situations in which this type of
4 scheme is sensible, possible, and desirable to deliver
5 would really help with the decision making in that
6 regard.

7 **Q.** Moving now to the decision in March '21 to end, bring
8 the scheme to an end, and it was brought to an end at
9 the end of September '21, your organisation called for
10 it to continue longer than that, until the end of '21.
11 Why was that?

12 **A.** I think we'd learnt from that period of uncertainty
13 I just described, and the importance of providing
14 greater certainty to business. We pointed out, and
15 I think it's in our evidence, that France and Germany
16 had done the same thing. And I think we also knew, or
17 thought we knew, by that point, that businesses were not
18 using furlough if they didn't need to. So we were
19 pointing to evidence, for example, in the construction
20 industry that at the beginning of the pandemic, a large
21 proportion of the workforce had been furloughed. By
22 that point, people had found safer ways of working, ways
23 to operate, and the number of people on furlough had
24 dramatically reduced.

25 So our perspective was it's better to be safe in

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1 this respect, and the disadvantages of extending
2 furlough seemed to us to be outweighed by the advantages
3 of that certainty.

4 **Q.** Thank you. Can I move now to ask you about the
5 Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, or the
6 self-employed scheme, if we can call it that.

7 On 23 March 2020, you called for greater support for
8 the self-employed, didn't you? I think we can just
9 bring this up. It's INQ000612684.

10 This is part of your report, which I think you've
11 touched on earlier, called Fixing the Safety Net, and so
12 what you're asking for there is for the government
13 support to the more than 5 million self-employed people
14 who at that point were not eligible for the government's
15 job retention scheme.

16 And later on in the report you suggested the most
17 effective way to support the self-employed would be to
18 bring in a scheme which mirrored the support to the
19 employed. So a support of 80% of income up to a maximum
20 of £2,500 a month.

21 Now, some of the evidence we've received suggests
22 that there was a moral rather than an economic case for
23 supporting the self-employed. What's your view on that?

24 **A.** I don't think we considered it in those terms. We had
25 received calls from our members as soon as the CJRS was

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1 we were raising: one was that "not quite in
2 self-employment not quite in employment group", for
3 example with multiple PAYE engagements, who were kind of
4 neither one or the other. The well-known issues about
5 those people who didn't have a tax return of the
6 relevant year. Those who were kind of just over the
7 border, the £50,000 cut-off, again, really tricky to
8 design that taper but over time we thought maybe that
9 could have been addressed. And of course some
10 particularly difficult issues around people who received
11 their income through dividends.

12 Again, I think those were difficult design issues.
13 They were hampered by kind of lack of data and
14 government information which was difficult to solve but
15 again, I think that makes the case for early engagement
16 with a range of different stakeholders in thinking how
17 you would prepare for a future pandemic.

18 I think maybe just the other point maybe I would
19 like to raise, if that's okay here, is one of the
20 reasons that these kind of exclusions were so sharp was
21 because of the inadequacy of other forms of social
22 security or other forms of support. So in other
23 countries, if you lost your job and were not eligible
24 for other forms of support, you might have been getting
25 around 80% of your previous wages anyway through the

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1 announced. I think we had calls from our members
2 representing self-employed workers who were talking
3 about the impact on those workers, and of course their
4 businesses.

5 Obviously, you know, the situation is different for
6 self-employed workers, although we should note that many
7 of those workers may not necessarily be self-employed by
8 choice. They will have been required to work under
9 those arrangements by the people who are contracting
10 them, so I think it's difficult to draw the boundaries
11 sometimes between the self-employed and the employed and
12 I think that's one of the cases we were making, is there
13 will be many people in that situation who had no other
14 choice about how to protect their livelihood and we
15 needed a scheme that would protect them.

16 **Q.** Can I move now to ask you about some of the design
17 features of the scheme. And again, although you
18 welcomed the self-employed scheme and the additional
19 support it gave to those who qualified, I think you've
20 identified some coverage issues which you would like to
21 see addressed in any future iteration of the scheme.

22 **A.** That's right and I think, you know, this was always
23 going to be a difficult scheme to design and there may
24 always have been sort of edge issues about people who
25 fell either side of those gaps. But I think four issues

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1 social security system.

2 But our particularly mean social security system
3 meant the consequences of falling outside, between the
4 gaps in these schemes, or outside one of the boundaries
5 that this scheme had set were really devastating for
6 people, and you see that in our evidence where you see
7 half of BECTU members, so they were members in the
8 creative industry, saying they were having to borrow
9 money to make ends meet.

10 **Q.** Thank you. The final scheme I want to ask you about is
11 the Kickstart scheme. So this was the scheme designed
12 to support jobs placements for 16 to 24-year-olds on
13 Universal Credit, announced in July '20, and went live
14 in September '20.

15 You've commented in your statement that the scheme
16 was underwhelming in its delivery and you've raised some
17 concerns around the quality of training. Can you just
18 elaborate on those issues, please.

19 **A.** Yes, of course. I think I should say in the first
20 instance that it was a welcome scheme. We'd called for
21 that scheme, and we published a report calling for
22 a jobs guarantee scheme, because we were very clear
23 about the terrible experience young people were having
24 in the pandemic. They were most likely to be in the
25 sectors which were affected by job losses, and of

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course, much less likely to have savings and most likely to be scarred by the impacts of unemployment.

So, the existence of the scheme was very welcome, and when we look at the evaluation of it we can see that it did deliver positive results, and there were, I think, over 160,000 people who benefited from that scheme.

However, I think our ability to engage with the scheme or the willingness of government to engage with us on the scheme diminished a little bit through the course of the pandemic.

And one of the issues we'd consistently raised was the need for some more local coordination in how the scheme was delivered. So we asked for local or regional panels bringing together union representatives, business representatives, and Jobcentre Plus, who were the main body responsible for delivering the scheme, to really coordinate on how those placements were delivered, who was getting them, the type of additional support that young people with additional needs might require. And that wasn't really something that was ever taken up, as far as I know. That suggestion seemed a little bit to fall on deaf ears.

And we think that kind of local level of coordination might have helped with some of the kind of

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agreement, maybe some of that tripartite agreement as well, unions, businesses, government, about how such schemes work and then how they can be adapted to the particular circumstances of a pandemic.

We obviously also don't know that the next crisis we face will be a pandemic, and I think we can think of other situations in which a scheme like this might have real benefits. Flooding might be an example, where there's a short-term temporary interruption to business. And such a scheme, once again, as we saw with this scheme, can protect jobs, livelihoods and businesses.

Q. Thank you. Those are all my questions. Are there any additional reflections or lessons learned you'd like to share?

A. I suppose we that kind of four points, most of which I think I've made, but I think it is really important to remember these schemes really worked. They did save jobs across the country, they did save businesses and they did really protect people's livelihoods. And I think we should be collectively proud of that.

I think they really showed the benefit of engagement. I've talked about how that engagement could be improved, but workers' voices were able to make a difference to that scheme, as were businesses.

I've just talked about the importance of thinking

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teething problems the scheme faced, some of the concerns that you can see in the evaluation from some young people, although the majority did have a positive experience about the quality of their placements and the training they were receiving.

Q. Thank you, Ms Bell.

We've touched on a number of reflections and recommendations throughout your evidence but there's just one point I want to touch on from your statement. You ask the Inquiry to consider recommending a permanent furlough scheme to deal with the future periods of economic turbulence caused by a future pandemic. Why a permanent scheme rather than, for example, an off-the-shelf Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme?

A. I'm not sure there's a huge difference between those two. I think you can see that in countries which already had schemes up and running, or short-time working schemes available, it was easier for them to adapt those schemes. And I think some of the issues we've talked about, about kind of when you pull the lever to have your furlough scheme or short-time working scheme in place, are made much easier if you've got a scheme which is already existing which has a set of criteria which you may need to adapt in the circumstances of a pandemic, that you've got shared

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now about any future scheme and what conditions we would want, and that would also help us think about the kind of data requirements we might face, and getting ahead of some of those data requirements that, for example, made some of the self-employed scheme difficult to manage.

And then I think I would want to reiterate that point that the gaps in the, kind of, UK's overall safety net made all of the choices about these schemes much harder, because it meant that if you fell through the cracks, you were falling a long way. And that shouldn't have been the case now and it shouldn't be the case in the future either.

MS WILSON: Thank you, Ms Bell.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much, Ms Wilson.

Thank you very much indeed, Ms Bell, I'm extremely grateful to you. You've given a lot of help to the Inquiry already, I know, in its various modules. I know the TUC are helping us in M10 as well, so I'm not sure that --

THE WITNESS: Not me.

LADY HALLETT: -- I can say "Thank you and goodbye", but thank you very much indeed for all the help you've given so far.

THE WITNESS: Thank you very much for listening to us.

LADY HALLETT: Right.

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1 **MR WRIGHT:** Yes, my Lady, the next witness is Dr Tim Leunig.
 2 **LADY HALLETT:** I'm really sorry to be picky, can you take
 3 your hands out of your pockets when you take the
 4 affirmation.
 5 **DR TIM LEUNIG (affirmed)**
 6 **Questions from RICHARD WRIGHT KC, LEAD COUNSEL TO THE**
 7 **INQUIRY for MODULE 9**
 8 **LADY HALLETT:** Sorry about that.
 9 **THE WITNESS:** That's fine.
 10 **MR WRIGHT:** Dr Leunig, you've provided a statement to this
 11 module of the Inquiry, which is INQ000588231. Before
 12 I ask you some questions arising from your statement,
 13 I think you've drawn to the Inquiry's attention two
 14 short corrections, so can we deal with those at the
 15 outset and there will be a further short statement
 16 formally addressing them, but I understand the two
 17 corrections are that at paragraph 434 of your statement,
 18 where you reference "R below zero", the reference should
 19 have been "R below 1"; is that right?
 20 **A.** Correct.
 21 **Q.** And at paragraph 555 of your statement, the reference to
 22 110 million should be to 110 billion?
 23 **A.** Embarrassingly, but yes.
 24 **Q.** Thank you. Thank you very much.
 25 That presages me asking you that you are the -- or
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1 scheme? How would you term? How should we think about
 2 it.
 3 **A.** Well, it's many things simultaneously. The point of
 4 a furlough scheme, and they exist in just about every
 5 European country, is indeed manifold. As you say, one
 6 aspect is simply to replace income, but that's not the
 7 primary intent.
 8 **Q.** Can I pause there, because otherwise I'll be told off.
 9 We're going too quickly.
 10 **A.** I'm sorry.
 11 **Q.** No, no, it's not your fault, it's mine, because I need
 12 to just slow things down little bit. It's because
 13 a note is being taken, so just take it a little bit more
 14 slowly if you wouldn't mind.
 15 **A.** So one of the objectives, aims, outcomes, call it what
 16 you will, of a furlough scheme, is income protection.
 17 That's not its primary aim.
 18 **Q.** So can we just pause there?
 19 **A.** Yeah.
 20 **Q.** Just to unpack this for anyone listening, income
 21 protection, so that's what the protection of the income
 22 of the worker?
 23 **A.** Yes, absolutely.
 24 **Q.** Okay.
 25 **A.** And we can see that in continental Europe where they
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1 were the economic adviser to the Chancellor at the time
 2 of the pandemic; is that right?
 3 **A.** That is right, yes.
 4 **Q.** Thank you very much.
 5 Dr Leunig, your background has been in economics
 6 throughout your working life, as an academic and
 7 practising economist; is that right?
 8 **A.** Yes.
 9 **Q.** And you then found yourself working in government at
 10 different times, including at this time as an adviser to
 11 the Chancellor of the Exchequer.
 12 **A.** Yes.
 13 **Q.** Thank you.
 14 I want to ask you first of all about the Coronavirus
 15 Job Retention Scheme. But before we get into the nuts
 16 and bolts of that scheme, I'd like you to assist the
 17 Inquiry, if you could, with understanding in a wider
 18 sense where a scheme like that sits in terms of economic
 19 response, what it is it's intended to do, if we can
 20 examine that for a moment, and to look at what other
 21 options may have been available, policy options in this
 22 sort of situation.
 23 Should we think about the Job Retention Scheme as
 24 a labour market scheme, a scheme that's designed to
 25 support the labour market, or is it an income support
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1 have, as Kate Bell, your previous witness from the TUC
 2 has said, much more generous welfare schemes but they
 3 also have furlough schemes. And there, the aim is
 4 explicitly really not to protect the incomes of the
 5 workers because they are protected by other things.
 6 Rather, the primary aim of a CJRS-style scheme is to
 7 maintain that link between workers and their employers,
 8 and that reduces the risk that workers will drop out of
 9 the labour market altogether.
 10 I remember shortly before or roughly at the time,
 11 Top Shop went bankrupt and I remember an interview on
 12 the BBC with one woman who said she hadn't applied for
 13 a job in 30 years, she didn't know where, how to begin,
 14 and she thought she might just quit.
 15 If we'd had massive redundancies at the time caused
 16 by Covid, there would have been other people like that
 17 who would have chosen or felt that they were forced to
 18 choose never to work again. And that's bad for those
 19 individuals, it's bad for their income, it's bad for
 20 their mental health, it's bad for national income, and
 21 therefore it's bad for public services because we get
 22 less taxes.
 23 **Q.** Just pausing there. So a scheme like the CJRS scheme,
 24 it supports the income of employees, and relative to the
 25 amount of money that was available in terms of income
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1 support through benefits through Universal Credit at
 2 a higher level. So for those who are furloughed, their
 3 income is relatively better protected than it would be
 4 if they were forced or required to claim benefits?

