

Monday, 15 December 2025

(10.29 am)

LADY HALLETT: Mr Wright, good morning.

MR WRIGHT: Good morning, my Lady. I call Rishi Sunak.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE RISHI SUNAK (sworn)

LADY HALLETT: I'm sorry we had to call you back, Mr Sunak, but as you'll appreciate, you were indispensable to this module.

THE WITNESS: It's quite all right, my Lady. Thank you for having me.

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

MR WRIGHT: Mr Sunak, you've provided a statement to this module of the Inquiry, and I'm going to give the reference number now for the record, which is INQ000661483, and you've provided that statement in your capacity as Chancellor of the Exchequer during the pandemic, having been appointed, as the Inquiry understands it, on 13 February of 2020.

A. Yes, that is right, and good morning, Mr Wright, good morning, my Lady. Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence today. Of course this is all about making sure that we can be better prepared for any future pandemic, and I look forward to providing evidence in the spirit of constructive candour, as

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very much focus on your reflections and lessons learned from both what went well, and that's important, and where you think a different approach might be beneficial in a future, potential emergency.

And over the last four weeks the Inquiry has heard a lot of evidence about what has happened during the economic response, and received a lot of statements addressing that in detail. So I don't just want to ask you questions about what could or should be done next time, if there is a next time, but how, from a practical perspective, that might be achieved, bearing in mind it's easy to say, well, you could do this or do that, but the real question is: how do you actually make that happen?

Can I, to assist you, Mr Sunak, and those following your evidence, just set out the basic structure that I'm going to follow in my questioning so you know the order in which we're going to deal with the subjects, and we will work through these in the course of the six sessions of evidence that we have with you.

So first, I'm going to examine preparedness as part of the initial response, look at the scale and nature of the shock, the economic shock the country was facing, then look at some systemic and structural issues in terms of decision making and delivery.

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I enjoyed doing last time around.

But before we begin, I would like to extend my condolences to all those families who lost their loved ones during Covid. Remembering those we lost and all those who suffered should, of course, be the starting point for all these discussions.

And before we move on to the detailed questions, Mr Wright, if I may, I'd like to put on record my thanks and my deep gratitude to the teams at the Treasury, HMRC, and indeed all the departments that worked to devise and then deliver all the economic support programmes that were put in place. They worked tirelessly, selflessly and without complaint, and I think they demonstrated exceptional skill and professionalism throughout.

It was, to me, a very fine example of public service and I felt personally very fortunate to have both their advice and their support during what was an incredibly difficult time for the country.

Q. Thank you very much, Mr Sunak.

On the subject of constructive dialogue and looking ahead, the terms of reference for this Inquiry require the Inquiry to identify lessons to be learned, to inform preparations for future pandemics across the United Kingdom, and so in each area of questioning I want to

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I'd then like to move on to funding, and in particular funding for the devolved administrations; and then to explore the policy response, looking at, in particular, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, first of all, then the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, then Kickstart, then the uplifts to both Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, then examining the Statutory Sick Pay Rebate scheme; then looking at loans as an umbrella heading, picking up different loan schemes within that; grants, as an umbrella heading, picking up different elements of grant schemes; and then I'd like to ask you some questions, Mr Sunak, about access by the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to pan-economic measures that you introduced; then, to examine the economic impact of Long Covid, as a discrete subject; and then finally, and I'm sure you'll be relieved it's a finally, to come to giving you an opportunity to discuss any overarching lessons and reflections that you have, having been Chancellor during this emergency, and to look at any recommendations or thoughts for the future that you wanted to share with the Inquiry.

We obviously will pick up reflections as we move through, but I want to give you, as I have with every witness, an opportunity at the end of your evidence to

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1 make any points that you feel are important points of
2 learning.

3 As I've said, you were appointed on 13 February 2020
4 as Chancellor. You'd previously been Chief Secretary to
5 the Treasury so you had been within the Treasury, is
6 that right, before that?

7 A. Yes, that is right.

8 Q. And there had been a number of appointments on or about
9 that date. We've heard Lord Sharma was also appointed
10 on 13 February, and we know that the current Governor of
11 the Bank of England came into post a month later,
12 16 March.

13 A. (Witness nodded)

14 Q. And we understand that the budget, but that is a regular
15 fiscal event, as opposed to some emergency budget, was
16 programmed for 11 March. So, regardless of the
17 pandemic, your first job was going to be -- or your
18 first big job -- was going to be to deliver that budget
19 on 11 March; is that right?

20 A. Yes, that is correct.

21 Q. Yeah. And so you had been -- and I'm just setting this
22 context, really, to remind us all of the scale of the
23 challenge that you and officials at the Treasury were
24 facing at the time -- you had been Chancellor for just
25 over a month when, on 16 March, the Prime Minister

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1 and then it was a -- it was a surprise to be made
2 Chancellor in the middle of February. And at that point
3 I inherited a budget date which had been previously set,
4 that the government had announced, and was being worked
5 towards. So my immediate job was, you know, to put
6 together a budget in the space of a few weeks, which, in
7 ordinary course, I think would probably be what you
8 would imagine to be the most difficult job you'd ever
9 have to do as Chancellor. As it turned out, that was
10 really the -- one of the easier things I had to do,
11 given what then unfolded over the next few days, weeks,
12 months.

13 And at that moment things were moving very quickly,
14 so even during the budget preparations, you know, it was
15 clear that what was happening with the pandemic was
16 escalating, and so I wouldn't say we necessarily rewrote
17 the budget, but, as well as the regular budget that we
18 had planned, what we then ended up having to do, you
19 know, midway through that prep was to deliver a set of
20 Covid-specific responses in that budget which I'm sure
21 we can go through.

22 So the budget itself was, you know, almost a budget
23 that delivered largely what was in the 2019 manifesto,
24 from an economic perspective, but then also had a set of
25 interventions specifically designed to deal with the

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1 recommended avoiding all non-essential contact and
2 travel, and then a week later there was an announcement
3 of lockdown that effectively put the economy into
4 something approaching hibernation, and this was
5 therefore a significant economic crisis unfolding that
6 was unprecedented.

7 You informed the nation on 17 March, in a speech,
8 that the coronavirus pandemic is a public health
9 emergency, but it is also an economic emergency. And
10 you put it, Mr Sunak, in this way: "We have never, in
11 peacetime, faced an economic fight like this one."

12 And it was an economic fight that resulted, we, the
13 Inquiry, knows, in fiscal interventions to a value of in
14 excess of £350 billion over the course of the pandemic.

15 So I've just set that context so we remind ourselves
16 of where we were in February and March of 2020.

17 From your perspective, coming new into the job, for
18 example, you were having to react to a situation for
19 which there was no playbook, as it were. Nothing like
20 this had happened before; is that right?

21 A. Yes, that's -- I think that's exactly right. I mean,
22 you mentioned I'd been in the Treasury. I'd been
23 appointed Chief Secretary to the Treasury the previous
24 July, so, you know, not a huge amount of time in that
25 context. I was obviously very new to senior government,

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1 pandemic -- as we imagined it would be at that moment;
2 obviously we had to build on those pretty considerably,
3 and quickly, thereafter.

4 So, you know, all that is to say already the budget
5 contained some things, and then we iterated very quickly
6 thereafter. And, to your point, there wasn't a toolkit.
7 There was not a playbook that you could pull off the
8 shelf that said, well, this is how you, you know, tend
9 to deal with pandemics, in the same way that you
10 somewhat have with other economic shocks or financial
11 shocks.

12 So, you know, we -- you did have to draw on some
13 things that we had done in the past, and we'll get into
14 that, with the specific interventions, but, largely,
15 listen to the -- the health and medical advice as to
16 what was likely to happen and then do the best you could
17 at designing economic interventions which would -- which
18 would help support the country through that period.

19 Q. These may not be the words you'd use to describe it, but
20 we'd heard from Sir Charles Roxburgh who kept a diary
21 and caveating that, in that it was a personal diary that
22 he shared with the Inquiry, the way he put it in an
23 entry on 17 March which was, from his perspective as one
24 of your senior officials looking at what you had to do,
25 he wrote down that you were in the position of having to

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1 "pull a rabbit out of a hat" is effectively how he was
2 looking at things in terms of the situation in which you
3 found yourself.

4 And really, building on that, a lot of the schemes,
5 and we're talking here about fundamental significant
6 schemes like the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as
7 you said, there was no playbook, you were having to
8 devise those at speed, we heard from Dr Leunig, an
9 adviser, about 55 hours of time to conceptualise and
10 announce the furlough scheme, as it became known.

11 And what sort of pressure did that place you and
12 your officials under, in terms of the need to deliver at
13 speed?

14 A. I think, taking a step back, and maybe I should
15 slightly, going back to your previous question, you
16 know, I think there was just an enormous amount of
17 uncertainty. I think that was the number one challenge.
18 We were dealing with something that no one had dealt
19 with before, and there was uncertainty about the scale,
20 the potential duration, the behavioural response, and
21 the wider, so macroeconomic impact of all of this, both
22 from the NPIs and then how the economy would respond,
23 and that's what made it so tricky in terms of figuring
24 out what to do.

