

and there are consequential decisions for the Devolved Administrations - it does not act as the government of England. Mr Drakeford is fighting for at all points for Wales and the other Devolved Administrations to be regarded as equal partners, rather than devolved nations in a country where certain specified powers and responsibilities have been devolved. To change this would mean a fundamental change to the devolution settlement in the UK and the constitution itself. This is a political objective as opposed to one warranted by the pandemic response.

88. On the issue of improvement of engaging with the Devolved Administrations, I have reflected on this and we could potentially have better managed the relationship by having had more meetings where we worked at a ministerial level, perhaps a few days or hours earlier, to try and discuss the contours of the support packages which were available. Though this would not have changed HM Treasury's decisions, it is something that *could* have been done purely to manage the relationship. There was a relentless pressure on time, so managing relationships simply could not always be the first priority during a crisis like the Covid Pandemic. It does need to be borne in mind that our disagreements arose from fundamental differences of view as to what was the right, proportionate and affordable thing for the government to do by way of response.

89. So it was not, in my experience, a question of fine degrees or the graduation of a package which was really in dispute. It was a question of (for example) whether there should be a national lockdown in response to a particular situation or not, or whether Covid lockdown measures should have been removed at a particular moment in time. When that disagreement stems from differing philosophies concerning risk tolerance, then, I question how productive it would have been in practice.