5 **A.** Yes, that would absolutely be the case. And of course,
 6 being placed on furlough doesn't preclude you from
 7 claiming Universal Credit. Universal Credit is
 8 a benefit available to people in work as well as those
 9 out of work.

10 **Q.** To top up their income?

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** Right. But it preserves a --

13 **A.** It preserves a match --

14 **Q.** -- match does it --

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** -- between the member of the staff and the --

17 **A.** Employer --

18 **Q.** -- business?

19 **A.** Absolutely. That also makes it much easier for
 20 a business to reopen. If we imagine that tomorrow this
 21 building was shut down and everybody was made redundant,
 22 it would take some time to rehire people and get them
 23 trained up so that the business of running this building
 24 could function effectively. But with a furlough scheme
 25 you just recall them and, by and large, they all return

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1 economy and boom! It's what was called a V-shaped
 2 recovery at the time. Those are very rare in general
 3 economics but a furlough scheme makes them much more
 4 likely.

5 **Q.** So it's not just about matching skills to jobs; it has
 6 another advantage which is about the speed of recovery?

7 **A.** Absolutely.

8 **Q.** You turn the tap back on --

9 **A.** Yes.

10 **Q.** -- and people can come back to work straight away --

11 **A.** Absolutely, yeah.

12 **Q.** -- and that applies all the way through the supply
 13 chain?

14 **A.** Yes, and it also gives people a lot of hope. Because if
 15 you're sitting at home but you're furloughed, you are
 16 furloughed in the reasonably confident expectation,
 17 particularly once your firm is having to pay
 18 a proportion of your salary, that as soon as they can
 19 reopen, they will want to rehire you, whereas if you'd
 20 been made redundant you might think, "Hey, I'm a good
 21 worker, someone is going to want to hire me", but you
 22 don't have any evidence of that, so it's altogether a
 23 better proposition to be furloughed in terms of mental
 24 health, in terms of confidence in the future.

25 **Q.** And in terms of the Treasury's response to this

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1 and then you can reopen. And you can also be confident
 2 of that for all of your supply chain.

3 So the example I give in my evidence is the café
 4 that can be confident that it can hire its staff, but it
 5 can also be confident that the pastries will arrive
 6 because the company producing the pastries will have
 7 retired their staff, and therefore the economy can
 8 restart much more quickly than if everybody is made
 9 redundant and firms have to start from ground zero.

10 **Q.** So taking your example, it means when the economy can
 11 restart, the pastry chef is still matched to the job
 12 making pastries?

13 **A.** Correct.

14 **Q.** And the barista, not barrister, but the barista is still
 15 matched to the coffee shop where he makes the coffee or
 16 she makes the coffee?

17 **A.** Correct, and that is better than them having to find
 18 a pastry chef from scratch, having many applicants, some
 19 of whom, frankly, don't know a choux bun from a -- he
 20 demonstrates he knows nothing about choux buns or
 21 pastries, from another form of pastry, and should not be
 22 hired or would not be as good at it were they to be
 23 hired. So the economy can start much more effectively.
 24 And that's really critical when you're going to reopen
 25 an economy because you want to be able to reopen the

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1 emergency, is it fair to say that the majority of the
 2 support, certainly in pounds, shillings and pence terms,
 3 and in terms of workers, was through this job matching
 4 scheme and income support delivered in that way?

5 **A.** I'd have to check that but I doubt it's true. I think
 6 when you add up the SEISS, the grants to local
 7 authorities, the grant -- the reopening grants to
 8 business and the losses on the loans, I'd be very
 9 surprised if the furlough scheme was a majority, very
 10 surprised. But I haven't done that test before.

11 **Q.** In terms of support for jobs, furlough was at the heart
 12 of that?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** Right.

15 **A.** But we should also remember that a reopening grant to a
 16 firm is also support for jobs, as well, indirectly. So
 17 it would depend on how you classify things, but it was
 18 indeed the principal labour market intervention.

19 **Q.** All right. And you've explained the benefits of that --

20 **A.** Yes.

21 **Q.** -- labour market intervention. But before we look at
 22 those benefits and whether they apply in all economic
 23 emergencies, and all economic circumstances, can we just
 24 touch on alternatives.

25 **A.** Yeah.

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1 Q. There wasn't presumably a sense in which the only thing
2 the government could have done was introduce a job
3 retention scheme?

4 A. Oh no, there are lots of things the government could
5 have done, including absolutely nothing. If this had
6 happened 100 or 150 years ago there is no doubt the
7 government would have done absolutely nothing because
8 that was an era of laissez-faire where governments were
9 absolutely willing to say unemployment, as Keynes wrote,
10 "Employment is the lot of man. Each generation must
11 take its fair share without grumbling." We are not in
12 that world any more for sure.

13 Q. But that was an option -- (overspeaking) --

14 A. Yes -- (overspeaking) --

15 Q. -- albeit one that -- (overspeaking) --

16 A. Just for the record, I'm not saying we ever considered
17 doing absolutely nothing and tolerating four million
18 people becoming unemployed.

19 Q. No. Now, another approach may be an approach more like
20 the approach taken in the United States of America that
21 I think you've described as the "helicopter money
22 approach"; is that right?

23 A. Yes, that's the standard economic description of it.

24 Q. Yeah. Just explain to somebody who doesn't understand
25 anything about economics what that means?

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1 March 2020 or, bluntly, I, without wishing, I do not
2 know your income but I'm willing to bet that £200 is
3 a very small proportion of your annual income, and it
4 wouldn't really have led you to spend £200 more at that
5 point.

6 So what we know is that the problem with helicopter
7 money is a lot of people just save it, especially in
8 a context where you cannot go out to dinner, you can't
9 go to the theatre, you can't go on holiday. There are
10 so many "can'ts" during Covid that helicopter money
11 really would have been an ineffective way of doing
12 something.

13 Q. Is it just that I can't spend the money or is it also
14 that in a time when the country is frightened about the
15 future, does not know what's going to happen --

16 A. Mm, yeah.

17 Q. -- or when, it's not just I can't -- I'd spent it if
18 I could, it's that I don't want to spend it, I want to
19 keep it in case I need it, because I don't know when I'm
20 going to go back to work, when I'm going to have a job,
21 when I'm going to have income.

22 A. So there are many reasons why people's propensity to
23 consume, as we say in economics, falls. It fell during
24 Covid. A lot of that money would have been saved, and
25 therefore it would not have been effective, but even if

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1 A. So the idea is that to keep jobs going you simply give
2 everybody a lot of money, they spend the money, people
3 get employed. And so the idea as a helicopter goes
4 overly materially dropping ten-pound notes. Now, of
5 course, nobody is literally suggesting a helicopter goes
6 over and drops ten-pound notes. The usual way it's done
7 is to give every individual or household a sum of money.
8 And if we work out arithmetically what that would mean
9 is this case, because I did the numbers in advance, that
10 would mean the amount of money we spent on the furlough
11 net of tax, because it's important to remember the
12 furlough was taxable and actually a lot of the money
13 came back immediately through Income Tax and National
14 Insurance and later through the contributions from
15 firms.

16 So the net cost to government was 25, 26 billion,
17 which equates to about £520 as a tax-free gift to any
18 individual -- to every adult in Britain. So we could,
19 instead, have given everybody £520. However, to do that
20 at the beginning, would have required us to know how
21 long the crisis was going to go on for. So more likely
22 we might have given out a couple of hundred pounds in
23 March 2020 and then another hundred or 150 in the autumn
24 and so on.

25 But it seems unlikely that giving you £200 in

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1 it had have been --

2 Q. Sorry, I don't want to cut you off from saying anything
3 important and forgive me if my questions sometimes
4 disrupt your flow --

5 A. That's all right.

6 Q. -- but I just want to pick things up as a you are
7 dealing with them. Under the helicopter money approach,
8 is there not also a sense in which you would be giving
9 out money to a lot of people who didn't need it?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Because you'd be delivering the £520 per adult in the
12 United Kingdom to people who had no need for any money
13 at all?

14 A. Absolutely, it would have been absurd, had I been given
15 £520, and as I say, I don't wish to pry into your
16 circumstances five years ago, but I suspect it would
17 have been absurd to give you £520 as well.

18 Q. Yes, I'm getting a bit nervous, it's always coming back
19 to my circumstances --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- Dr Leunig, so let's move on from me as the exemplar,
22 shall we?

23 **THE WITNESS:** [Addressing Chair] I'll pick on you next.

24 **LADY HALLETT:** I wondered when that was coming.

25 **MR WRIGHT:** Inevitable.

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1 So that's one of the problems, you're giving out
 2 money to everybody, there's no targeting where it's
 3 needed. And if you compare that helicopter money
 4 approach, which unless you have the data, requires you
 5 to give it to everybody, does it already feel much less
 6 targeted than a job retention scheme --
 7 A. -- (overspeaking) --
 8 Q. -- of just giving it to those who can't work?
 9 A. 100 per cent. And we shouldn't forget, the only country
 10 who used helicopter money was the country that didn't
 11 have a PAYE system, which is a requirement --
 12 Q. We're going to come on to that --
 13 A. -- to run a furlough scheme.
 14 Q. Yes.
 15 A. So, in a sense, it's almost pointless to ask me about
 16 a scheme that no one in their right mind would choose.
 17 And we know empirically that no country that had the
 18 choice chose to use helicopter money rather than
 19 a furlough scheme. The only people who used helicopter
 20 money were people who couldn't run a furlough scheme.
 21 Q. No, and I appreciate that's your view about it, that
 22 the -- (overspeaking) --
 23 A. No, no, that's an empirical fact.
 24 Q. -- no, no, that it's pointless me asking you about
 25 it -- (overspeaking) --

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1 Q. -- "We should have thought about doing that", they did
 2 it that way because they couldn't do it any other way?
 3 A. Indeed.
 4 Q. And what are -- I mean, we've touched on some of them
 5 but are there any other downsides to doing it the way
 6 the Americans did it, so far as you're concerned?
 7 A. Well, it would not have overcome the ability to reopen
 8 quickly because people -- many of those people would
 9 have been made redundant. Anyone working in a shop --
 10 in a restaurant would almost certainly have been made
 11 redundant under the American model because the employer
 12 would not have had any income to fund them.
 13 It would almost certainly have overloaded the
 14 welfare system, which was a problem we saw in the US.
 15 The US welfare system is much more complicated than
 16 ours, because it's delivered at local level, but if we
 17 had have seen 4 million lose their jobs, even if they'd
 18 have got other jobs a month or six weeks later, there
 19 would have been a lot Universal Credit claims, to the
 20 point where it seems unlikely the system could have
 21 coped.
 22 Q. Just pausing there, we heard some evidence last week
 23 about the uptick in the Universal Credit claims --
 24 A. Yeah.
 25 Q. -- in the early days of the pandemic, over a million

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1 A. Oh, sorry.
 2 Q. But this is an opportunity for you to explain why the
 3 Treasury took the approach that it did.
 4 A. Hmm.
 5 Q. So the country you're referring to is the United States.
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. And even if the United States had wanted to have
 8 a job matching scheme, a job retention scheme, they
 9 don't have a PAYE tax system; is that right?
 10 A. Correct.
 11 Q. They wouldn't have known who employed who?
 12 A. Correct.
 13 Q. They wouldn't have been able to deliver the support?
 14 A. Correct.
 15 Q. And so they were starting from a basis where they
 16 couldn't do it even if they'd wanted to?
 17 A. Oh, absolutely. They had not a chance of doing it.
 18 Q. Yes.
 19 A. And hence when Bernie Sanders called for the British
 20 furlough scheme to be copied in the United States there
 21 were some wry smiles in the Treasury, because we knew
 22 that was impossible for them.
 23 Q. So, is that why you say any sort of comparison between
 24 "Well, the Americans did it this way" --
 25 A. Yeah.