25 And then, as you've just said, I think speed was

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1 would have on the economy, you know, what we did know is
2 what we were trying to prevent, and that was what we
3 call economic scarring. You know, we knew that there
4 was going to be an economic shock, our understanding was
5 that it would be temporary. I think our understanding
6 at the beginning was that it would last several weeks to
7 a few months, and what we were focused on doing is
8 making sure that the temporary shock did not have
9 long-term serious economic consequences, and that's what
10 the term "economic scarring" means.

11 And there are various transmission mechanisms for
12 economic scarring, damage to aggregate labour supply,
13 damage to the capital stock, damage to what we'll call
14 total factor productivity, which is how you knit things
15 together and create things out of them. So that is what
16 we were trying to do and I think that was the right set
17 of objectives.

18 And then you talked about the "how" earlier on, you
19 know, that then led to a few things that we were
20 designing schemes and designing economic policy to
21 deliver in terms of outcomes that we could be measured
22 against. And the first was to prevent unemployment, and
23 protect living standards --

24 Q. I don't want to cut you off but I am going to come on to
25 those priorities --

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1 paramount because one thing that was crystal clear that
2 this was happening very quickly and was about to have an
3 extraordinary impact very fast on millions of people,
4 their livelihoods, and millions of businesses, as well.

5 So, you know, not only are you trying to do things
6 that have never been done before, you know you have to
7 do them as fast as you humanly can, and that's why, at
8 the opening of my evidence, I did want to put on record
9 my thanks because I -- as I felt I was new to the job,
10 I was new to being in Cabinet having a job like this and
11 then having, obviously, to deal with something like this
12 and do the best job you could for the country, having
13 the support, the advice of people around you who were
14 working, you know, incredibly hard at particularly those
15 first few weeks, was something that will stay with me
16 for the rest of my professional life. It was an
17 extraordinary effort by a whole number of people, you
18 know, trying to serve the country in the best way they
19 thought they could.

20 And maybe if it's helpful, I can then talk a little
21 bit about what we were trying to solve for. So, you
22 know, when we were sitting there in these meetings
23 -- and you've probably heard a little bit about this
24 from Charles's evidence -- you know, our understanding
25 of what the virus would do, or, you know, the impact it

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1 A. Oh okay, fine.

2 Q. -- shortly. I just, at the moment, if we could, and if
3 I don't keep this promise, you can haul me up about it,
4 but we will come on to that very soon. Just before we
5 get there, just going back to this point about speed and
6 there being no playbook, you referred to that, in
7 ordinary times, if we're talking about governance in
8 ordinary, steady state, things like the CJRS, schemes
9 like that, would have taken months to work up, to
10 consult upon, to implement, in ordinary government
11 proceedings.

12 How important was it, did you think -- yes, there
13 was no playbook so you couldn't dust it off and say,
14 "What do we do in this situation?", but did you find
15 that actually having an entrepreneurial approach to
16 decision making was a benefit? In other words, being
17 freed of the usual strictures of government systems and
18 operations?

19 A. I don't think it necessarily was strictures but I think
20 the necessity of speed just -- just meant that everyone
21 recognised we didn't have the luxury of time. And
22 I think that was everyone's driving force, really.

23 I can't think that there were particular processes
24 or structures that somehow we did away with; it was just
25 that we had to work quickly. And as we'll get into

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1 later, I think there was an acknowledgement from the
2 beginning -- I mean, you used the word
3 "entrepreneurial", I'd probably say iterative, maybe,
4 the other way to characterise it -- there was an
5 acknowledgement early on, when I was talking to the
6 team, that of course we weren't going to get everything
7 right straight away. I think it would -- was -- you
8 know, that would have been, you know, surprising, given
9 the speed at which we were operating and the scale of
10 the interventions we were designing and -- and putting
11 in place.

12 So there was a recognition up front, and I,
13 you know, encouraged the team to be comfortable with
14 that, that that was okay. All right? We couldn't let
15 perfect be the enemy of the good and we were going to
16 have to acknowledge that we would iterate as we go.

17 I think -- there are general for policy -- general
18 lessons for policymaking, I think, in any case about
19 that -- what they'd call in the Cabinet Office
20 a "test and learner" approach and an iterative approach
21 to policymaking, I think that's a good thing. I think
22 that's what you'd see in the private sector, for sure.
23 I, in general, think that's a good thing for government
24 to try to adopt, even in -- in peacetime.

25 It requires a recognition on everyone's part that,

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1 of tools that we developed, we iterated, and no doubt
2 can be improved in the future.

3 But I would slightly guard against the idea that,
4 whatever happens next time, you can pull something off
5 the shelf and, as you said, just kind of go: right,
6 line 1, line 2, plug it into a machine, and off you go.

7 Each -- each economic shock, each economic crisis,
8 is going to be slightly different, and it's important
9 for policymakers at -- at that moment to be agile and
10 responsive to the situation they face, and not be so
11 mechanically thinking: okay, well, just because we did
12 this last time, it's the right thing to do in exactly
13 the same way.

14 So -- I think you used the word "agility". I think
15 that's right. It's just responsiveness to the situation
16 you -- you face, having the agility to respond to it, to
17 be flexible, but also then to acknowledge, even next
18 time, a willingness to be able to iterate as you go,
19 would be my takeaways.

20 Having said that, all of that will be benefited from
21 the fact that we have now developed a whole new set of
22 tools this time around, building on some tools that we
23 had previously, and that will help.

24 Q. Yes, we heard some evidence from Dr Leunig, who -- his
25 stark evidence was, you know, he was anti-planning, but

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1 you know, you are then putting things out there that are
2 not perfect day 1 and then iterating them over time.

3 But I think, in the context of a pandemic, everyone
4 was comfortable with that, or should have been, because,
5 you know, we had to get things out fast otherwise the
6 consequences would have been severely negative.

7 Q. So, that -- that iterative approach has benefits in --
8 in all times, in your view, and so when we look at
9 playbooks and the idea of playbooks, and this is just
10 why I'm interested in this issue, in terms of how much
11 planning you can ever do, you don't want to plan to the
12 point where you lose the ability to be agile and to --
13 to react what's going on, in other words, that you just
14 follow line 1, line 2, line 3 --

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. -- you've got to still be reactive?

17 A. Yeah. And I -- look, I've followed some of the evidence
18 that you've that during this -- this module, and I think
19 this is -- this is a really interesting question: to
20 what extent should we come out of this saying, you know,
21 "Here's the playbook for next time"? And I probably --
22 and again, we'll get into it in detail when we go
23 through the individual interventions -- my overarching
24 reflection would be we -- we have learnt an enormous
25 amount having been through this once, and we have a set

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1 actually, in questioning, I think where he'd landed was
2 that you can build the architecture now, you can put in
3 place the delivery mechanisms, you can get the data
4 streams sorted out, you can do that sort of planning,
5 but then you need to also retain agility in terms of
6 reacting to the particular shock.

7 And is that more or less where you --

8 A. Yeah, I would broadly agree with that characterisation.

9 Q. Yeah. Okay.

10 So that was -- you had to be agile, you had to be
11 iterative, because you didn't have a playbook and there
12 weren't these structures, so that's the starting point.

13 Moving on, then, to the scale and nature of the
14 shock, and when we've discussed that, then we'll come on
15 to the point you were making about what you were trying
16 to do, what you were thinking about. But in terms of
17 this pandemic, this wasn't a shock, and Andrew Bailey
18 spoke about this, that arose in the economic system or
19 in the global financial markets; this was a health
20 crisis that then had a knock-on effect in terms of an
21 economic shock; is that right?

22 A. Yes, that's right. I think normally, when you're
23 responding to an economic shock, part of your job is to
24 try to stimulate economic activity. You know, here we
25 had the almost reverse situation where the government

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1 was deliberately suppressing economic activity. So, as
 2 I say, this is why it was unprecedented, at least for
 3 modern policymakers to have to grapple with, and to
 4 figure out what the right set of economic interventions
 5 would be in that context.

6 **Q.** And how important did you consider it to be to really
 7 understand, in the Treasury, the nature of the shock and
 8 the extent to which it was a supply-side shock and it
 9 was affecting global supply chains or a demand shock, or
 10 the interrelationship between those things?

11 **A.** No, that's exactly what we tried to do, and I -- and
 12 you'll see it in my evidence, and indeed in my evidence
 13 in the previous Module 2, that the calls that I had,
 14 even during those budget preparations with the Chief
 15 Medical Officer, Chris Whitty, and the Chief Scientific
 16 Adviser, separate from the various COBRs and things we
 17 were at, and I spoke to them specifically with my team
 18 to try and glean as much as I could from them in those
 19 early days about what this would look like, so we in the
 20 Treasury could then do the best job we could of
 21 understanding the impact that would have on the economy
 22 and how we should think about it and then help devise
 23 the right type of responses, the first iteration of
 24 which you saw in the budget and then we built on
 25 thereafter.

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1 **Q.** And that's really what I'm coming to, in that we know
 2 from all the other evidence the Inquiry has heard how
 3 rapidly the health position was changing?

4 **A.** Changing, yes.

5 **Q.** So, from your perspective, did that mean that the
 6 economic position was changing just as rapidly behind
 7 the health developments?