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1 extra claims, and that that number of claims, it was
 2 said in evidence last week, risked --
 3 A. Yes.
 4 Q. -- knocking over the entire system.
 5 So if we'd been talking about a situation where
 6 there there'd have been many more millions of claims,
 7 your view was also that that was also undeliverable?
 8 A. Well, that was the advice we got from DWP. Now, I'm not
 9 a computer programmer, I know nothing about the
 10 scalability of UC, but DWP's advice was that if
 11 4 million new claims came along in a month, that was,
 12 you know, curtains for the system.
 13 And that's understandable. You would -- you can put
 14 up the number of people who would usually claim and you
 15 can say "We need a margin of error ten or twenty times
 16 bigger", it would have been bizarre for the British
 17 Government to have specified a system with, you know,
 18 a 1,000 multiple sort of margin. That would have been
 19 not a good use of taxpayer's money whenever UC was
 20 created.
 21 Q. So there were other things that theoretically could be
 22 done if you take the view you need --
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. -- to do something, but you've explained the
 25 downsides --

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1 A. Yes.

2 Q. -- of helicopter money.

3 Were there any other viable alternatives other than

4 helicopter money and furlough?

5 A. Well, it depends what you mean by viable. As I say, in

6 the 19th century --

7 Q. Or done nothing?

8 A. -- we would have just done nothing. People would have

9 lost their jobs, they would have lost their livelihoods,

10 they would have been seen in the street in the way that

11 the Victorian era was quite famous for.

12 Q. Yes. But if you accept the argument that the government

13 had to do something --

14 A. Yes, then I -- I can think of no other --

15 Q. -- other than those two -- no.

16 Yes, I'm sorry, I'm being told to ask you to slow

17 down again.

18 A. Ah, yes. Well, wave that little thing at me and then

19 I'll know what it means. That will be helpful.

20 Q. I'll just keep telling you to slow down, all right.

21 Let's try and do that if we can.

22 On the subject of the helicopter money approach, and

23 I asked you about the fact you'd end up giving money to

24 lots of people who didn't need it under that approach,

25 can I just pick up on one issue about data, and we'll

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1 have an agreed definition of what a household is that is

2 universal and covers all the myriad of different living

3 arrangements we have.

4 The second issue we have is how we would keep up to

5 date who is living with whom. There is no requirement

6 in Britain to tell the state where you live. It's hard

7 to believe that we could keep that up to date. So it

8 depends what you mean by a database. A database that is

9 good enough on balance to inform policy, I think that is

10 relatively straightforward. A database that is strong

11 enough to actually allow for operational decisions, such

12 as giving £520 to every household, I think that's way

13 harder, and I -- I would defer to experts at the ONS and

14 elsewhere on whether that was possible to do, but

15 I admit, as an economist rather than a data expert, I am

16 not convinced that's an easy thing to do.

17 Q. So the more data you can gather that will enable

18 analysis to inform policy, good thing --

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. -- but you doubt whether you can ever gather enough data

21 to actually deliver support through that data in

22 a joined-up way?

23 A. I doubt it would be politically feasible.

24 So I recollect that DWP, if they're deciding whether

25 two people live together as a couple, look at things

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1 come back to data, I'm sure, during your evidence, but

2 we've heard from a number of witnesses about the lack of

3 data for this or that, but one issue that's emerged

4 through a number of witnesses is about a sort of

5 household dataset, so a set of data that would enable

6 the centre to actually understand something about the

7 need of individual households' financial need in a time

8 of crisis.

9 Do you, first of all, think it would be a good idea

10 to build the capability to establish that sort of

11 dataset? Secondly, do you think it's feasible?

12 A. So the first thing you'd have to do is define what

13 a household is. Because a household has many different

14 meanings. A decade ago, my household was quite

15 straightforward: it was my wife and I and our daughter.

16 It's still my wife and I and our daughter, but she's now

17 an adult. Are we one household or are we -- she's

18 a working adult -- are we one household or two

19 households? If she then moves out and then moves in

20 a flatshare, are they one household or are they two

21 households?

22 I believe Facebook used to have the relationship

23 status "It's complicated", and that's certainly true for

24 anybody trying to devise a database based on households.

25 So my biggest concern about it is we simply don't

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1 like where is their toothbrush in the bathroom. Do they

2 share a single tube of toothpaste? Apparently that's

3 if -- if the DWP inspectors visit you, that's one of the

4 standard tests of are you cohabiting or is this person

5 a lodger.

6 Now, of course, we could look at every single

7 person's bank account to discover if they buy their

8 toothpaste separately. I mean, at a technical level,

9 that might be possible, but I really doubt any

10 politician that says "We're going to look at every

11 person's bank account to discover who buys the

12 toothpaste" -- I can't see that happening any time soon.

13 Q. All right.

14 Can I move on a little in the context of the Job

15 Retention Scheme, because you've touched on this to

16 a limited extent so far.

17 You've explained why a furlough scheme -- or the

18 advantages of a furlough scheme, but there wouldn't

19 be -- there would not necessarily be advantages in all

20 emergencies; is that right?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. Does it depend on the type of economic emergency you're

23 facing as to whether you want to go down the job

24 matching route?

25 A. Absolutely. You really want to use a furlough scheme

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1 when you think the economy after the emergency will be
 2 the same as the economy before.
 3 **Q.** Right.
 4 **A.** So if we go back, and some people in this room will be
 5 old enough to remember, the 1970s, we had two oil
 6 shocks. They were genuine emergencies. I mean, I'm
 7 just old enough to remember as a child queueing with my
 8 grandma to buy petrol in about 1979. Because I loved
 9 cars, that was quite exciting for me. It was rather
 10 boring for my grandmother and she complained about the
 11 cost of petrol, about which I knew nothing.

12 But that sort of crisis, which is going to lead to
 13 a change in the optimal nature of the economy,
 14 a furlough scheme could be very bad news. Because if
 15 you've got a company that is shut down because the price
 16 of oil is so high they can't make money, well, unless
 17 you think the oil price is going to come back down, it's
 18 not sensible to furlough all those workers.

19 So there are some crises where a furlough would be
 20 the wrong approach.

21 So the question is: do you think the post-crisis
 22 economy will be substantively the same in terms of where
 23 people will be working? If you do, then a furlough
 24 scheme is great. If you don't, then all you're doing is
 25 giving people false hope, and that's not -- that's not

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1 same form, but also, was there an expectation that this
 2 would be a relatively short shock --

3 **A.** Yes.

4 **Q.** -- of duration?

5 So is duration of the shock important to furlough?

6 And let me ask you in this --

7 **A.** Yes.

8 **Q.** -- way: if it had been expected that there would be
 9 a shutdown of society for five years, would a furlough
 10 scheme have been the right answer?

11 **A.** Well, let's take the extreme case, let's say it's
 12 20 years, then obviously not. And it's a judgement as
 13 to how many years. And it depends how accurately you
 14 think your prediction of it rebounding is. It also
 15 depends on what you can do with people in the interim.
 16 So in a period where we wanted people to stay at home,
 17 protect the NHS and save lives, if you want them to stay
 18 at home, kind of paying them to stay at home through
 19 a furlough scheme might actually be an effective health
 20 policy. But would you do it for five years? I doubt
 21 it.

22 **Q.** Right.

23 **A.** But it really does depend on whether you think they can
 24 get another useful job, and that's one of the reasons
 25 that I pushed so hard, and the British furlough scheme

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1 going to be helpful.

2 **Q.** And so, was the Treasury proceeding -- were you
 3 proceeding, in giving your advice to the Chancellor, on
 4 the basis that this was the sort of emergency where you
 5 could broadly expect that the economy would be the same
 6 after the emergency --

7 **A.** Oh, absolutely.

8 **Q.** -- as it was before it?

9 **A.** In March 2020, all the talk was of flattening the curve,
 10 sort of banging it on the head to begin with, evening it
 11 out to cope with NHS capacity, and then we'd come out
 12 the other side having reached herd immunity. And
 13 although that phrase is unpopular today, I think it is
 14 medically the correct phrase, and at that point we were
 15 thinking three or, more likely, six months we'd be out
 16 of it, people would be going back to restaurants, they'd
 17 be going on cruise ships, they'd be going to nightclubs,
 18 and all those jobs would come back, give or take.
 19 Obviously some firms would go bankrupt along the way but
 20 by and large, yeah, that's what we were expecting.

21 And of course that is what happened, albeit with
 22 delay.

23 **Q.** I was going to pick up on that. I mean, you've factored
 24 in another issue here, which is, firstly, there was an
 25 expectation that the economy would reopen in broadly the

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1 is internationally pioneering, in that people could get
 2 another job along the way. Because we didn't want Tesco
 3 ringing us up saying, "Hey, we've bought thousands of
 4 vans, there are thousands of people wanting their
 5 shopping delivered, but we can't recruit people for love
 6 nor money because they're on furlough", so we wanted it
 7 to be really clear that you had the right to take
 8 another job temporarily.

9 And having spoken to the OECD subsequently, they do
 10 think that is an interesting variant of furlough that is
 11 suitable for a national crisis as opposed to an
 12 industry-specific crisis which is what furloughs are
 13 usually used for in Europe.

14 **Q.** So this is part of the scheme architecture --

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** -- that allowed a worker who had been furloughed --

17 **A.** Yes.

18 **Q.** -- to, if another job presented itself, they could
 19 undertake that job --

20 **A.** Absolutely.

21 **Q.** -- without jeopardising their ability to return to their
 22 pre-existing employment --

23 **A.** Absolutely.

24 **Q.** -- post-pandemic?

25 **A.** Absolutely.

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1 Q. But also presumably giving them the flexibility to
 2 retain that other job if that in fact turned out to be
 3 a better job or a job they were more suited to?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Or equally, for people who were furloughed but felt they
 6 wanted to make a contribution in other ways, to
 7 volunteer in some way towards the national effort?
 8 A. Absolutely, with the exception that you couldn't
 9 volunteer for the firm you worked for, because that
 10 creates all sorts of risks of bad behaviour.
 11 Q. I'm just going to pick up on that because we've heard
 12 about that this morning and I just want your explanation
 13 for that. This was in the context of the charity
 14 sector, Sir Oliver Dowden was explaining that point that
 15 there was a concern within the Treasury that if you
 16 allowed people to volunteer within their own job, that
 17 there could be issues. Would you explain why, and
 18 what -- (overspeaking) --
 19 A. Yes, we worried, and I'd be interested to have heard --
 20 you asked Kate Bell this question, actually, whether the
 21 TUC would have been worried about the pressure on
 22 workers to accept being furloughed and then returning to
 23 work "voluntarily". And our view was, and who knows who
 24 DCMS would have spoken to in the Treasury, you'd really
 25 need to ask Beth Russell or the Permanent Secretary this

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1 You've made the point about furlough can go on too
 2 long.
 3 A. Yeah.
 4 Q. Or the longer the emergency, the less likely it will be
 5 the right policy response. I just want to pick up on
 6 that in the context of the UK response, and the UK
 7 scheme. Where do you stand on the question of whether,
 8 looking back, the scheme went on in the UK for too long?
 9 A. So with the benefit of hindsight we could easily have
 10 ended it three months earlier, but that really is with
 11 the benefit of hindsight. I mean, you've heard Kate
 12 Bell say that the TUC were claiming that we were ending
 13 it too early, and they weren't alone in saying that at
 14 the time. And the cost to the final three months was
 15 pretty low. I give some estimates in my evidence of the
 16 fiscal benefit of ending it early, and it isn't high.
 17 So yes, with the benefit of hindsight it could have been
 18 ended a little earlier but the savings would have been
 19 small.

20 Because the great thing about furlough schemes is
 21 they are self-tapering in the main. As soon as the
 22 company can reopen they will resummon their workers
 23 because they make a profit out of their workers.
 24 Everybody employs someone for a reason and so as soon as
 25 you're allowed to trade by and large you will resummon

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1 rather than me, but I'm not aware of DCMS raising that
 2 with us at the time and I think our general view was
 3 that most people who volunteered could find a similar
 4 charity to volunteer for. So if you volunteered in one
 5 food bank -- sorry, if you were paid to work in one food
 6 bank, there was almost certainly another neighbouring
 7 food bank for which you could volunteer and, indeed,
 8 there was nothing to stop two food banks ringing each
 9 other up saying, "Hey, I furloughed this person. Hey, I
 10 furloughed that person. Why don't we both ask them to
 11 volunteer in the other ones?"

12 But we really did think it was important to protect
 13 workers from bullying bosses expecting them to turn up
 14 and work for a 20% wage cut or doing something really
 15 naughty like saying, "If you're furloughed we guarantee
 16 you a bonus of 40%, so you will be a winner, we will be
 17 a winner and the poor old taxpayer is a loser."

18 Q. And the flexibility that you've described in the UK
 19 furlough scheme that allowed people to take other jobs,
 20 is it your position that that wasn't replicated anywhere
 21 else in the world so far as you're aware?

22 A. My understanding is we were the first in the world and
 23 that it was not introduced by any other country during
 24 the Covid era, yes.

25 Q. Right.

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1 that worker, and therefore the cost of keeping it going
 2 too long is pretty small.

3 Q. So the furlough scheme almost self-polices --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- because ultimately you work on the basis, do you,
 6 that the employer business actually wants to go back to
 7 profitability --

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. -- and to start --

10 A. Exactly.

11 Q. -- producing widgets again --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- rather than remaining dormant for a longer period of
 14 time?

15 A. It wants to make and sell pastries. However, there are
 16 some favour furloughs that we know are out there who --
 17 you might have a member of staff who you know wants to
 18 retire but they're an old family friend, you're a small
 19 firm, so you leave them on furlough because it costs you
 20 nothing. You will get some like that. So if we get
 21 a complete blanket open furlough where an employer could
 22 furlough everyone, then you would get some furloughs
 23 that would last forever and towards the end we would
 24 have had a high proportion of favour furloughs, and the
 25 like, at the end. And that's why when the scheme ended

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1 we didn't see a rise in unemployment.
 2 So that's why you shouldn't simply have
 3 a British-style furlough system forever. The
 4 continental ones have more checks and balances in them.
 5 **Q.** Right. Were you yourself arguing, actually, that a
 6 decision should have been made earlier to announce that
 7 furlough would end at a fixed point, that there would be
 8 a date in the future when it would end?
 9 **A.** Well, we agreed in the Treasury in the Easter that it
 10 would end that summer. I'd have to go back and check
 11 the notes to give you a definitive answer either way on
 12 that one.
 13 **Q.** What's the advantage of providing that sort of certainty
 14 to business that -- it's certainty the other way, that
 15 support is going to end as opposed to support is going
 16 to continue?
 17 **A.** Well, at one level the two are the same thing. I mean,
 18 as Kate said, and the TUC was right, they were the first
 19 people to tell us that a lot of firms had 45-day notice
 20 periods of intention to make people redundant. And 45
 21 days is almost seven weeks. So it meant the government
 22 really should, if they can, be giving businesses seven
 23 weeks' notice. That would only give a business two days
 24 to decide whether to make someone redundant.
 25 So we therefore need to give people seven weeks'

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1 absolutely no cost to yourself. We want you to make --
 2 **Q.** Sorry, can we --
 3 **A.** Sorry.
 4 **Q.** You are just speeding up again a little bit so can you
 5 slow down a touch.
 6 **A.** We wanted to say to firms -- it's exciting. We wanted
 7 to say to firms that if you want to retain this worker
 8 you need to have a little bit of skin in the game.
 9 You've got to be saying to the world, yeah, I want to
 10 reemploy this person, I'm putting my money where my
 11 mouth is. Not too much money, not sums of money we
 12 don't think they have or can get hold of, but a little
 13 bit of something, and that is the continental model.
 14 Now, the continent started the other way, they
 15 started with their standard rules of furlough, which
 16 involved employer co-payment but they soon gave up with
 17 them. And in a sense that's the danger of preparing too
 18 much in advance. If you think you have a playbook, what
 19 you've got is the playbook for the last war and you have
 20 to change it. But because we were writing a new
 21 playbook, I actually think our way round was better: no
 22 initial co-payment and a later co-payment. And what we
 23 discovered is that most firms were absolutely willing to
 24 make those co-payments. We did not see jumps in
 25 redundancies when they were announced.

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1 notice and that's -- in that summer we knew from the
 2 previous year that cases were likely to be lower but
 3 also that furlough use was going to be low so it seemed
 4 easier, particularly in the experience of the last
 5 autumn, to play it safe and add another month or two on.
 6 That's my recollection.
 7 I'd have to double-check the emails to see if that's
 8 true but that's my recollection sitting here today.
 9 **Q.** We know that an element of tapering was introduced to
 10 the furlough.
 11 **A.** Yeah.
 12 **Q.** Can you just explain to us why that was introduced, what
 13 the rationale was?
 14 **A.** So the rationale was two-fold. Firstly, that we started
 15 off with 100% of cost furlough being met by the
 16 government. We wanted this to be the no-brainer option
 17 for firms, because we wanted firms to say to workers:
 18 "Stay at Home, your job will come back, you don't want
 19 to move house, you want to be in the same place. Just
 20 'Stay at Home', 'Protect the NHS' and 'Save Lives'.
 21 So we didn't -- it had to be an absolute no-brainer
 22 which it really was. That's why we got the numbers of
 23 people furloughed that we did. But over time what we
 24 needed to say to firms is: if you think the world has
 25 changed, you shouldn't be able to hold on to workers at

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1 **Q.** Can I just pick up on something you've landed on there,
 2 which is planning.
 3 **A.** Mm.
 4 **Q.** And playbooks.
 5 **A.** Yeah.
 6 **Q.** We've heard about talk of off-the-shelf schemes, and
 7 permanent schemes, and the like. Dr Leunig, from your
 8 statement, would you say we might be right to detect
 9 that you're not a great fan of pre-planning for economic
 10 response in the sense of having fixed reactions to
 11 events?
 12 **A.** You would indeed, very strongly, and I'm glad that came
 13 over loud and clear. And the reason for that came
 14 through in what Dr Bell said ten minutes ago when she
 15 said there's no difference between having a permanent
 16 furlough scheme and an off-the-shelf scheme that we can
 17 reach for. And we, you know, we've done the furlough
 18 scheme once in Britain, we managed to do it in 55 hours
 19 and including inventing it, so if we had to do it again,
 20 we could definitely do it in 55 hours. It didn't need
 21 statute. It is available to any government in future
 22 who wants to reactivate it. So it is there. You can't
 23 undo something you've done. So in that sense, whatever
 24 we may think of planning, that idea is there for any
 25 future government.

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1 Q. I just want to drill down a little bit into how anti
 2 planning you are. You presumably wouldn't argue
 3 against, for example, thinking now about what data would
 4 it have been nice to have in the last pandemic --
 5 A. No, absolutely.
 6 Q. -- "If we'd have had better real-time monitoring, then
 7 we might have been able to tailor as we went", those
 8 sorts of things?
 9 A. So --
 10 Q. You can plan for your infrastructure, can't you?
 11 A. Correct.
 12 Q. Right.
 13 A. Correct. So you can plan to have the right sort of
 14 people in post and the right sort of evidence, but
 15 I think it is better left to those people with good
 16 evidence to make up the plans at the time in the light
 17 of the actual facts that are known, not some sort of
 18 loose -- because the danger of having plans I think was
 19 seen on the medical side.
 20 We knew we were second best in the world at pandemic
 21 preparedness. Because the Johns Hopkins international
 22 study had told us that. Not only were we second best,
 23 we were miles better than the French and the Germans,
 24 and many miles better than the Italians.
 25 So we were -- not complacent, I don't think we were,

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1 to decentralised. I certainly wouldn't want to see,
 2 say, the Cabinet Office given responsibility for the
 3 things that PHE or the Department of Health can do
 4 better than the Cabinet Office, or the Cabinet Office to
 5 try to do economic analysis better done by HMT or the
 6 OBR. So I think we need to be a little bit careful
 7 about centralised.
 8 Q. Okay. But you can plan for evidence, analysis you say
 9 you can stand up.
 10 What about planning for delivery architecture? So
 11 the infrastructure through which you deliver the scheme.
 12 We've talked about Universal Credit, and we've heard
 13 evidence about legacy benefits: the IT was so poor that
 14 it would simply not have been able to process an uplift.
 15 So can you just do that sort of planning in terms of
 16 getting your infrastructure right so you can deliver, if
 17 you choose to do so?
 18 A. Yes, although the reason why we still have the legacy
 19 schemes in DWP is apparently it's very expensive to get
 20 things off of mainframe computers.
 21 And that's true in the private sector as well.
 22 I have a friend who administers pensions for the private
 23 sector on a mainframe. He assures me he has a job for
 24 life because it's very hard to get the stuff out.
 25 So you can plan, but sometimes you also -- you just

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1 but we were confident we knew what to do when a pandemic
 2 hit. We were wrong.
 3 And that's the danger of having a playbook, that
 4 even when it's quite closely aligned to what you think
 5 you're doing, it is often better to sit down and think,
 6 as John Maynard Keynes said, with a fresh, unprejudiced
 7 mind.
 8 Q. Let's just break this down. So you can plan for the
 9 evidence you think you're going to need?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. And you support that?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. So that is data gathering, collection?
 14 A. -- and sharing.
 15 Q. And sharing. Would you also agree you can plan for
 16 analysis. In other words, you can put in place good
 17 analytical capability?
 18 A. Yes, although you can also hire that in pretty quickly,
 19 whereas you can't create data collection pretty quickly.
 20 You pay the right money, people will work for you.
 21 Q. And do you support the idea that there should be
 22 centralised cross-Government analysis that provides
 23 a synthesis of all the underlying data, so it gives
 24 people more confidence in their decision making?
 25 A. I'm not sure whether it has to be centralised as opposed

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1 have to accept there are some things that would be very
 2 expensive to prepare in advance. You multiply that by
 3 the chance of disaster and it's still not worth sorting
 4 out. It's better to say, well, we'll have to come up
 5 with a workaround where necessary.
 6 Q. But if you can make these corrections now, in
 7 a cost-effective way, then you should do them? You
 8 should get the architecture --
 9 A. Absolutely.
 10 Q. -- the nuts and bolts in place --
 11 A. That is the definition of common sense.
 12 Q. -- and then you can do the free thinking --
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. -- in the context of the future emergency, however it
 15 looks.
 16 A. Yes.
 17 Q. Can I just push you about the off-the-shelf scheme idea.
 18 For it or against it? Should there be not
 19 a pre-determined plan that "You will deploy a labour
 20 support scheme in a future pandemic", but should there
 21 at least be a basic playbook of "This is how you do it"?
 22 A. Well, I think there is already that playbook, in that we
 23 have -- partly it's created by you, but the Treasury has
 24 its lessons learned, it has its history, et cetera. So
 25 I think there is already that playbook. And

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1 Dan York-Smith said last week that the Treasury has
2 a list of people all by their previous jobs, so that, if
3 Tom Hemingway is still somewhere in government, as the
4 senior civil servant who held the pen throughout Covid,
5 he will get a phone call from someone saying, "Hey Tom,
6 we need to talk to you."

7 And even if he isn't still working in government, so
8 long as he's alive, they will track him down. I'm not
9 saying that's because they can snoop on him, but you can
10 find most people these days pretty easily.

11 So I'm not sure you need a playbook that is, you
12 know, nicely printed and stamped on the front
13 "Playbook". What you need is that collective residual
14 memory.

15 And that was something that Treasury, as a rather --
16 I was going to say inbred, that's a little harsh -- but
17 as an organisation that tends to promote from within, is
18 actually very strong at. And again Dan York-Smith
19 talked about that last week, as to how he was able to do
20 his job while finishing off on the budget. And why he
21 was the right person to do it: because he was the most
22 cross-Treasury person. And that was my experience of
23 working with Dan when he was -- when he and I were
24 colleagues. He was exceptionally good at finding people
25 who knew their arse from their elbow.

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1 (3.05 pm)

2 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Wright.

3 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you very much, my Lady.

4 Dr Leunig, we discussed before the break about this
5 idea that the furlough scheme was to some extent
6 self-policing, business would want to get people back to
7 work.

8 I just want to ask you for your observations about
9 one element of the data, which I think is slightly odd,
10 relating to furlough in September 2021. So this is
11 a time when we are thinking about the economy
12 recovering, I'm going to ask that it's put up. I think
13 it's INQ000657558. It is at page -- yeah, there we are,
14 thank you very much.

15 It's this table which shows us a number of
16 employments on furlough. We see there September 2021,
17 108,000, which is (a) a significant number but (b) much,
18 much higher than in other months. I mean, do you have
19 any view about that, given what you've said about the
20 firm will naturally want its employees to come back and
21 will want to start making money again and be productive?
22 **A.** So I'm going to put forward two possibilities, and HMRC
23 could probably tell us whether either are possible. The
24 first is that actually this is employments that have
25 been declared, and some of them are actually earlier.

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1 Sorry, knew all sides of the issue.

2 **Q.** That's probably a more politic way of putting it, but
3 anyway, thank you.

4 So, have I understood really that what you're saying
5 is: corporate memory, important.

6 **A.** Yes.

7 **Q.** Remembering what you did, why you did it, and how it
8 went and where the pitfalls were and you think that's
9 more important than it is to have an off-the-shelf
10 scheme?

11 **A.** Oh, absolutely.

12 **Q.** -- (overspeaking) -- in any --

13 **A.** Absolutely.

14 **Q.** -- (overspeaking) --

15 **A.** I have no hesitation in agreeing with you entirely, and
16 utterly on that one.

17 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you very much.

18 My Lady, is than an appropriate moment for a break?

19 **LADY HALLETT:** Yes, of course. We take breaks every so
20 often.

21 **THE WITNESS:** Yes.

22 **LADY HALLETT:** And I suspect everyone will be grateful for
23 one. 3.05.

24 (2.48 pm)

(A short break)

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1 So I mention in my evidence that IKEA furloughed staff
2 but they never claimed the money. So a company might
3 have put people on furlough and just not got round to
4 claiming the money and suddenly think, "Oh no, it's
5 about to end, we better claim the money."