8 **A.** Yes, that's right, and I think perhaps maybe slightly
 9 underappreciated how -- and I'm going back over all
 10 those individual meetings of that period, even I, when
 11 I went over it in preparation for the previous module
 12 and now, am struck by how much that health and medical
 13 advice was changing in those early days. I think
 14 people -- even I was struck by that, re-reading it. And
 15 of course the economic response then had to keep up with
 16 that, and you saw that, because we put a set of things
 17 in place for the budget and then very quickly we had to
 18 then go and do a whole host of other things, and, you
 19 know, what we did in the budget wasn't that it was out
 20 of date, and in fact many of those things persisted for
 21 a long period throughout the pandemic, but we had to do
 22 significantly more than that. And that is a reflection,
 23 as you said, of a rapidly evolving health situation.

24 **Q.** And that pace, and the speed at which things were
 25 evolving, presumably, supports your view about the need

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1 **Q.** Yeah. I mean ordinarily, as Chancellor of the
 2 Exchequer, you set the economic policy direction for the
 3 country and you announce measures in a budget, and so,
 4 in a sense, usually, the Treasury is in control, as much
 5 as it can be or any government department can be. But
 6 here, was the Treasury finding it had to be reactive to
 7 other events, rather than able to control those events,
 8 given the nature of the shock?

9 **A.** Well, I think, of course the Treasury and the economic
 10 response had to be responsive to, and based on, the
 11 health interventions. So, I mean -- I think that's kind
 12 of, you know, a statement of obvious in one sense. But
 13 the Treasury couldn't drive the conversation, especially
 14 in those early -- and nor should it have done -- in
 15 those early days and weeks. And I went through this in
 16 some detail in my evidence in the previous module.

17 You know, my strong recollection of that period is
 18 largely the response being led by the Department of
 19 Health together with the medical and scientific advisers
 20 and us largely, you know, following the advice that they
 21 were putting in front of ministers and the
 22 Prime Minister and then obviously the economic policy
 23 response would be based on that. And as that changed,
 24 then we had to change the economic response, or
 25 anticipate where it might go.

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1 to retain agility and to take this iterative approach?

2 **A.** Yes, I think that's absolutely right. And the Treasury
 3 has a great institutional ability to, you know,
 4 deliver -- and I'd say, you know, the set piece economic
 5 policy announcements because of the budget process, in
 6 what we had to do, or -- in the organisation, and they
 7 responded, you know, absolutely brilliantly to that,
 8 and, you know, reflect on the time -- you know, we
 9 almost had to deliver, you know, five budgets in the
 10 space of about two weeks. In terms of the scale of what
 11 was being announced, they were bigger than pretty much
 12 any budget that had ever been announced by any
 13 Chancellor, and it felt like, for a period, we were
 14 doing one of those every two days, for that first two
 15 weeks. It was an incredibly -- to go back to what you
 16 were saying before -- it was an incredibly intense
 17 period, those first, you know, two weeks, and, as
 18 I said, every second day, I was popping up, it felt
 19 like, doing a press conference, announcing something,
 20 and then behind all of that, there was, you know,
 21 48 hours of nonstop work to get to that point and then
 22 after that go and make sure all the implementation was
 23 happening and then move on to the next thing.

24 I think, probably looking back at it, I slightly
 25 benefited from the fact that there wasn't really time to

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panic, there wasn't really time to worry. You just, certainly on my approach to it individually, was you just had to focus on the problem in front of you, run at it, solve it as best you could, get on to the next one and just keep going and not let it consume you. But the organisation, as I said, responded exceptionally well in those early couple of weeks.

And probably another thing to say is, you know, we were all new to working from home at that point, right? I think people forget. And I think Charles, in his evidence, made an observation about that, and it's a small point but, you know, we were not set up with all the things like Teams and everything else. There wasn't, I think, even the right set of plug sockets, I think Charles mentioned in the Chancellor's meeting room in Number 11 Downing Street which --

Q. No telephone socket -- (overspeaking) --

A. That was it, which is why we were kind of crowding around in kind of almost a sitting room, because that was where you could plug in all the various things and have a conference call. And that was what it was like in those first couple of days.

So I think, given that, I was very grateful for the team to rising to the challenge to get me what I needed to go out and do what I had to do, which I know we'll

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Scientific Adviser at one point saying, "It's important not to go too early because these things need to be maintained for a period of time."

And then -- and clearly, as you just said, things just kept escalating, things were put in place, and then ultimately, even at the end, that last few days, I think the Prime Minister said to people it was a voluntary social distancing, and to avoid hospitality and leisure on the basis, on the advice from the scientists, and schools were not closed at first, then the advice was that they should be closed, and that was followed immediately.

And then even at that point, there was a belief that that voluntary social distancing, together with the school closures, if there was, I think the number was 75% compliance, would be sufficient to manage the virus, to deliver the health outcomes, and then very, you know, two, three, days after that was said, it was decided that that wasn't going to be achievable which was why you had to move to a full mandatory lockdown.

But to your point, the health and scientific advice was changing, you know, every couple of days and that's what characterised that period, and going back to your point, there was a sense that it could be contained at the beginning, and then it would last for a, you know,

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come on to in a second.

Q. And in terms of what the challenge was, or became -- and again, just for context, we've seen the very first briefing you had as Chancellor about the pandemic, and at that time there was still an expectation it might be contained even in China, that it might not reach the United Kingdom, and then a month later, the budget, that's all consigned to history.

But in March -- February, March, was there still a hope, perhaps even an expectation, that it might be capable of being a relatively short-lived economic shock?

A. Yeah, you can see that in the evolution of the various minutes coming from the SAGE meetings and the packs that were prepared for ministers in the COBR meetings. That was very clear. There was a set of things that people were working towards. And I remember clearly at that time, especially in those early conversations, a lot of what the medical and scientific community were advising us was not to go too early because they were very -- with the various interventions, because they were worried about public, I think, acceptance of them and they needed to maintain a duration. And so they were quite focused on getting the timing right, and the quotes are in my evidence about, I think, the Chief

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a period of time, more than couple of weeks, but a period of time, and that's what we initially designed the economic interventions to do.

Q. And that's why I'm really setting this ground --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- because you're having to be reactive in the Treasury to health events, but, as Chancellor, in terms of setting the economic response to the emergency, the economic response to a short-lived emergency may be very different, in terms of its policy and implementation, to the economic response to a long-lived emergency; is that fair?

A. Yeah, I think, you know, that obviously sounds right. I mean, again, looking -- looking back -- and I think it's probably better for when we get into the individual interventions, you know, it's not -- it's not obvious what very significantly large decisions that we would have made that would be very, very different at the beginning, knowing -- if you knew that it was going to be for longer than you thought.

I mean, we -- you know, there might be some micro design details, but I'm not actually -- as we get into it, I'm not -- I'm not sure if that's necessarily the case, and that's -- whenever it's appropriate to get into whatever we were solving for and then to -- so at

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1 least you have an understanding --

2 Q. Well, let's come on to that now.

3 A. Yes, because I think, as I said, like, a lot of that is

4 slightly time agnostic, in a -- in a sense.

5 Q. Understood.

6 So, here you are, the health position is worsening.

7 That's having an economic effect. What was it you were

8 having to take into account, in terms of what you were

9 trying to prevent, what you were trying to achieve, and

10 why?

11 A. I mean, I won't repeat what I've said about economic

12 scarring, but that, essentially, is the kind of economic

13 theory underpinning what we were trying to do, and --

14 and, as I said, just to put it simply, it's to try to

15 make sure that a short-term economic shock doesn't lead

16 to -- to long-term damaging outcomes for -- for the

17 country, the economy, for people and their livelihoods.

18 Q. Can I just pick up on that, then?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Does that mean that, so far as it is possible, you want

21 to take interventions that mean that, first of all, the

22 economy can recover quickly, and it can recover to the

23 same level or as close to it as it was before the

24 emergency?

25 A. Yes, it's -- it's about protecting that potential output

25

1 appropriate, because, you know, long-term economic

2 growth is a function of the efficient allocation of

3 resources in an economy, and what you did -- you needed

4 to allow happen at the appropriate moment was for those

5 normal forces to be able to resume.

6 It's not good, long term, for an economy, you know,

7 for things to carry on in an artificial state, if you,

8 you know, believe, as I do, in markets, and their

9 ability to allocate resources efficiently.

10 So you wanted to make sure that, you know, as

11 appropriate, economic activity and normal economic

12 allocation mechanisms could operate and markets could

13 function.

14 And then -- and then lastly, but not least, of

15 course, was ensuring value for money for the

16 interventions and thereby minimising the fiscal impact.

17 So, as a -- it's a kind of set of things, you know,

18 four, five things there, that were always at the top of

19 our mind and, at the beginning of the pandemic, you

20 know, I'm sure probably they were written down

21 somewhere. But that -- that was -- you know, that was

22 a set of things that we were solving for, fitting in

23 this overarching desire to -- to avoid economic scarring

24 best we could, or minimise it.

25 And -- and as you'll see, as I described those

27

1 of -- of the economy.