6 So it might be that.

7 **Q.** Right.

8 **A.** So that we would want to check.

9 Otherwise it's pretty self-evident, I would say,
10 that there's 70,000 people whose furloughs look pretty
11 ropery to me. However, given they're only being
12 furloughed for a month, part of me thinks would a firm
13 really risk getting sanctions for fraud for stealing
14 what it is a very small sum of money, given that it only
15 lasts one month. I mean, if you did it the month
16 before, you'd get double the benefit financially for
17 your fraud, for probably a similar amount of risk.

18 So that's why I think you'd really need someone from
19 HMRC to tell you exactly how these figures are
20 constructed.

21 **Q.** You describe it in your statement as an oddity, this
22 figure --

23 **A.** Yes.

24 **Q.** -- and that's still how it appears to you?

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 Q. It's odd?
 2 A. It's odd.
 3 Q. All right, okay.
 4 Let's move on, and to the autumn of 2020, moving on
 5 in time. There's a section in your witness statement
 6 that you've called "Could we have done better in the
 7 autumn of 2020?" And I think you'll anticipate that
 8 part of my interest in autumn of 2020 might be described
 9 as the U-turn --
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. -- on the extension of the Job Retention Scheme.
 12 Let's start with an open question. Could you have
 13 done better in autumn of 2020, did you think?
 14 A. So had we known what was going to happen then clearly we
 15 could have done better. But if we go back to what
 16 I said before about giving people seven weeks' notice,
 17 that would mean the Treasury would have needed to make
 18 the decision eight weeks before, even assuming we could
 19 make the decision in a week, and it took about ten days
 20 for the data to come through. And therefore, the
 21 question is, what were the data like ten weeks
 22 beforehand? And at that point death rates are still
 23 falling and Covid infection rates are incredibly low.
 24 And here you have the tension between giving firms
 25 notice, which tells you that you should try to do things

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1 to anticipate a lockdown without a pretty firm steer
 2 from Patrick Vallance, Chris Whitty, the Prime Minister,
 3 that lockdown is the most likely outcome.
 4 Q. So, based on the data that was available to you, at the
 5 time when you would have needed to announce the decision
 6 to extend the data would not have supported a decision
 7 to extend; is that right?
 8 A. That's absolutely correct. And therefore, the -- what
 9 is it? -- 30,000 rise in redundancy notices, I don't
 10 think those could have been prevented without the
 11 ability to foretell the future.
 12 And we should note that although maybe 30,000 more
 13 people got a redundancy notice, that doesn't mean they
 14 were made redundant. When we look at the data on
 15 employment and unemployment throughout that quarter, we
 16 don't see a big rise, either shortly before furlough
 17 ended or -- sorry, after furlough was expected to end,
 18 or shortly afterwards. So we see a big rise in
 19 redundancy notices but that doesn't mean the person was
 20 made redundant.
 21 Q. So I just want to pick up on that. So it's perfectly
 22 possible that people were given a notice of redundancy?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. And then the extension of furlough --
 25 A. Yes.

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1 in advance, which is what we tried to do by announcing
 2 the Job Retention Bonus. And as Kate said again, an
 3 hour or so ago -- sorry, Dr Bell from the TUC -- said,
 4 they called for the end to furlough that summer. It
 5 wasn't quite universal that everyone said, "You've got
 6 to end furlough", but it was absolutely the standard
 7 received wisdom.
 8 Had we stood up in the summer and said, "Oh, we're
 9 just going to extend the furlough if necessary for
 10 another year", we would have been laughed out of court.
 11 We had the Governor of the Bank of England through to
 12 the TUC saying, "You need to end furlough."
 13 And that's the context.
 14 Q. Right. So --
 15 A. Could we have done it a week before? Yes. Probably.
 16 I think we did get into a mindset of thinking: we've
 17 made a decision, we need to keep going with this.
 18 Could we have done it three weeks before? Maybe,
 19 but that -- I think renouncing furlough three weeks
 20 before we did, given where the deaths rates were at the
 21 time -- which, of course, are the five weeks before the
 22 death rate because of the lag in the way the data come
 23 through -- I think that would have been a pretty punchy
 24 statement by the Treasury that we could see a lockdown
 25 coming. And I'm not sure that that's the Treasury's job

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1 Q. -- when the decision was reversed and it would be
 2 extended, meant that those redundancies did not in fact
 3 take place and they remained on payroll and in receipt
 4 of furlough payments?
 5 A. That is correct. And HMRC may have the data at firm
 6 level that would allow us to find that out for sure. To
 7 the best of my knowledge, that is a known unknown that
 8 could be a known known.
 9 Q. But to your knowledge of the data, you do not see, at
 10 the time of the decision to extend, the U-turn, we'll
 11 call it that for a -- (overspeaking) --
 12 A. Yes, it is a U-turn.
 13 Q. -- for convenience sake, you do not see a significant
 14 increase in unemployment figures that corresponds with
 15 the redundancy notice figures?
 16 A. That's correct. There is no such evidence in the data.
 17 Q. But from your perspective, the key point is, based on
 18 the available data at the time the decision was made,
 19 and at the time it would have had to have been announced
 20 to have removed any of the downsides, the data would not
 21 have supported an extension?
 22 A. Correct.
 23 Q. And just taking that one step further, if it wouldn't
 24 have supported an extension, so it was positive-looking
 25 data, relatively, but the messaging of Treasury was

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1 perceived to be "We think we need to extend furlough",
 2 would that have an effect? Does the messaging of the
 3 Treasury have an effect on confidence, consumer
 4 confidence, so on and so forth? Is that important?
 5 **A.** Oh absolutely. Everything the Treasury does is
 6 scrutinised. If the Treasury had stood up weeks before,
 7 when the numbers were just going up a little bit and
 8 said, "Oh, we think we're going to need furlough this
 9 winter" definitely people would have said, "Whoa, what
 10 do they know?" And then they would have said, "What is
 11 the government not telling us?", whereas actually we
 12 would have just said, "Oh, it's a hunch." We would have
 13 looked, I think, very silly then and I think the
 14 government as a whole would have looked very silly
 15 because the government's mantra was that, "We're
 16 following the science" and, as I've said, in reality
 17 that means we were following the scientists but it
 18 really wasn't for Treasury to basically undercut the
 19 scientists by announcing a package that implied we would
 20 need a lockdown or that Covid was about to spiral out of
 21 control.
 22 **Q.** Right. I'm just going to ask for another document to be
 23 put on the screen. This is an email from you on the
 24 10 September. INQ000656583. And it's at the bottom
 25 there, 10 September, from yourself to

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1 consistent in this period. You can find other emails
 2 that I sent that said, "Yes, I think we need to get rid
 3 of this, it risks ossifying the economy, it risks
 4 preserving further furloughs", et cetera, but on that
 5 day I was thinking aloud about whether at 1.7 billion by
 6 November, a figure, of course, which would not have
 7 happened because the lockdown happened, so it wouldn't
 8 have been 1.7 billion, I was wondering then about
 9 whether we should just stick with that and let it run
 10 out in a normal manner.
 11 **Q.** Was this because the data was, what, starting to show
 12 that things were going the other way, or --
 13 **A.** No, it was quite the reverse, actually. It was because
 14 the data -- we were still confident that --
 15 **Q.** I see.
 16 **A.** -- things were putting better and the furlough cost was
 17 coming down. So I was thinking: why are we creating
 18 a new scheme? The system is sorting it out. The
 19 economy is rebounding.
 20 If I'd have sent this email six or seven months
 21 later, it would have been the perfect email to
 22 demonstrate my prescience that when the economy reopens,
 23 there is no need for a new scheme. Just let the thing
 24 run out.

And in the context of believing that there was no

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1 Olaf Henricson-Bell. Who was who?
 2 **A.** Err ... head of press or similar. He might have been
 3 the Chancellor's official spokesman, but he was somebody
 4 who was very well in touch with public opinion, which is
 5 why I was corresponding with him.
 6 **Q.** So that's the purpose of the email -- or the reason
 7 you're sending it to him is because of his knowledge of
 8 public opinion?
 9 **A.** Well, he was also -- he's intelligent, he's -- he went
 10 on to head the Number 10 policy unit. He's a serious
 11 thinker. I wouldn't want to speculate five years on
 12 exactly my reason for sending a particular email.
 13 **Q.** No, but I'm just interested in how high up --
 14 **A.** He's a fellow senior colleague. I think we were both
 15 directors at the time.
 16 **Q.** I'm just interested in how far up the chain you expected
 17 this communication to be passed. Is this just office
 18 chat or is it --
 19 **A.** Yes, it's office chat.
 20 **Q.** Right.
 21 **A.** I mean, it's chat for a purpose, because I'm thinking
 22 about a serious issue here and as you can see, on that
 23 day, I thought that we shouldn't be as keen to get rid
 24 of furlough as the Chancellor was. And they were other
 25 times around that period where I was ... I was not

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1 second wave coming, I sent that email.
 2 **Q.** So this is generally demonstrating you putting into
 3 action the thought you've expressed that the scheme is
 4 naturally --
 5 **A.** Yes.
 6 **Q.** -- self-policing, it will naturally run itself down as
 7 the economy recovers. Therefore, if it's going to do
 8 that naturally, and the costs will keep on going down
 9 and down and down, what's the point in saying we're
 10 going to end it on a hard date?
 11 **A.** Yes. However, the returner's bonus was predicated on
 12 what a lot of economists told us. This is a period in
 13 which people are predicting that unemployment will rise
 14 by about a million. And a million people -- although
 15 that's a lot lower than the 4 million who would have
 16 lost their jobs, a million people is a lot of people.
 17 And what the economists told us is the best way to
 18 reduce the number of people who are unemployed is to
 19 reduce the inflows into unemployment. That is, to
 20 reduce the number of people who lose their jobs. And
 21 the returner's bonus was a good idea in that context.
 22 So -- what I'm saying in this email, however, is
 23 that the returners bonus won't work if it isn't cutting
 24 through with firms, and that we invented it with the
 25 best of intentions, in line with good economic thinking,

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1 but it just wasn't getting the cut-through that furlough
 2 had, or that was necessary to make it work. So, in the
 3 context of it not getting the cut-through that we
 4 anticipated, I'm saying, "Let's take stock and ask
 5 ourselves is it really worth doing or should we just run
 6 out furlough into the winter as Covid dies out?"

7 But my belief that Covid was dying out was entirely
 8 predicated on the under -- on my understanding of where
 9 the scientists and the medics were in the summer and
 10 early autumn.

11 Q. All right. Looking back and accepting, you know,
 12 hindsight is a wonderful thing, and you didn't have
 13 a crystal ball --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- you've said you don't support planning, corporate
 16 memory is what is important, what does your experience
 17 tell you: if we were back in this situation, what would
 18 you do differently with furlough, if anything?

19 A. So the thing I would do differently is that I would
 20 remember that almost all viruses are much worse in
 21 winter. And you'll know, because I submitted it,
 22 a rather longish paper that I sub -- I wrote in,
 23 I think, August or September, looking at the performance
 24 of about 15 different countries, at some point early
 25 that autumn, showing that some had shot up and some had

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1 this: winter hits you very hard.

2 Q. Yes. Now, that is a very high-level reflection about --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. -- about what you did and didn't do in Treasury.

5 But can I move on to more granular issues, design
 6 issues, about the scheme, just to see whether there's
 7 any learning you would take from certain design issues
 8 in the scheme. And the first thing I'd like to pick up
 9 is whether payments, that is payments to employers,
 10 should be in advance or in arrears, and where you stand
 11 with that.

12 Tell us first of all what the scheme did, and
 13 whether you agreed with it.

14 A. So, the -- so I definitely agreed with it. I was
 15 instrumental in it.

16 The scheme offered payment in advance, but a large
 17 number of companies, indeed the vast majority, didn't
 18 take it. And that surprised me because I had expected
 19 companies with no revenues not to be able to pay payroll
 20 and then claim the money back five weeks or seven --
 21 sorry, five days or 17 days later.

22 And it wasn't clear to me the banks would want to
 23 lend a company with absolutely no revenue money for
 24 those five days, even on the certainty it was coming
 25 back.

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1 gone down. And there were any number of emails I had
 2 sent saying "Winter is coming, it will surely be worse".
 3 And actually, if there was one thing I wish I'd had
 4 tattooed on my increasingly bald forehead at the time,
 5 it was "Winter is coming and it will be worse."

6 And that is the thing I think that we didn't really
 7 get in government in the summer or the autumn.

8 And as I say, my reading of that is that the then
 9 question is: did that mean we should have loosened up
 10 the economy more in summer, to increase the number of
 11 people who got it then, to reduce the chance of the NHS
 12 being overloaded in winter? Or should we have gone hell
 13 for leather to make the vaccine available as quickly as
 14 possible in November/December? But I think it has to be
 15 one or the other.