2 And then -- so then if you go: what does that mean?

3 Well, it means preventing mass unemployment, because

4 obviously if you have very large-scale unemployment in

5 the short term there can be permanent damage from that.

6 So, you know, protecting job matches and keeping people

7 connected to their jobs is important.

8 Linked to that is obviously preventing firm failure,

9 you know, both in and of itself and because of the

10 impact on employment, and protecting, as you describe,

11 that potential output of the economy. So, otherwise

12 healthy, solvent businesses, you wanted to make sure

13 that they would still be there when -- when this -- when

14 this finished, have the recovery and not lose that

15 output.

16 We always had a strong eye on the most vulnerable.

17 We knew this was going to be an incredibly serious event

18 for the country, and you always want to make sure --

19 I certainly wanted to make sure -- and the team knew

20 this -- that, you know, the most vulnerable in society,

21 that we were making sure that we -- we had an eye on

22 what was happening to them and could support them as

23 appropriate.

24 And then, you also wanted to design things that

25 would allow economic activity to recover when

26

1 things, there's an inherent intention between -- between

2 these things.

3 And -- and all economic policymaking is about

4 trade-offs, for the most part, but this in particular,

5 yes, of course, minimising fiscal impact, ensuring value

6 for money is incredibly important. Designing schemes

7 that could ensure economic activity could -- could

8 resume is, of course, important.

9 You know, where we probably put more weight in those

10 early days is, as I said, protecting unemployment and

11 business failure. And there's -- as we go through,

12 there's an inherent tension between these things, and

13 part of my job was to, you know, make decisions on -- on

14 where to design policies, which things to weight more or

15 less at any given moment in time.

16 And again, there's not a perfect science to that,

17 that's a judgement and those are judgements that I made

18 on a regular basis throughout the pandemic. But to give

19 people, like I said, an overarching sense of what we

20 were aiming for, what our economic objectives were, you

21 know, those were the economic objectives that, as I say,

22 were important to me throughout.

23 And maybe one other point I'd make, is, those are

24 all the very practical measurable economic outcomes.

25 I probably underestimated it at the time, but I mean,

28

1 I had a sense of it, but it became clearer over time.
 2 I think there's also an incredibly important job for
 3 leaders in a situation like this to provide reassurance,
 4 and particularly in the sphere of economic policy.

5 I think one of your expert witnesses,
 6 Professor Brewer, I thought made an astute comment about
 7 that, you know, modern economy, modern society, depends,
 8 I think he said, enormously on confidence, and
 9 uncertainty is a dangerous thing, he said.

10 In a crisis like this, there was an enormous amount
 11 of anxiety and rightly so. I think people feared for
 12 their jobs, their livelihoods, their families, alongside
 13 the health anxieties they had, you know, what it would
 14 mean for their economic financial security, what it
 15 meant for their family's security, what it meant for
 16 their house, their small business they'd built up. Were
 17 they going to keep their job? Would they have a job to
 18 go back to? Would they be able to make their mortgage
 19 or rent payments?

20 So, you know, my role in part was not just to get
 21 all the policy things right, which was, you know, it was
 22 early on, just to provide reassurance to the country
 23 that we would get through it, that we would do what we
 24 could to help people, and, as I said, I think that is
 25 probably an underappreciated but an important objective,

29

1 A. Yeah, I felt that -- and as I said, it's probably, you
 2 know, it's easy sitting here five years later, but those
 3 early days, those early weeks, it was, you know, it was,
 4 as I said, it was an incredibly unsettling time for
 5 everybody, and we'll get into the, as I said, later on,
 6 the individual things, but I think someone who provided
 7 evidence in one of your sessions, they were talking
 8 about, you know, the loans and helping small businesses
 9 but I think actually their comment applies more
 10 generally and they said something to the effect of it,
 11 you know, it felt existential. And I think that is
 12 actually a generally good description of the overall
 13 situation, is it felt existential.

14 And that's why, I think, Andrew's comments --
 15 which -- I haven't seen the precise paragraph that
 16 you're referring to -- I would agree with, I think he
 17 said, obviously, the Prime Minister providing overall
 18 leadership but those of us in charge of the economic
 19 response, you know, part of our job is, as I said, not
 20 just to get the policies right; it's to give everyone in
 21 the country that reassurance and confidence that the
 22 people in charge know what they're doing and they're
 23 going to be able to do their best to help get the
 24 country through it. I think that is an important
 25 economic policy tool, as well as just the right thing to

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1 certainly from the person in charge of the economic
 2 policy response. And I tried to do that early on
 3 through the various press conferences and the language
 4 I used and the interviews I gave.

5 But I think in the future you can't just get the
 6 policy bits right; you do have to be able to just
 7 communicate and give people the reassurance at what
 8 I think was an incredibly anxious time, as I said, for
 9 people and their businesses.

10 Q. You reference the speech you made on 17 March, I think
 11 at which you publicly made that statement of standing
 12 behind people, but can I just pick up on that in terms
 13 of reassurance, because I think it's a point that Andrew
 14 Bailey was making in his evidence as governor when he
 15 was talking about the bank having an obligation to act,
 16 when I was putting to him the narrative of why not just
 17 do nothing and sit back and see how things unfolded.
 18 And he spoke about the need -- he put it perhaps
 19 slightly more starkly than you have, going beyond the
 20 reassurance to the need to prevent disorder. And he
 21 meant that in a social sense, disorder.

22 But I think he was making the point about the need
 23 for the people of this country to understand that their
 24 central bank, their Chancellor, was going to stand
 25 behind them economically. Is that what you --

30

1 do from those who have that responsibility to lead at
 2 that moment.

3 Q. It's easy to think about government intervention
 4 sometimes in terms of how much money people get from the
 5 government, depending on their business or their
 6 circumstances. In terms of household incomes, and
 7 protecting household incomes would it be fair to say,
 8 when you ran through your priorities, that your priority
 9 was to protect household incomes insofar as you could
 10 through the preservation of business, preservation of
 11 jobs, retention of job matching, and in that way?

12 A. Yes. I think -- and I was -- I think in that first
 13 press conference or certainly -- I was, I hope, always
 14 open -- and it wasn't going to be possible to save every
 15 single person's job and people were going to experience
 16 economic hardship as a result of what was happening, and
 17 I thought it was important to be honest with people
 18 about that, upfront. There's a balance. You know, you
 19 want to provide reassurance, but I think a degree of
 20 candour is also appropriate, and also again, you know,
 21 my job to get that balance right. I tried to do both
 22 things.

23 I think, actually, as it turned out, the impact on
 24 household incomes and living standards, particularly for
 25 the most vulnerable in society, you know -- we'll get

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1 into it in the right section I assume, so I'll save it
 2 for then -- but I think the overall results on that were
 3 stronger than I would have perhaps anticipated going
 4 into this, and I'm very proud of that. It was, you
 5 know, it was something that we had an eye on throughout,
 6 and certain policies were designed specifically with
 7 that in mind. But when you go back and look at the
 8 impact on deprivation or poverty, or disposable income
 9 for those who were the most vulnerable, as I say, the
 10 track record through the pandemic I think we'll find is
 11 much more favourable than anyone might have thought.

12 But more generally, I think the living standards
 13 probably come as a, you know, as a consequence, as you
 14 said, of protecting people's jobs and that job
 15 connection, protecting business failures, et cetera,
 16 et cetera; but obviously some policies -- Universal
 17 Credit being one in particular which targeted that, as
 18 well, and furlough.

19 Q. And we heard from, again, Dr Leunig about, for example,
 20 the approach taken in the United States of America where
 21 this idea, he'd termed it "helicopter money", money
 22 delivered through welfare, rather than through job
 23 preservation, though he explained that really that
 24 wasn't a policy choice by the US in his view, it was
 25 more a fact that they couldn't have delivered the sort

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1 the social impact of -- of that.

2 So, you know, that -- as I said, that was what we
 3 were -- what we were particularly focused on averting.
 4 And I think there are -- there are different approaches.
 5 One thing I'd say is it's probably not that binary, in
 6 the sense that it's not either/or. We did both.
 7 You know, we put support through the welfare system and
 8 we created the furlough scheme to protect jobs and job
 9 matches, and we did things to help business, you know,
 10 and we created hardship funds for people who might have
 11 not benefited from those or needed extra help.

12 So, you know, you can do a range of things. I think
 13 that's the right thing to do. It's probably -- it's not
 14 as binary as, "Well, it's either this approach or that
 15 approach."

16 And I think most countries, when you look at it,
 17 adopted a mixed -- a mixed set of tools. And
 18 particularly with CJRS, when -- you know, when we get to
 19 it, I think most countries ultimately decided that was
 20 a sensible intervention and -- and many other countries
 21 did something similar.

22 Q. And, as Chancellor, you were obviously authorising
 23 significant public spending. These interventions, we
 24 know, cost a lot of money. And you, as you've said,
 25 were trying to stand behind the country, if you like,

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1 of scheme you delivered in terms of job retention
 2 because they didn't have the systems by which to
 3 deliver it.

4 But it's fair to say, is it, that you put that
 5 protection of jobs and recovery of business at the
 6 forefront of the response?