16 So, looking back, that is the thing I wish I had
 17 better understood, is the sheer seasonality of this.

18 And in that, that we could have learnt from flu, because
 19 flu is tremendously seasonal.

20 Now, I'm not a medic, I'm not an epidemiologist, if
 21 Chris Whitty wants to stand next to me and say to me,
 22 "Tim, you're flat wrong on this for the following
 23 reasons", I will absolutely accept that I am wrong,
 24 because Chris is an epidemiologist and I am not, but
 25 that is the thing that I, looking back, take out of

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1 And that's why I pushed very hard for it to be in
 2 advance, and I was very impressed that HMRC said they
 3 could do enough for checks to make that worthwhile.

4 What we then found out though is a lot of companies
 5 didn't claim it for weeks and weeks and weeks, so we
 6 didn't actually know how many people were being
 7 furloughed. And as I say, I gave the case of IKEA,
 8 which never entered the statistics, because they never
 9 claimed the money. So I would, in retrospect, say that
 10 there should be some rule that says that companies must
 11 claim within a month or whatever the standard payroll
 12 dates are that the HMRC could advise, so that the
 13 government knows the fiscal position accurately and
 14 knows how many people have been furloughed accurately.

15 Q. Would there be an advantage then, on that basis, in
 16 saying you must claim in advance?

17 A. No.

18 Q. And just explain why.

19 A. Well, there's no -- well. If --

20 Q. Because it would at least tell you the numbers, wouldn't
 21 it?

22 A. It would, but whether they claimed in advance or
 23 five days later, those are both good enough.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. We don't actually need -- people always talk about

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1 real-time information, and as the Head of Tesco once
2 pointed out to me, they have no real-time information on
3 what's on the shelf because there's a delay between your
4 taking it off the shelf and it going through the till
5 and that is just not a problem. You rarely need things
6 that are up to date. Five days, a week, two weeks, that
7 would have been fine.

8 **Q.** So no absolute requirement to claim in advance, either
9 or remains fine --

10 **A.** Yes.

11 **Q.** -- but you would advocate having a requirement that if
12 a company is going to claim it has to claim within
13 a certain period of time?

14 **A.** Yes, and that certain period of time should fit with the
15 standard payroll software to make it easy to do.
16 I think they have 19 days, from memory, but most
17 companies do it after about five days.

18 **Q.** Would imposing that requirement also ensure that the
19 scheme was slightly more targeted in the sense that,
20 take IKEA, if they didn't claim, you might conclude
21 that's because they didn't need to?

22 **A.** Oh, I think IKEA would have claimed in those
23 circumstances. They always -- so somebody senior in
24 IKEA gave an interview with one of the newspapers in
25 which they said, "We furloughed people and we expected

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1 supplier that supplied entirely the restaurant chain and
2 she was told to throw her milk away.

3 She was clearly affected but there's no way that
4 HMRC or HMT could know that this farm is affected and
5 this farm is not. And if you say, well, you can only
6 get the money if you prove your revenue is down, well,
7 that gives firms an incentive to reduce production and
8 that's a terrible incentive to create in an economy.

9 So we go back to the fundamentals, that if John's
10 mum could sell her milk, she would, and she would employ
11 her staff. She has an absolute incentive to employ her
12 staff.

13 But if she can't, then she will claim furlough as
14 a fallback but her incentives are all under furlough,
15 absolutely correct. If you can make money from your
16 milk, make it. And if you can't, we stand ready to
17 help. But I mean, the idea of a whole bunch of
18 bureaucrats working out which farmer should be in or
19 out, I mean, that is not a world I would want to be in.

20 **Q.** What about targeting of furlough only on those sectors
21 that have been closed only by the NPIs?

22 **A.** But the farm wasn't closed. It's the supply chains
23 that's the issue.

24 **Q.** That's why I'm asking you the question.

25 **A.** Yes.

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1 to claim because we had no revenue. But at the end of
2 the year we had sold as much furniture despite only
3 being open half the year and therefore it felt immoral
4 to claim even though we had the legal right."

5 So I assume, had they been required to claim, they
6 would have claimed and then they would have repaid it,
7 which a number of other firms did and, as I say, I think
8 a statue should be erected in their honour, because it
9 is quite something to return substantial sums of money
10 to the government when you have no legal obligation to
11 do, and so I think the fundamental morality of those
12 companies should be recognised.

13 **Q.** In your view is there any way of targeting payments so
14 that those companies who don't actually need the money
15 can't claim it at all?

16 **A.** No. And that's not a feature of furlough schemes in the
17 Covid period in general. And that is -- the principal
18 reason for that is supply chains. So the example I gave
19 in here was my then vicar's mother who was a farmer.
20 Now, of course, there was no ban on drinking milk, but
21 restaurants consumed -- we drink far more milk when we
22 go to restaurants and cafés than we do at home because
23 people drink all sorts of fancy milk-intensive coffees
24 and therefore milk consumption goes down when we can't
25 eat out. Her farm happened to have a contract with a

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1 **Q.** So you would say that is an answer as to why that sort
2 of targeting is difficult or impossible?

3 **A.** Yes, it's impossible. It's impossible to do it well.
4 You can do it badly and if the only alternative is to do
5 it for that or nothing at all, then I would leap at the
6 chance. But whenever generally sensible people said in
7 the press during Covid, "You should target the scheme",
8 I would simply email them and say, "How?" And they
9 would say, "Ah, you should do clothes sectors only",
10 and I would say, "What about the supply chain?" And
11 they would usually write back and say, "Ah", and I would
12 go, "Well, let me know when you've come up with a way,
13 but if you wouldn't mind, until you have come up with
14 a way, I would be grateful if you didn't say 'this
15 should happen' in the press again."

16 **Q.** So is part of the power of the scheme and the success of
17 it driven by its universal application, everybody can
18 claim?

19 **A.** Yes, it is. It's everybody can claim, but nobody has an
20 incentive to claim unless their business is actually
21 affected.

22 **Q.** Because otherwise why wouldn't they want to make money?

23 **A.** Correct.

24 **Q.** Right. You do, I think, advocate that one adaptation in
25 any future emergency would be to publish upfront, so at

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1 the time of claim, a list of all companies who are
 2 making a claim; is that right?
 3 A. Yes, absolutely. I think that would deter fraud.
 4 Q. And just explain why you think that.
 5 A. So every single disbursement of government money and
 6 every single tax has an element of fraud. It's what's
 7 called the "tax gap" in the literature. And therefore,
 8 there were bound to be fraudulent claims, and some of
 9 them were exposed in the media. I remember
 10 a hairdresser being interviewed, who had discovered,
 11 I don't know how, that she'd been furloughed, which came
 12 as something of a surprise to her as she had continued
 13 to work throughout the crisis.

14 Now, if her -- most hairdressers are small
 15 companies, we can imagine that if her hairdresser was
 16 listed as having furloughed six people, she could deduce
 17 there were only eight of them and ask her boss quite
 18 what was going on. But better still, her boss would
 19 have been deterred from fraudulently claiming furlough
 20 for workers.

21 And we have an estimate of about 5%, that's about
 22 typical for tax schemes, but if we can get that 5% down
 23 we can and we should. We owe it to hardworking,
 24 law-abiding taxpayers not to give their money to crooks,
 25 spivs and others. And that's true in any other form of

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1 targeting -- sector, geography, financial impact, so on
 2 and so forth -- but should we understand you don't
 3 favour any, or is financial impact the
 4 potential -- (overspeaking) --

5 A. Definitely not financial impact. The only one that is
 6 possible for future pandemics is a regional one.

7 So the most obvious case here is if there was some
 8 disaster in Ireland, could I imagine a furlough scheme
 9 entirely for Northern Ireland, where we might look at
 10 the supply chain effects and think those are very small
 11 on the mainland, then I could just about imagine it.

12 So regional is the one that I think is -- could not
 13 be ruled out categorically in future. But I wouldn't
 14 rush to do it even then, because, who knows, do we
 15 understand the integration of the Northern Ireland
 16 economy with the rest of the country sufficiently well
 17 to be sure that it shouldn't be done? I doubt it.

18 Q. Yes. And that's largely the downside, is the supply
 19 chain?

20 A. Absolutely.

21 Q. Right. Can I pick up another potential modification of
 22 scheme design, partial furlough.

23 A. Mm.

24 Q. So partially furlough an employee, effectively a wage
 25 subsidy. Where do you sit on that?

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1 government spending, whether it's buying PPE, the
 2 furlough scheme or how we enforce income tax.

3 Q. Just so we're clear, there was publication; is that
 4 right?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. But it came later on?

7 A. Yes, it was much later and I think as a standard thing,
 8 any private body getting anything other than individual
 9 welfare benefit where there is an expectation of privacy
 10 should be recorded. So that goes for CJRS, the
 11 self-employed scheme, the grants to shops, and so on and
 12 so forth. These should all be recorded where there is
 13 any optionality. So if everyone gets rates relief then
 14 there's no need to write down the list of everyone. But
 15 when there's any element of "I have chosen to claim"
 16 that should be public.

17 Q. I think you also suggest that it may be much smaller
 18 effect, but that may also discourage those from
 19 furloughing staff who don't really need to --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- or claiming -- not in any fraudulent sense, but just
 22 because they don't need to?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. I think we've dealt with targeting, Dr Leunig,
 25 because I could run through lots of different ways of

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1 A. So, just to clarify, a wage subsidy is a much more
 2 all-embracing term, so I'm going to delete the words
 3 "wage subsidy" from your question and answer the
 4 substance.

5 The standard European one does allow a partial
 6 furlough. And as you'll know from my original emails,
 7 that was my working assumption to begin with. And two
 8 things changed my mind. Firstly, this is a medical
 9 emergency, and therefore having people come in half --
 10 having everybody coming in half the week is really quite
 11 a bad outcome in terms of stay at home, save lives,
 12 protect the NHS.

13 And secondly, the complexity of it. And thirdly --
 14 sorry, it's one of those two-part answers that has
 15 three -- the ability to be fraudulent is much greater
 16 with a partial furlough, since if an inspector turned up
 17 you could say, "Oh, yes, well, this person is here but
 18 it's their day in the office", whereas if you only have
 19 a full furlough and you see someone is working,
 20 especially as they're not allowed to volunteer, then you
 21 have a slam dunk element of fraud.

22 So, for those reasons, I favoured a full furlough
 23 initially and, as Dr Bell said earlier this afternoon,
 24 both they and the CBI pushed for a partial furlough. We
 25 created it after a while. It was not used as heavily as

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1 I think some of its advocates expected.
 2 But yes, it was a worthwhile introduction.
 3 **Q.** Right. Do you think that there is sense, looking ahead
 4 again, in asking employers to register workers before
 5 they start work?
 6 **A.** Categorically. It would be very useful for two reasons
 7 for firms to have to register when they employ someone.
 8 The first is simply for government statistical
 9 knowledge. It would be useful for the government to
 10 know how many people are employed and unemployed at
 11 a time and how many people soon will go into those
 12 categories. So if the Chancellor at the moment knew how
 13 many people had received a redundancy notice and how
 14 many people had got a job offer, she would be in a much
 15 better position to understand how the economy is doing.
 16 And secondly, it would allow us to combat tax fraud,
 17 because you could turn up at a -- at the moment,
 18 somebody can be employed, and they'll be paid at the end
 19 of the month, and there's no obligation to inform anyone
 20 that they're employed. So if you turn up as an
 21 inspector to a factory, and absolutely nobody working
 22 there is listed with HMRC, the company can say: Oh, we
 23 just hired them last week. And there's nothing you can
 24 do then, even though you're pretty sure that's
 25 a cash-in-hand employer.

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1 can't have somebody paid 5 pence above the minimum wage
 2 taking a 20% cut and then ending up below the minimum
 3 wage, so you would need some sort of complicated taper
 4 on furlough that I think would have reduced the clarity
 5 of the message.

6 The second reason I don't support it is that almost
 7 everybody has some costs associated with going to work
 8 that disappear when you're on furlough. So you don't
 9 have to pay travel, you don't have to buy a sandwich,
 10 there's a bunch of costs that usually come with working.

11 We do, of course, also have Universal Credit, so if
 12 the household, as defined by Universal Credit, is now in
 13 trouble, then Universal Credit is there to help them and
 14 we shouldn't think that everyone on minimum wage is in
 15 a household that is poor, sometimes they are second
 16 earners, sometimes they're third earners. So no,
 17 I think the complexity outweighs the benefit of that
 18 suggestion. It's one of the few areas in which Dr Bell
 19 and I disagree.

20 **Q.** Right. And then one final scheme design element that
 21 wasn't a feature of this scheme, and I'd just like your
 22 view about it because we've heard this in evidence last
 23 week from Dr Mike Brewer and supported by others, the
 24 idea that an employee should have a right to request
 25 being furloughed, and a corresponding right to request

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1 If we said they had to be registered before they
 2 started work, then we could clamp down on some really
 3 bad firms that are undercutting reasonable firms,
 4 distorting competition, and behaving in ways that are
 5 just unacceptable in a modern society.

6 So, for a variety of reasons, I'm absolutely in
 7 favour of that.

8 **Q.** Two other scheme design issues. One that we heard from
 9 Kate Bell earlier today: minimum wage.

10 **A.** Yes.

11 **Q.** So that furlough should not reduce wages below the
 12 minimum wage. In other words, if you assume the minimum
 13 wage is the minimum that anybody should be paid, then
 14 that should be the amount of furlough. Would that,
 15 first of all, have had any effect on the success of the
 16 scheme, in terms of its objectives? Its economic
 17 objectives?

18 **A.** No, not much. It would have been quite hard to do,
 19 because the government only knows how much money you're
 20 paid per week or per month. It doesn't know your hourly
 21 wage. So it would be relatively hard to enforce. So --
 22 because obviously not everyone works full time, so you
 23 can't deduce what their hourly wage is from their weekly
 24 or monthly wage.

25 Secondly, you would then need a taper, because you

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1 not to be made to work?

2 **A.** So, of course, everybody in law has the right to ask for
 3 anything. You have the right. Everybody had the right
 4 to go to their boss and say, "I would like to be
 5 furloughed" and to set out their reasons. What I think
 6 they mean is a stronger right, such as the right to go
 7 part-time, where your boss can only say "no" if they can
 8 provide a valid reason.

9 **Q.** Yes, that's precisely what Dr Brewer articulated.

10 **A.** And I am -- it is one that should be considered in the
 11 different circumstances but on balance, I don't think
 12 that should be the case, because I worry -- perhaps
 13 rightly, perhaps wrongly -- that a lot of people who
 14 were worried for all sorts of reasons would come forward
 15 and say, "I am anxious, I am worried, I have childcare",
 16 there are 101 reasons that would have risked quite
 17 substantial parts of the economy collapsing.

18 I'd be particularly worried about this in healthcare
 19 settings. We know that anybody aged 50 and over was at
 20 a heightened risk of death from Covid, and I think it
 21 would have been hard to establish when an organisation
 22 could say, "yes" or "no". Would the NHS, for example,
 23 have had to grant furlough to every single member of
 24 staff over 50? I think that would have been
 25 catastrophic. Absolutely catastrophic. And the same

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1 issue for other parts of public services.

2 So on balance, I'm not persuaded of that, but I see
3 where they're coming from. It is not a ridiculous
4 suggestion.

5 Q. Right. Thank you very much.

6 Can we move on, then, to another major scheme: the
7 Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, which you address
8 in your witness statement from paragraph 599 onwards.

9 Now, this scheme, would you characterise it as
10 purely an income replacement scheme?

11 A. Yes, absolutely. And the answer is in the name, right?
12 It's an income support scheme.

13 Q. Right. And so does it share any common objectives with
14 the furlough scheme beyond the support?

15 A. Not really. So the point of the furlough scheme was
16 that it allowed firms to reopen very quickly, but
17 self-evidently if I'm self-employed and I have to stop
18 work because of the NPIs, I can return to work in my
19 business at any time I choose, I own that right, in
20 a way that an employee has no right to reclaim their job
21 if they've been made redundant. So in that sense it
22 doesn't really help with a V-shaped recovery. So no it
23 really doesn't. It doesn't keep you in touch with the
24 skills you have already because you have those skills.
25 And you can always choose to reemploy yourself. You

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1 say some people got far more than their losses.

2 Then you say, next paragraph:

3 "So SEISS was really ... a generous income support
4 scheme for a politically vocal group."

5 And then underneath that:

6 "[For what it's worth], I think we should say to the
7 Chancellor -- sure, some self-employed people will be
8 doing less than they would like."

9 And you go on.

10 So in terms of that being a good use of public
11 money, that scheme, where do you stand with the scheme?

12 A. Well, that's a political question. There was definitely
13 pressure out there. There was an expectation, not just
14 among the self-employed but in the population as a whole
15 that if you were self-employed and you couldn't do your
16 job, the state should stand behind you in the way it
17 stood behind employed people. I think, bluntly, had the
18 Chancellor followed my advice, he would have been
19 described in Yes Minister terms as exceptionally brave
20 because the self-employed are widely liked, they're
21 respected, most people will tell you they want more
22 support for the self-employed versus big business. I'm
23 in somewhat of a minority in not sharing that opinion
24 but it was good that the Chancellor got to see both
25 sides of that and I provided one side and there's no

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1 have that, by the definition, that complete agency.

2 So it's very much an income support scheme, and
3 I was very pleased that the titles reflect that. One is
4 a job retention scheme, one is an income support scheme.

5 Q. You say in your witness statement, I'll just put it to
6 you, rather than having it put up on the screen, that
7 since the number of self-employed people is relatively
8 low and unlikely to cause a collapse of that scheme, the
9 rationale for the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme
10 was moral and political rather than economic --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- and it came with a considerable fiscal cost. Is that
13 your considered opinion about the scheme?

14 A. It is.

15 Q. I'm going to ask that we put up a document, please,
16 INQ000656603, page 1. And you say there:

17 "I have struggled with this one intellectually from
18 the beginning. The aims of furlough were ..."

19 And then you set them out.

20 "Not one of these was achieved by SEISS ... is not
21 needed ..."

22 I think that's the point you've just made.

23 They can go back to their old job; nothing to
24 preserve a connection with the labour market; doesn't
25 compel you to return to work. It's not fair because you

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1 doubt that public opinion polling, a sense of what was
2 right and fair, was absolutely not with me.

3 I mean, as I say, I'm in a small minority on this
4 one.

5 Q. I'm just interested in a value for money sense.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. I'm just going to ask that another email is put up,
8 INQ000656405, page 1 of that, please. And you say
9 there:

10 "Self-employed has proven too hard. Our scheme is
11 terrible VFM."

12 Is that value for money?

13 A. Value for money, yes.

14 Q. "We are defeated, and that annoys me."

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Why was it terrible value for money?

17 A. Well, because of the reasons in the previous email. I
18 can't remember in which order I wrote those two emails,
19 but the previous email set out the reasons why I did not
20 think SEISS was achieving anything, except to give money
21 to a group of people that I couldn't see any moral
22 reason for giving money to but that's a personal view.
23 We were defeated in that we couldn't come up with
24 a better scheme and it annoyed me that we couldn't. And
25 it still annoys me. I still haven't come up with

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1 a better answer. I still can't improve on those emails
 2 I sent, and I still understand why the Chancellor chose
 3 to ignore me. I was not with public opinion. And
 4 public opinion should be respected in a democracy.
 5 Nobody has ever elected me. They did elect him and they
 6 supported him in those decisions that he made.

7 It certainly wasn't a terrible VFM in the sense of
 8 a complete waste of money; I never once wrote to the
 9 permanent secretary and said, "I think this is so bad
 10 you should require a letter of direction because this is
 11 a misuse of public funds."

12 It was perfectly reasonable for the Chancellor to
 13 say, "The employed and the self-employed should in some
 14 loose sense have the same level of support and this is
 15 the closest we can do."

16 **Q.** Was part of your -- perhaps "hostility" is too strong,
 17 but your argument against the scheme, that the
 18 self-employed had a different tax treatment to the
 19 employed in terms of National Insurance contributions
 20 and so on?

21 **A.** Yes, completely. People who are self-employed --
 22 I myself am both employed and self-employed, and I pay
 23 a much higher rate of tax on my income from PAYE
 24 employment than I do on my self-employed income. That
 25 is the way the system is structured. It's not that I've

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1 **Q.** -- (overspeaking) -- sorry. I'm doing it now and it's
 2 countering --
 3 **A.** Well, hang on, I want to distinguish between two groups.
 4 If you are self-employed, you could set up a company and
 5 then employ yourself and pay the maximum amount of tax.
 6 That's relatively hard. The group company owner
 7 managers who pay themselves as a dividend rather than as
 8 a salary, we didn't bail them out, partly because we
 9 couldn't, but there was a feeling that they had
 10 positively structured their tax affairs to minimise the
 11 amount of tax they paid. And from memory, I think the
 12 TUC supported us in that right back in March.

13 And there was some criticism of that but, as I said
 14 in that longer email, we rode that one out. And the
 15 people who had done that felt they were in a weak
 16 position to get public sympathy because they'd clearly
 17 structured their accounts to reduce the amount of tax
 18 they paid compared to the norm for self-employed people.

19 **Q.** If the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme was
 20 designed to provide income support, what was the
 21 rationale for not saying to that group of people, "Claim
 22 Universal Credit"?

23 **A.** Well, exactly. Well, I mean, the rationale is that the
 24 public expected the self-employed to get similar levels
 25 of support to the employed, and that to have said to

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1 engaged in any tax planning, that's just the way it is.

2 And I think, by and large, if a group pays less in
 3 tax, there should be an expectation that they get less
 4 back in benefits. And that was traditionally the reason
 5 why the self-employed paid less tax, because they got
 6 a lot less support in terms of crisis. They were not
 7 able to get sick pay, they were not able to get
 8 unemployment benefit, et cetera. And I felt that should
 9 apply here.

10 **Q.** And did you raise the argument for tax harmonisation
 11 -- (overspeaking) --

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** -- it might have justified the scheme?

14 **A.** Sorry. I'm not supposed to speak over you. Yes.

15 **Q.** And with who and to what effect?

16 **A.** Oh, to all sorts of people and to no effect. Both to
 17 fellow civil servants and I'm pretty sure to the
 18 Chancellor. He certainly knew my view on small firms.
 19 Indeed, there were points when I would type into Teams
 20 calls "My usual comment applies", and he knew exactly
 21 what that meant.

22 **Q.** Yes. And your view was, effectively, that very often
 23 these were people who paid themselves by a mechanism
 24 that meant they paid less tax; is that right --

25 **A.** Yes, absolutely.

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1 them, "Well, claim income support" -- which many of them
 2 would not have been eligible for a penny because they
 3 had more than, what is it, £16,000 of savings -- and
 4 they would then be told "You are on your own". That's
 5 how the Universal Credit system works.

6 And as Dr Bell said an hour or so ago, we need to
 7 understand that these decisions were made in the context
 8 of a much lower level of welfare support in Britain than
 9 in other European countries. I'm not saying that means
 10 we should copy Europe but it does need to be understood
 11 in that context.

12 **Q.** So does this scheme, in your view, really sit at the
 13 boundary between economic policy and social policy
 14 brought about by political pressure?

15 **A.** Yes, it's social policy, and there's nothing wrong with
 16 that, but it is, in my view, social policy rather than
 17 something to help the economy rebound.

18 **Q.** Yes. So, as an economist, you would say job retention
 19 scheme did do that, lots of good economic reasons for
 20 doing that, but you personally didn't share the view
 21 that the self-employed scheme would -- there was an
 22 economic case for it?

23 **A.** You put it very well.

24 **Q.** Thank you.

25 Can I pick up, please -- moving on, because those

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1 are my questions about the self-employed scheme -- data.
 2 A. Mm.
 3 Q. You've already touched on some elements of data, where
 4 you think that the Treasury would be in a much better
 5 position to see the real-time effect of -- on the
 6 economy and to respond. Do you have any other thoughts
 7 about data collection, either by HMRC or the Treasury,
 8 that would enable the Treasury to respond better in
 9 a future pandemic, or other emergency?
 10 A. So, overall, and both Dan York-Smith and James Benford
 11 said this last week, there was a very low level of trust
 12 in government on data and data sharing at the beginning
 13 of the pandemic, and that was regrettable.
 14 And that happened in very surprising ways. One of
 15 my emails that I spotted noted my recording that
 16 Highways England had refused to share data with Treasury
 17 on how well the roads were used. They claim they had no
 18 legal basis to do so. So that's why we had to ring up
 19 Google, who told us how many -- how the roads were being
 20 used. But from the Treasury's point of view, knowing
 21 how many people are on the roads is kind of useful if
 22 you want to understand whether the lockdown is working.
 23 And for Highways England to turn round and say
 24 "Well, we're not telling you" is just bizarre. I mean,
 25 it should be unacceptable. But they said, and they

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1 share data across government. And I would love
 2 a one-line bill that says: If the Senior Analytical
 3 Leadership Team says that data should be shared, then
 4 that data -- it is legal for that data to be shared
 5 within government.
 6 I think that would be a helpful recommendation on
 7 your part and it would be helpful if the government did
 8 it.
 9 More generally as to what data should be collected,
 10 I think it would be useful if the British Government,
 11 along with other governments, worked with the OECD or
 12 others to covers what information other countries
 13 collect and how they use it. Because I can sit down and
 14 try to think about ideas from scratch, but we tend to
 15 make best progress when we copy other people who are
 16 more successful than us.
 17 So, as I recount in furlough, people said to me,
 18 "Oh, you invented furlough", nope, nope, no, no, no, no,
 19 no, no, I took the furlough scheme from Germany. We
 20 should try to find out what data other countries
 21 collect.
 22 That doesn't mean we should collect it. In the
 23 19th century the French agricultural census recorded how
 24 many dogs every farm had and they were divided into four
 25 categories of dog. It is really not necessary for the