7 A. Yes, I -- I did. And I did that because I thought that
 8 was the best way to, as I said, minimise economic
 9 scarring, the long-term damage on the economy, on
 10 people's, you know, employment security, financial
 11 security.

12 And, you know, I'm glad the -- when we come on to
 13 it, you know, the -- so what happened to online
 14 employment was considerably better than anyone had
 15 forecasted at the early stages of the pandemic. So we
 16 were successful in preventing that -- that mass
 17 unemployment. Which, going in, was the biggest fear;
 18 you know, the biggest economic fear going into this was
 19 that there was going to be mass unemployment.

20 That might speak to what Andrew was perhaps saying
 21 about the social disorder. You know, the scale of
 22 projections people had, about 12% unemployment rates,
 23 millions and millions of people without a job, clearly
 24 that's not something that the country had experienced in
 25 a very, very long time, and reasonable to worry about

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1 and -- and business and individuals. But were you also
 2 having to factor in that, as Chancellor, you would also
 3 have to bring all of this to an end, when, hopefully,
 4 the country recovered? In other words, this wasn't
 5 a blank cheque that could just go on forever. So you
 6 were having to bring things in, but also you may go from
 7 hero to zero, be the person who had to end it because
 8 you had to then start -- or the country had to start
 9 living within its means, effectively?

10 A. Yes, I -- very much that was in my head throughout.
 11 I mean, I -- I am, you know, by -- by instinct and
 12 experience and everything else, a fiscal conservative.
 13 Right. That is what I believe. I believe in, you know,
 14 controlled government spending and a lower tax burden as
 15 a result of that. And I think a lower tax burden comes
 16 from, you know, control over government spending and
 17 borrowing.

18 And, you know, so this was obviously, you know,
 19 atypical in terms of my -- my general view. But
 20 I said -- I think probably in one of those early
 21 interventions, I said this isn't the time for ideology.
 22 I think I might have used that exact phrase or something
 23 to that effect in one of those early press conferences.

24 So we had a particular situation that we were
 25 confronted with, and that meant, okay, though I might,

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1 in general, be someone who believes in a smaller state
2 and a lower tax burden and -- but this was, you know,
3 this was a unique crisis, and -- and it required
4 a particular response where the government did have to
5 intervene and did have to do these things which
6 I thought would be in the long-term best interests of --
7 of the country.

8 And you're absolutely right, of course I knew that,
9 you know, there's no such thing as a free lunch. And --
10 and that's why, you know, what -- where you could target
11 things more appropriately and effectively, so that you
12 were ensuring better value for money, reducing the
13 fiscal impact, you would try to do those. And that
14 happened -- happened throughout.

15 And that's why, you know, I think in the last budget
16 I did as -- sorry, not the last budget, I'm talking
17 about the spring 2021 budget, I stood up and said, you
18 know, we do now have to -- to pay for these things.
19 I didn't leave the tab, in that sense, for -- not to be
20 picked up. I was honest with the country, that now we
21 had to put in place some tax changes -- which I,
22 of course, hated doing, when -- to your point, but it
23 was the right thing to do.

24 It was the right thing to intervene and it was the
25 right thing to ensure that our public finances were then

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1 And then that split, because again I think it's
2 probably underappreciated. In terms of that quantum
3 that you talked about, you know, depending on how you
4 measure it, about 325 billion, give or take, about half
5 of that is what I would call purely economic support.
6 So things like furlough, self-employment scheme, loans,
7 grants, the things that we're probably going to talk
8 most about over the next day and a half.

9 And then about half of the response, or half of that
10 quantum actually relates to that health response and the
11 broader public services funding. So the funding for the
12 NHS, for PPE, Test and Trace, vaccines, social care,
13 education, transport, other public services.

14 So it's not precise, but very roughly the way to
15 think about it is we've spent broadly, on average,
16 compared to most advanced countries, and -- and what we
17 spent was about half purely economic response and half
18 the broader public services response, and that's,
19 I think, just a good -- good framework for people to
20 have in their heads when they think back over what we
21 did.

22 **Q.** In fairness, Mr Sunak, you make a perfectly proper
23 point: that this module is looking at the economic
24 response but there were other things, a lot of other
25 things the government was doing it in addition to the

39

1 put on a sustainable trajectory there afterwards, which
2 is why, you know, I had -- I had to, as Chancellor,
3 deliver a tax-raising budget in the spring of 2021,
4 precisely because these things are not free and needed
5 to be -- to be paid for.

6 Probably, if -- just to put it in context, in terms
7 of the scale of the -- the support you mentioned,
8 I think it's interesting, looking at it -- probably the
9 best way to measure it is as a percentage of GDP. And
10 actually when you look at the scale of the intervention
11 here, I think -- the IMF have probably got the best
12 database, which looks at countries consistently -- you
13 know, we were very much in the middle of the pack,
14 actually, at about 14% of GDP being the total scale of
15 our -- our response. And you had, you know, countries
16 that were a bit lower than us, so: Canada, 13%;
17 France and Italy, 12% and 13%. And then you had,
18 you know, countries that were more than us: Japan, 15%,
19 Australia, 17, Germany 18%, and the US, 22%.

20 So, in terms of the overall scale, you know, we're
21 kind of in the middle of the pack. Some people might
22 say we should have been at the top end, some people
23 might say we should have been at the bottom end, but for
24 better or worse, we were roughly about average in terms
25 of the overall quantum of the support.

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1 purely economic response?

2 **A.** But, as you said, all of which ultimately do have a
3 fiscal impact. And it's not just the economic things
4 that have a fiscal impact, all of the interventions on
5 public services, to support the NHS, all those have a
6 fiscal impact too, and in the round, you know, of course
7 that, in the long run, needs to be paid for.

8 **Q.** I hope that fairly sets the context in which all of the
9 decisions we're going to examine were having to be made,
10 not just in terms of the pressure to stand things up
11 quickly and to adapt them as you go along, but also in
12 terms of the, ultimately, hard decision to decide when
13 to withdraw support so it doesn't either undermine the
14 economic recovery or become support that just can't be
15 funded.

16 So can we move on to looking at systems and
17 structures of the --

18 **A.** Just before we do --

19 **Q.** -- of course.

20 **A.** -- Mr Wright, I think, you have summarised the context
21 very well. I think the only thing that we didn't touch
22 on, just to bring to life what that early period was
23 like was -- you will have got some of this from Andrew,
24 but I'm giving it to you from my perspective -- was just
25 what was going on in the gilt markets at that time.

40

1 And, you know, if I think back to that period which, as
 2 you said, was intense and filled with anxiety, certainly
 3 for me, you know, that was particularly troubling.
 4 I mean, you know, I'd been Chancellor for, you know, it
 5 felt like five seconds, and then you could see a very
 6 material tightening in UK financial conditions. And you
 7 had bank, you know, the first thing that happened was
 8 bank CDS spreads were widening, and the CDS spreads are,
 9 I kind of think about them as the insurance premium that
 10 people can buy to insure against a bank going bankrupt,
 11 right, or defaulting on its debt. So that's the kind of
 12 the way to think about it. So the price for that
 13 insurance, the CDS spreads were widening, which is never
 14 a great sign.

15 And then you had, I think on March 18, it was the
 16 single biggest one-day change in real yields or
 17 something, since bank independence. So that happened
 18 one day. And then the next day there was another move
 19 where it looked like there was a bigger move for UK gilt
 20 rates than there were for other places, which again, is
 21 never great, and then you had a failed gilt auction.
 22 And that was the first time we'd had a failed gilt
 23 auction since the financial crisis.

24 And so one after another, these things were
 25 happening, and I think, you know, we've all, over the

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1 back of my head, as well, because that really would be
 2 a disaster if there was a problem.
 3 **Q.** No, quite right you should mention that, and I had
 4 a little note saying, "Risk to markets" and we skipped
 5 over it. But don't worry, quite properly that you
 6 mentioned it, and as you say, Mr Bailey touched on that.
 7 He justified the bank's actions to go big and go fast,
 8 as he described it, on that basis, that there was a real
 9 risk to the markets, that there was significant market
 10 volatility, that there was a need to take decisive
 11 action, and that that would have been a very serious
 12 threat, had it transpired.

13 **A.** Yeah.

14 **Q.** So all of this going on, in the background of your
 15 decision making.

16 Can we move, then, to really pick up the sort of
 17 systems and structures around that decision making, if
 18 we could. So moving on slightly in the list of topics.
 19 And I just want to pick up some sort of high-level
 20 concepts, really. And the first of those is that --
 21 I mean, generally speaking, do you agree that if it's
 22 possible, accepting pace, speed, the need for
 23 confidentiality in different times, accepting all of
 24 that, where possible to bring together your delivery
 25 experts at the time of formulating policy, is a good

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1 past couple of years, seen, you know, the importance of
 2 the gilt markets to the health of the UK, its economy.

3 Obviously, I come from a financial background so
 4 it's something I have some familiarity with. You know,
 5 but that was, you know, acutely stressful. In the
 6 context of having to do all these other things, you
 7 know, I was sitting there, you know, worried about the
 8 UK's ability to fund itself, and in the end we, you
 9 know, we organised with the Bank of England something
 10 called the Ways and Means Facility which I've talked
 11 about in my evidence which thankfully we never needed to
 12 use, but essentially is a back-stop for the government;
 13 if it can't raise the money it needs on the bond markets
 14 it can go to the Bank of England instead for a temporary
 15 period of time.

16 And it was last used, again, in the financial
 17 crisis, but it's a pretty, you know, exceptional
 18 measure. Thankfully we didn't need it. But I think
 19 that was all in my head, of all the things that I was
 20 kind of worried about as well as, you know, figuring out
 21 furlough over here or loans over there and everything
 22 else, was that that was happening at exactly the same
 23 time, and to your point, I'm thinking, "Gosh, are we
 24 going to be able to borrow the money we need to put all
 25 these things in place?" I needed to have that in the

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1 idea, particularly when responding to an emergency?

2 **A.** Yes.

3 **Q.** Yes. I didn't think it would be one you'd say "no" to.
 4 So far as the Treasury was concerned, there was a very
 5 good example of that, I think, in terms of its
 6 relationship with His Majesty's Revenue & Customs, and
 7 the policy partnership that we've heard a lot about,
 8 which is unique to those two departments, and probably
 9 because of how they're configured; is that right?

10 **A.** Yes. Obviously, look, actually, I'm trying to think of
 11 the exact legal link -- I mean, HMRC is a body of HMT,
 12 and it has a minister that it reports into, but
 13 obviously it's operationally independent, and
 14 essentially is the delivery mechanism, for the most
 15 part, of most of what the Treasury does. So there is an
 16 existing relationship between those two departments.

17 **Q.** Yes.

18 And that meant, for example, when you were looking
 19 to stand up the CJRS, you could have the delivery
 20 experts in the room at the same time as you're
 21 formulating the policy, and that made it all deliverable
 22 quickly?

23 **A.** Yes, it was -- it would have been impossible without,
 24 I'd -- I'd go as far as saying that. There was an
 25 extraordinary team at HMRC, whom I won't embarrass by

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1 naming them all, but, you know, we had that from the
 2 beginning. I think the perm sec at HMRC described it
 3 as, you know, a shared vision and a single-team
 4 approach, and -- which I really felt that it was. And,
 5 you know, it's normally not everyone's, you know,
 6 favourite government agency, HMRC, but I can honestly
 7 say, you know, in this period, we were lucky as
 8 a country that they were able to deliver something as
 9 effectively as they did which, let's be candid, I think
 10 most people thought that it wouldn't work. In fact, you
 11 know, certainly at least more than one journalist told
 12 me afterwards they were all ready to write the stories
 13 about how the whole system would fall over when it went
 14 live. I certainly had a very stressful morning talking
 15 to all the IT people that day, I remember.

16 And so it wasn't just that, you know, the policy and
 17 the delivery, you know, down to the, you know,
 18 thankfully we had a brilliant guy again, I won't
 19 embarrass him by mentioning him -- you know, to
 20 literally go through the, you know, the IT to make sure
 21 that it would stand up to what was going to be millions
 22 of people claiming and not fall over, and could do all
 23 the things we needed it to do.

24 All of that was part of, as I've said, a single
 25 team, there from the beginning, involved in everything,

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1 So, you know, it wasn't as intense as the HMRC
 2 relationship. Well, that's because what we were doing
 3 with them was -- was probably less intense when we were
 4 doing it. And we'll come on to loans later. That
 5 obviously was intense.

6 But, you know, it was still, we created these --
 7 I think we called them "cells", for -- actually, I'm not
 8 entirely sure why, but someone came up with that name,
 9 and we had these cells and -- and actually I do think it
 10 requires a bit of -- I tell you about lessons learned
 11 and things; you know, one thing is it's always going to
 12 rely slightly on the relationship with the ministers, is
 13 my sense. Unless they're told something by the
 14 Prime Minister.

15 I was very fortunate -- and I think you've had
 16 evidence from both of them -- I had very good
 17 personality working relationships with Alok, who was
 18 Secretary of State of BEIS, and -- and Thérèse Coffey,
 19 who was Secretary of State of DWP, and I think --
 20 hopefully, I think both of them would have said the same
 21 thing when they've been here.

22 So we had a good personal working relationship.
 23 That really matters, and -- because if that's not there,
 24 then the Prime Minister has to force you to do it, and
 25 that's probably never perfect. So thankfully that is

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1 and it worked brilliantly well. And I said, I'm very
 2 grateful that that all happened so seamlessly. As
 3 I said, I wouldn't have been able to do it without that.
 4 **Q.** Now, it worked that well, as you've described. The
 5 natural reaction might be to say: right, well, every
 6 government department should work with the Treasury in
 7 that way. Having been Chancellor and Prime Minister,
 8 I assume you're going to tell me that wouldn't work
 9 either, because it's just not possible. It's not how
 10 government is configured.

11 **A.** Look, of course, of course there, you know, government
 12 is configured in departments, and departments have their
 13 equities and that tension is not necessarily a bad thing
 14 by the way. It's a healthy thing, for having done both
 15 jobs, you know, I wasn't, obviously, Prime Minister
 16 during this period. It was important that the
 17 Prime Minister during this period, important for me as
 18 Prime Minister, to get those different department
 19 equities in the policy-making process.

20 But, you know, I would say, looking back, I'm
 21 pleased that we managed to, I think in large part
 22 replicate that policy partnership, I think is the phrase
 23 that you've used to describe it, particularly with DWP
 24 and BEIS, as well, in the areas where we were doing
 25 policy together with them.

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1 the case.

2 And then -- and the teams take -- because the teams
 3 will take a steer from that. You know, teams in other
 4 departments, they need their Secretary of State to
 5 essentially say to them, "This is okay, you can go off
 6 and have meetings directly with Rishi as Chancellor, and
 7 I don't need to be on every single meeting, you keep me
 8 up to date and I'll talk to Rishi."

9 But that's very practically what needs to happen,
 10 and --

11 **Q.** Can I just come in there, because, I mean, you might
 12 be -- say, well, the problem with that is: what if
 13 you've got two secretaries of state who can't stand each
 14 other?

15 **A.** Well, in which case, as I said, it would require the
 16 Prime Minister to -- to lean in and --

17 **Q.** Well, he might not like them either.

18 **A.** Well, you know. [Laughs]

19 **Q.** What I'm really getting at is, just leaving it to
 20 personality is just slightly dangerous, isn't it? Don't
 21 you need to bake in that, sort of, muscle memory of
 22 cooperation?

23 **A.** Well, I -- you can bake in that muscle memory, but
 24 again, in my honest reflection, you might come out of
 25 this and say, "Great, there should be this structure

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1 stood up or that structure", but it is -- in reality,
2 you know, it is going to depend a bit on personal
3 relationships. We might prefer that it wasn't, and you
4 can, kind of -- I mean this in the nicest possible
5 way -- structure your way out of it or create some
6 process out of it -- (overspeaking) --

7 Q. Can I just give you a different perspective --

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. -- that isn't about structures? But I think this is
10 a point Sir Charles Roxburgh made -- I mean, he was
11 against structure, but he was talking about the point
12 you've made: it's up to the Secretary of State to really
13 set the -- the agenda and the tone, but that in the
14 Civil Service there can be training for civil servants
15 that can be focusing on cooperation and
16 cross-departmental working. It doesn't change
17 structures, it just -- that's what I mean by bake it
18 in -- (overspeaking) --

19 A. Yeah, and I -- look, and I -- I do agree with that. And
20 I think, look -- sort of side -- sidetrack, but -- but
21 it may be helpful. You know, one thing I've been --
22 sorry, not being in government now, so one thing I --
23 I was, and I hope is the case -- was always positively
24 struck by is the Darlington Economic Campus, that I --
25 I established as -- as Chancellor. And the reason

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1 thing. Because obviously it improves policymaking in
2 peacetime as well, so of course I agree with that,
3 and -- and supportive of efforts to foster that
4 collaboration.

5 But in something like this, I would just -- like
6 I say, you do always need the secretary of state,
7 because ultimately those civil servants work up to their
8 secretary of state. And it's important that they do.
9 Right? I mean, you do need clear lines of
10 accountability.

11 And so, you know, I think it's important for
12 prime ministers, you know, to be aware of where that
13 might be an issue if -- if they thought it was going to
14 be an issue.

15 Thankfully, in this case, I don't think it was.
16 I think we worked very well with DWP. They -- you know,
17 they -- their officials -- Thérèse's officials would be
18 in the meetings with me. Similar for -- for Alok's.
19 And I think both of them have -- have said that they
20 never felt there was never any issue there.

21 And those were probably the two departments which we
22 worked most closely with outside of HMRC.

23 Q. Can I ask another question about structures and systems,
24 really about consultation. And I just want to pick up
25 on a point that Dan York-Smith made in his evidence, and

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1 I bring it up is, you know, that's -- it's an
2 interesting model, where multiple departments are in one
3 building. And that is, you know, obviously -- I don't
4 know really unique, but rare for how government
5 functions normally.

6 The senior civil servant there is a -- is a Treasury
7 person, and -- and Beth Russell has done an
8 extraordinary job of -- of, you know, leading, growing
9 that -- that organisation.