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1 might be right, that they had no legal gateway to share
 2 that information.
 3 And there's one of my emails in here in which
 4 I reply "Argggghh", with a lot of Gs and Hs, when HMRC
 5 declined to share some information with Treasury.
 6 And I think that approach is just hopeless. Unless
 7 it's disclosive of an individual or could be disclosive
 8 of an individual, ie it covers a small enough group that
 9 one can deduce something about an individual, government
 10 should be willing to share -- government departments
 11 should absolutely be mandated to share data with each
 12 other.
 13 If the Treasury or DHSC wants to know how many
 14 people are travelling on different roads in the country
 15 from all those cameras that Highways England have, then
 16 Highways England should categorically be required to
 17 share that information.
 18 Now, I think that's got better since then. I think
 19 SALT, the Senior Analytical Leadership Team, which has
 20 the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, the Government
 21 Chief Economist, the National Statistician and a couple
 22 of others, I think that was created after furlough --
 23 sorry, after Covid, and I would hope that would be able
 24 to bang heads together.
 25 But even then, there is no general legal right to

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1 British government to collect data on four categories of
 2 dogs on farms but it is worthwhile seeing what other
 3 countries collect, seeing how it's used, and then
 4 thinking: what would be the cost of collecting that here
 5 and would it be useful?
 6 So I would prefer an international commission, the
 7 ONS has its counterparts in other countries, working
 8 with the OECD to give a really definitive answer to that
 9 question rather than my speculations.
 10 Q. Thank you. And then data science capability. We heard
 11 evidence from Mr York-Smith and Mr Benford about that,
 12 and they both expressed the view that that was really an
 13 essential component of an agile and efficient response
 14 to an emergency. Do you agree with their view?
 15 A. Oh, completely. When, I was Chief Analyst in the DfE, I
 16 created the data science unit in the DfE and that would
 17 have been about 2014, 2015. So for Treasury not to have
 18 one by 2020 is pretty poor. So yes, if you want
 19 a gotcha moment, Treasury got something wrong, then that
 20 is your gotcha moment. But as James said, in the time
 21 that he was in the Treasury, we did create a data
 22 science unit. He has now left Treasury, I've left
 23 Treasury. I can't tell you if their current data
 24 science capability is sort of top of the Civil Service
 25 class, middle of the pack, or bottom, but we know it has

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1 improved since then.
 2 And of course in another 10, 20, 30 years, who knows
 3 what the new skill will be that will be needed in that
 4 pandemic. But clearly it's helpful for the analytical
 5 team in the Treasury to be up-to-date with modern
 6 analytical techniques.
 7 **Q.** Right. Did you find, working in the Treasury at the
 8 time, that they weren't up to scratch, the analytical
 9 team? That they weren't up with the latest
 10 techniques -- that was lacking, obviously?
 11 **A.** So on data science, absolutely. More generally not, no.
 12 Although as I note in my evidence, there are, compared
 13 to, say, the Bank of England, the Treasury has far fewer
 14 people in economics who are trained to Master's level or
 15 PhD level and I think they should, again, benchmark
 16 themselves to other organisations and the Treasury in
 17 the past to think about whether that's appropriate.
 18 Master's courses in economics these days are
 19 hardcore number-crunching courses where you learn proper
 20 up-to-date econometrics of the sort that somebody of my
 21 age is out of date and that you simply -- you will very
 22 rarely get at undergraduate level.
 23 **MR WRIGHT:** Right. Thank you.
 24 Dr Leunig, those are my questions of you.
 25 I think there are some Rule 10 questions -- my Lady.

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1 money but those who are not in work more generally
 2 should not. So those extra costs should be met in
 3 general through the standard welfare system that is
 4 universal and available to all people with disabilities
 5 at appropriate volumes for the disabilities that they
 6 have. So no, I think furlough would be a very odd way
 7 to do that.
 8 **Q.** And in terms then, though, of maintaining that link
 9 between workers and employers, which I think you've said
 10 in answer to --
 11 **A.** Mm, absolutely.
 12 **Q.** -- Counsel to the Inquiry, was in your view really the
 13 primary purpose of furlough, given what we know about
 14 disability employment gap, difficulty of disabled
 15 workers having reasonable adjustments met and resulting
 16 disability pay gap, would you accept, though, that
 17 furlough is particularly important potentially for
 18 disabled workers if the aim is to maintain that link,
 19 and as you say, make sure that workers don't drop out of
 20 the labour market altogether?
 21 **A.** Yes.
 22 **MS BEATTIE:** Thank you, my Lady.
 23 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much, Ms Beattie.
 24 Mr Jacobs, who is over there.
 25 **A.** Ah, yes.

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1 **LADY HALLETT:** There are. Ms Beattie, who sits there.
 2 **Questions from MS BEATTIE**
 3 **MS BEATTIE:** Dr Leunig, I ask questions on behalf of
 4 national Disabled People's Organisations. In your
 5 statement you say that it wouldn't have been sensible to
 6 suggest that disabled people should have been able to
 7 claim furlough as of right, because at the start of the
 8 Covid, we had little evidence as to who was vulnerable,
 9 you say, and therefore we wouldn't have had the
 10 knowledge base to say who should have had the right to
 11 furlough.
 12 Now, there were known increased costs faced and
 13 borne by disabled people and foreseeable and recognised
 14 disproportionate adverse impacts of NPIs on disabled
 15 people, as well as a known pre-existing disability
 16 employment gap and disability pay gap.
 17 So given that existing knowledge base about disabled
 18 people and disabled workers, one didn't need more
 19 specific knowledge about specific clinical vulnerability
 20 to Covid itself to assess the importance of a right to
 21 furlough for disabled people; would that be fair?
 22 **A.** No, I don't think it would be. As you say quite
 23 rightly, there are additional costs that people who are
 24 disabled face, but it would be very odd to say that
 25 those who get furloughed should get that additional

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1 **Questions from MR JACOBS**
 2 **MR JACOBS:** Dr Leunig, on behalf of the TUC, I have the
 3 arguably unhappy task of asking you about advanced
 4 planning for the next pandemic or civil emergency.
 5 You've described in evidence and in your statement,
 6 Kate Bell having raised with you that many large
 7 employers have the six-week notice period and that that
 8 was in fact the first time that the government had
 9 thought about the relationship between extension of
 10 furlough and notice periods.
 11 Do you not think that's an example, but just one of
 12 many, of knowledge gained that needs to be built on and
 13 be available in the next pandemic?
 14 **A.** So to be clear, the TUC were the first people to tell me
 15 about it, but I think that I shared the email from
 16 either Kate or Rain with 93 members of staff
 17 congratulating us on the furlough scheme. So I can't
 18 speak for those 93. They may have known that as well.
 19 But I absolutely agree with you that the TUC was an
 20 excellent partner during the crisis in the creation of
 21 the furlough scheme and otherwise, but to be honest, it
 22 worked. I mean, as Kate said, it was one of the best
 23 things we did, and there wasn't the need -- I'm not
 24 saying we shouldn't have a tripartite system, whatever,
 25 I think that's a democratic issue for the democratically

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1 elected government of the day, but I think actually the
2 furlough scheme proved that there is no pressing need to
3 have those sort of formal tripartite systems, that when
4 push comes to shove, the Treasury will ring the TUC, the
5 TUC will ring the Treasury, both sides are on the same
6 thing, and knowledge and information gets through very,
7 very quickly.

8 Once you create a formal structure you really can
9 risk delaying things quite quickly. We managed it in
10 55 hours and whilst I'm sure if I summoned Kate to
11 a meeting at 10.30 pm, she would accept, I think you
12 would feel constrained about calling a tripartite
13 meeting at some of the times we called meetings
14 internally and I think that would have risked it coming
15 along so quickly.

16 **Q.** There is certainly no resistance from the TUC on there
17 having been a large measure of success, but in terms of
18 how it was achieved, you've given a sense of it just
19 then in your evidence but also in your statement,
20 achieved by some very competent people working extremely
21 fast, and extremely hard. You describe emails at 8 am
22 and after midnight, day after day. It doesn't sound an
23 infallible approach to resistance, does it, the good
24 fortune of good people working 18 hours
25 a day -- (overspeaking) --

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1 achieve the things we all went into public service for.

2 They will not get overtime, they will not get
3 recognition, but deep in their hearts they will know
4 that is what they signed up to, and they will be proud
5 of having delivered what they can for the people of our
6 country.

7 **Q.** Absolutely, and it's certainly not the premise of my
8 question that planning and being good and working hard
9 are somehow mutually exclusive, but you've spoken about
10 the potential use of data, and how improved data use can
11 feed into job retention schemes. It can't be right, can
12 it, just to wait for the next pandemic and then try and
13 resolve the problem about how best to use data in the
14 midst of the crisis? Isn't that an example of precisely
15 the sort of thing that actually -- from which there can
16 be real benefit in planning?

17 **A.** Well, I've already said that I'm in favour of collecting
18 more data in advance, subject to some cost-benefit
19 analysis, and I've set out some of the limits to that.
20 So I'm in favour of learning when people are made
21 redundant and when they start work, but I'm not in
22 favour of the government discovering who in you
23 household buys the toothpaste, and I know nothing about
24 your household arrangements, whether there's one or more
25 people who buy toothpaste and what we can deduce about

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1 **A.** Well, it's --

2 **Q.** -- rather than doing what you can in advance to equip
3 those responsible with the best knowledge that you can
4 on how to respond with a furlough scheme and the like?

5 **A.** Well, I don't wish to sound adversarial here but I think
6 that really is a case of the pot calling the kettle
7 black, because a couple of hours ago, Kate Bell told us
8 she was working all hours of the day and night but
9 I don't see the TUC turning round and saying, "Well, the
10 way the TUC worked was terrible, Kate had to work at all
11 hours of day and night and it was just a lucky
12 coincidence we had someone of her calibre." Both your
13 organisation and the HM Treasury are fine organisations
14 that can and do consistently recruit good people and
15 I mean good in two senses. I mean both that they're
16 capable, as Kate is, as I am, as Dan York-Smith, and so
17 on and so forth, and good people in that they're not
18 people who say, "I'm sorry, it's two minutes past five,
19 I've got to go home." These are people who are
20 committed to public service in your organisation and
21 mine and I'm absolutely confident that if we had another
22 crisis next year or in 10 years, the Treasury and the
23 TUC and the CBI and 101 organisations, including many of
24 the interested parties here will step up again and they
25 will work as hard as they are required in order to

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1 your living arrangements. That would be data too far.

2 So yes, on data, especially as data gets easier and
3 cheaper to collect, we could collect more data. That's
4 standard cost-benefit analysis. And you'll find no
5 disagreement between you and I there, I suspect.

6 **MR JACOBS:** Doctor, thank you very much.

7 Thank you, my Lady.

8 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much, Mr Jacobs.

9 That completes the questions that we have for you,
10 Dr Leunig. There are many unsung heroes of the
11 pandemic, and I'm sure you and your colleagues were
12 amongst them, so thank you for mentioning it. You all
13 deserve our gratitude, I know.

14 And thank you personally for your commitment to the
15 Inquiry. Your written statement is extraordinarily
16 helpful and please rest assured, I hope you have been,
17 that we'll very much take that into account when
18 reaching our findings.

19 And I found your evidence this afternoon not only
20 interesting but on occasions entertaining, which
21 I confess I had not expected.

22 **THE WITNESS:** Excellent.

23 Am I allowed to make a final statement?

24 **LADY HALLETT:** Yes, you may.

25 **THE WITNESS:** Which is that I think it's important in all of

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this to remember that what we did cost a great deal of money. And I say that not just because I'm here as a Treasury witness, but to think about next time. We borrowed a lot of money and I think it's really important that we, as a nation, discover why we needed to borrow so much more money than most European countries, because our level of debt is now sufficiently high that it will get harder to borrow that sort of increment again.

So of all the things I think the Treasury and the government need to do, that would be my number 1 recommendation.

Beyond that, as I've said, we can hire good people in government, but there is a limit to how many good people you can hire, particularly at the top, at the rates of pay that -- and I can say this now that I've left, without trying to feather my own nest -- at the very top of the Civil Service.

And finally, as anybody who has ever worked with politicians will know, there are good politicians and less effective ones. And if we're serious about getting the best people to go into politics, it would be helpful, I think, if this Inquiry were to call for a greater degree of respect for politicians who have to make some terrible choices sometimes while they're in

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government, because if we continually pillory them, no good people will go into politics and we as a society, as a whole, will suffer for that.

Thank you.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much, Doctor.

That completes, I think, the evidence for today.

MR WRIGHT: It does, my Lady.

LADY HALLETT: Very well, I shall return for 10.00 tomorrow.

(4.03 pm)

(The hearing adjourned until 10.00 on
Tuesday, 2 December 2025)

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