10 But whenever I was there, both as Chancellor and
11 as -- as Prime Minister -- because I continued to work
12 out of that office as Prime Minister, and always spent
13 the time to walk around and talk to particularly the
14 junior officials that were there -- I was struck by, to
15 your point, there was, I think, a greater culture of
16 collaboration and cross-working, because probably just
17 the physical set-up of that building is such that people
18 are there from five or six different departments.

19 And -- and I -- you know, so they're -- they're on
20 the same football team or running club or, you know,
21 quiz team or whatever it is, all of which I'm proud that
22 they now, you know, have there, which is great.

23 So, I -- look, I think there is something to what
24 you're saying. You can -- you can do a good job of --
25 of trying to just say that this is a good, sensible

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1 I'll just read it to you so you know the point he was
2 making. He said.

3 "I think in general, on everything, more
4 consultation is better ..."

5 I suspect that's not controversial?

6 A. More consultation is better?

7 Q. Yeah, consultation is a good thing, was basically his
8 message --

9 A. Yeah -- I mean, yes, but again, let's --

10 Q. Can I give you the "but"?

11 A. Can I do the "but" or you want to do the "but"?

12 Q. Well, let me tell you what he said, and then you tell me
13 if you agree --

14 A. Oh, right, fine, sorry.

15 Q. He said:

16 "... but I think the context was such that
17 consultation comes with a cost, in terms of the time
18 that it takes, and the people required to do it
19 properly."

20 So we're probably giving the same "but" here?

21 A. The same "but".

22 Q. "And particularly in the early part of the pandemic, we
23 had to move very, very quickly, and so had we done
24 additional consultation, that might have delayed ...
25 [implementation]."

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1 And was that the trade-off?

2 **A.** Of course it is. That's common sense; right? I mean,
 3 you've got consultation, all else equal, fine. But
 4 things are not all else equal, and we were in
 5 a situation where, you know, you -- you said -- you
 6 painted a picture of what we were grappling with in
 7 those early days, you know. I -- I don't know if Tim's
 8 number is right, but knowing Tim, Dr Leunig, I'm sure
 9 his 55 hours probably is right, if Tim has done it.

10 But, yeah, at that -- if you think about that,
 11 55 hours, great, I mean you can, you know, take an hour
 12 to do something else, that's quite a meaningful amount
 13 of your -- you know, your time slot to get that thing
 14 done, and then you repeat that for everything else that
 15 you're doing, so I -- I agree with what Dan said, there
 16 is obviously a trade-off.

17 That said, you know, when we go through these things
 18 in a bit more detail one by one -- I think you'll find,
 19 and I think the evidence supports this as well, hearing
 20 and reading what everyone else has said -- you know,
 21 there was a very good degree of engagement with all the
 22 relevant people in each sector, I don't just mean
 23 industry sector, just whoever the right stakeholders
 24 were for a typical intervention, whether it was SEISS,
 25 whether it was CJRS, you know, whether it was Bounce

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1 **A.** Yes.

2 **Q.** Is that the sort of thing you mean; where you could, you
 3 were having those conversations?

4 **A.** Absolutely. Now, and actually -- you mention the SEISS
 5 example and I remember that vividly because I think even
 6 the day before, I remember -- or not the day before but
 7 the last few days as we were getting the policy exactly
 8 -- we only had a few days so it probably might have been
 9 the day before, on reflection, but, you know, it was
 10 also the IOD, the Enterprise Nation and Creative
 11 Industries Federation, the Private Hire Association for
 12 taxi drivers. You know, there were several groups
 13 that I remember speaking to in the immediate days before
 14 and the team did, and it was like that on everything,
 15 you know, where, you know, where we could, where it made
 16 sense, of course, I wanted to hear from the people who
 17 were directly affected by this because ultimately
 18 there's no point -- you know, I've no interest in
 19 standing up and announcing things designed in an ivory
 20 tower that don't survive contact with reality. That's
 21 going to be self-defeating for me, right?

22 I not only need these people to make sure
 23 I understand about what they need, what will be most
 24 helpful, how do their businesses in particular work to
 25 make sure we can design these things properly; I want to

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1 Back Loans, whoever it -- whichever it might be,
 2 whichever intervention, you know, I think there's
 3 a whole body of evidence showing engagement with those
 4 people, and in most cases, they were all intimately
 5 involved in formulating and drafting the detailed
 6 guidance.

7 So it's all very well I stand up and announce
 8 something, in broad parameters, you know, ultimately,
 9 you know, that has to then get implemented through quite
 10 detailed guidance, and all these people were involved in
 11 their various different ways in helping to draft that
 12 guidance, making sure it was workable, and sure, yeah,
 13 would some of them have liked more consultation? I'm
 14 sure. It was ever thus. And would they have liked it
 15 a bit sooner? I'm sure. But speed was of the essence
 16 and ultimately I think we got to the right balance.

17 **Q.** Well, just in fairness to you, to, I hope, develop that
 18 with an example, if you look at SEISS, which went live
 19 on 20 April, the Inquiry knows from your statement that
 20 on 25 March, so almost a month earlier, you were having
 21 calls with the FSB, the IPSE, which is the Self-Employed
 22 Employers Group, and the TUC to discuss thinking on the
 23 design of SEISS, so this wasn't bringing them in after
 24 it had been worked up, this was bringing them in
 25 early -- (overspeaking) --

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1 make sure that they, you know, when you stand up and
 2 announce these things, we talked about reassurance and
 3 confidence, I want to make sure that they also say,
 4 "Thank you, great, that is going to work, and we can go
 5 and tell all our members they can breathe a little
 6 easier tonight."

7 So, you know, there was simply no -- you know,
 8 there's no desire not to do that, you know, as I said,
 9 it would be self-defeating, so if it has not happened in
 10 the way someone wants it's because, you know, we were
 11 moving at a speed that meant it wasn't possible, not
 12 because we didn't want to.

13 **Q.** Can I pick up --

14 **A.** -- (overspeaking) --

15 **Q.** -- a final question on that and then we'll have to take
 16 the break, but in terms of, you've spoken about
 17 personalities of the secretaries of state and changed
 18 from time to time, and set the direction, but on that
 19 front, do you, having been through this, think that
 20 there is a need for formal systems and structures to
 21 ensure that consultation, or do you think it is
 22 something that has to be more organic? What do you
 23 think would be helpful? Because there's the risk that
 24 people might drop through the cracks of consultation if
 25 there isn't an established body of people who are

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1 talking each other in normal times?
 2 **A.** Yeah, I mean I -- look, I tend to think this works
 3 pretty well -- or at least during my time in government,
 4 sorry, but, you know, it worked pretty well. I don't --
 5 you know, when I look back on this time, I felt that my
 6 team in the Treasury were constantly talking to people.
 7 My advice was, and they knew I would want that, was
 8 peppered with, "We've spoken to this person, this
 9 person, this person" because they knew that I would ask:
 10 well, how is that person going to react? What is that
 11 person going to say?

12 And I was someone who, you know, quite, to use
 13 a slightly more investment term, focuses on the unit
 14 economics of things, and I don't want to just design
 15 macro policy. If I'm doing something that impacts the
 16 hospitality industry, I wanted to make sure
 17 I understood, you know, what an average pub's revenue
 18 and costs were, and they knew that that's what I would
 19 want to know.

20 So, you know, my advice always had that information
 21 in it, and they were constantly out there talking to
 22 people, whether it was Charles having his, whatever,
 23 regular round tables with big businesses or all the team
 24 talking to all the trade associations and making sure we
 25 understood what their individual members were going

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1 he in his evidence has said, you know, he felt the
 2 Treasury were open and transparent in sharing what he
 3 needed. His private secretary, I think in evidence, has
 4 said exactly the same thing.

5 So that's my general view as to that topic and
 6 I know you've heard, you know, people's perspectives on
 7 it, but my overall view was, you know, there's a good
 8 degree of engagement and consultation, the culture,
 9 importantly, is one where they knew that that's what
 10 I would have wanted anyway and all of them would have
 11 wanted the same because we wanted to get our things
 12 right, and then, you know, we were very open to sharing
 13 that particularly with Number 10 as they needed it, and
 14 the taskforce so they had everything they needed to
 15 advise the Prime Minister.

16 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you.

17 My Lady, I think that's time for the break, and then
 18 after the break I just want to finish off briefly this
 19 topic and then we'll move on to funding for the devolved
 20 administrations.

21 **LADY HALLETT:** Very well, you remember the breaks, Mr Sunak.

22 I shall return at midday.

23 (11.47 am)

(A short break)

24 (12.00 pm)

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1 through so we could get things right for them. That was
 2 very much the culture and the expectation from me.

3 So this is about sharing and getting consultation
 4 external to the Treasury, which I think is important.

5 I know there's been some talk about, you know,
 6 economic, you know, do we have enough economic people?
 7 I always thought the economic analysis I received in the
 8 Treasury was superb, and we had a tonne of brilliant
 9 people there, and they were also very open to going out
 10 and getting the other things that they thought would be
 11 helpful for me to hear or where we didn't have the
 12 expertise on something, they would seek it.

13 And then we would, you know, share that openly
 14 around Whitehall, whether it was with BEIS, whether it
 15 was feeding into Number 10's weekly dashboard, and that
 16 all improved, and the one thing I should say, talk about
 17 structures, I think we covered this in Module 2, but
 18 clearly the creation of the Covid taskforce at the
 19 centre was a hugely welcome development, because it did
 20 kind of systematise, and meant that there was a good
 21 flow of information into one central place that could
 22 synthesise.

23 And then I think the Cabinet Office and Treasury ran
 24 weekly, you know, economy dashboards for the PM. We did
 25 meetings for him, monthly updates, et cetera. I think

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1 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Wright.

2 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you, my Lady.

3 I want to move on to funding, as soon as we can, but
 4 there are two really further points I want to pick up
 5 about systems and structures. The first is about
 6 transparency and sharing of analysis, and if you bear
 7 with me, Mr Sunak, as I just give you the context to the
 8 question, really, in terms of other evidence that we've
 9 heard in the Inquiry.

10 We heard some evidence from Robert Harrison who was
 11 the head of the directorate general for analysis in the
 12 Covid-19 Taskforce. And he explained about an epi-macro
 13 model that the Treasury had, and the first he heard
 14 about this was actually, during the Inquiry when he read
 15 the evidence.

16 And James Benford accepted that, that the model had
 17 not been shared, describing it as a departmental
 18 position.

19 I just want to pick up on this. I mean,
 20 departmental position, in normal times, the Treasury, as
 21 a department, for good reason, market sensitivity,
 22 budget purdah, so on and so forth, has reason not to
 23 share its thinking. Is that reasonable, in government?

24 **A.** Yes, I mean, of course, there has to be a concern for
 25 market-sensitive information, yes.

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1 Q. Yes. And I'm not suggesting, but I want to check this,
2 I mean, no one came to you and said, "Shall we not share
3 this model with them"?
4 A. To be perfectly honest, I don't quite know the specific
5 model that you're referring to or he's referring to.
6 There was an enormous amount of modelling done by lots
7 of different people throughout the pandemic, and in any
8 case, the primary responsibility for the modelling would
9 have -- the people who were pulling it all together was
10 actually coming centrally from that Covid taskforce.
11 Q. It was later in November, by November 2020 when
12 Mr Harrison joined -- came to the directorate general.
13 But I'm just talking about earlier than that.
14 A. This model that you're referring to presumably was after
15 that, because I think in fact --
16 Q. That model was later and the point was it wasn't being
17 shared and it's just really this: you talked about, from
18 your perspective, you were somebody who liked to see
19 what people thought about things to get as much
20 information as you can and to share information, and I'm
21 just wondering if really, if you'd have been asked about
22 this, would there have been any reason not to share it?
23 A. So it's tricky just because I don't know the precise
24 model that you're referring to. The epi-macro modelling
25 that I do recall, having reviewed the notes, the

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1 A. Well, I mean in general, yes, although I would -- and
2 I'm glad that was the case and I touched on this earlier
3 and I think you've seen from the Prime Minister at the
4 time, who said, in his evidence, that HMT was
5 transparent in sharing economic analysis and his
6 principal private secretary at Number 10, or one of
7 them, also said the same thing. And I think you've
8 heard that from the senior official at BEIS, as well.
9 So I think that was happening.
10 What I would say is, you know, there's a difference
11 between a kind of, you know, workings and -- as things
12 are being developed and, you know, I don't think you
13 kind of say well, okay, here's what we're doing today,
14 what we're doing the next day, as you're trying to
15 figure something out. You know, whereas if you've got
16 something that you think is helpful or sensible that is
17 going to be relied on for decisions or policy making,
18 sure. And I'm sure it would be, because why would you
19 not want to, you know, if I'm going to go make an
20 argument in a meeting or something about something, I'm
21 going to base that on some analysis, I'll want to be
22 using it in the meeting where we have that decision.

23 But you work on lots of things all the time, that
24 don't end up getting to that point where they are
25 useful, reliable, at which point I don't necessarily

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1 Treasury, I think, to the extent that they actually had
2 an event or a session with academics from Imperial and
3 LSE, from memory, that was helped -- partially organised
4 by the Royal Economic Society to go through epi-macro
5 modelling, and they had put together a kind of classic
6 SIR model which is the epidemiological model,
7 susceptible, infected, recovered and -- I can't remember
8 the other, the R, and together with the NiGEM model
9 which is the National Institute's general economic model
10 (sic), I think. But I think they'd actually had a full
11 session on it, I mean, let alone not sharing it, it was
12 done in consultation with a bunch of external academics.

13 So that's all I can remember about the epi-macro
14 modelling, I think in general, there was a lot of
15 sharing of information, as far as I was aware, with the
16 team at the centre, at Number 10 in particular.

17 Q. I'm not suggesting, given the number of decisions you
18 were making on a daily basis, that you would have any
19 recollection of this or that it had even come across
20 your desk, but really what I'm getting at is, when we
21 are looking at a future emergency, and you've got --
22 obviously analysis is important and sharing data is
23 important. Would you encourage as much transparency as
24 possible, in terms of data sharing, and sharing of
25 modelling as between departments?

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1 think that every single thing that you probably worked
2 on needs to be then given to everybody. That would be
3 a bit odd, I think, and cumbersome.

4 Q. That point is well made and accepted but I think you've
5 really hit on the potential mischief of people not
6 sharing analysis or the fact that they've got a basis
7 for analysis, is that ministers, secretaries of state,
8 will all have their own analysts who might be giving
9 them analysis that is influencing their position on
10 things, and others don't know why they're adopting that
11 position, what's informing that position, if things are
12 being kept secret rather than being shared, and once
13 they are worked up, once they're being presented as
14 analysis, do you -- (overspeaking) --

15 A. The -- if you think about it in practice, you're in that
16 situation as you describe, a minister's got a point of
17 view. You know, if someone said something in a meeting,
18 and said, okay, well, if you do this then all these
19 things will happen, I'm likely to probe it, right? And
20 similarly, if I said something, someone is going to
21 probe me, and I'm going to have to have the evidence or
22 the analysis to back up my point and I would imagine the
23 Prime Minister would say, "Okay, well, that's
24 interesting, that's different to what that person is
25 saying. I want to see that." Or "Why isn't that in my

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1 papers?"

2 So I think in practice it's highly unlikely that
3 anyone could get away with trying to promote some point
4 of view or, indeed, make some decision or the
5 Prime Minister make a decision based on something that
6 they haven't had the data for. So I think, in reality,
7 I'm not entirely sure that would be a problem, as
8 a general sense.

9 And look, I think there was -- on modelling in
10 general, my recollection of it, and particularly with
11 the gentleman you mentioned, what I wanted was more the
12 other way, because I'm someone who is comfortable with
13 models and, you know, having spent a career before
14 politics having to build them, interpret them, and use
15 them to make decisions, so what I wanted was -- and
16 I think, actually, this is good reflection for the
17 future -- is: these models on these big things, you
18 know, can't be black boxes that are then just presented
19 to politicians. And, you know, that was slightly my
20 frustration, and we talked about this in Module 2, and
21 I remember that gentleman when he was doing the thing
22 and my strong point of view was what I wanted was to be
23 able to understand the underlying assumptions that go
24 into the model in the same way I would if I was
25 analysing a company in my old life, it's all very well

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1 **A.** Yes, well, my point exactly is if anything, there wasn't
2 the transparency the other way. And that -- my point
3 was I was often presented from, you know, from the
4 centre or you'd have a model that came out somewhere,
5 and I don't think it's anyone's particular fault but,
6 for me, I wanted not just to be given a set of papers
7 that said: well, here are all the projected outcomes on
8 the path of the virus from some modelling exercise,
9 I wanted to have had the ability to know, well, what are
10 the underlying assumptions, and what's the sensitivity
11 analysis on those?

12 And look, that of course happened over time but as
13 I said, I would probably have wanted more of that
14 earlier and I think that would be helpful in the future.

15 **Q.** Well, can I pick that up, then, because I think you've
16 already said that you viewed the establishment of the
17 Covid-19 Taskforce as being a good thing because it was
18 a coordinating function through the Cabinet Office. We
19 know that the directorate general for analysis was part
20 of that, and our understanding of the directorate
21 general is that what it was doing was exactly what
22 you've said; it was bringing together all of the
23 assumptions and models of different departments and
24 presenting them in a sort of snapshot that said, "This
25 is the range of opinion, this is where we are in terms

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1 projecting things to happen in the future or the model
2 says X, the model says Y, well, that's a function of the
3 assumptions that have been fed into the model, and as
4 policymakers, you know, ultimately, you know, these
5 things are judgements. Those assumptions are
6 judgements, and it should be for the elected politicians
7 to be the ones that ultimately say, "Well, I want to see
8 a base case where the assumptions are this, this, this
9 and this" and, you know, because on each of those
10 assumptions there will be reasonable people who can
11 disagree, and in my view, there wasn't enough of that
12 earlier and that's when my pushback -- not my pushback,
13 but my kind of desire at that point was: look, I don't
14 want to just be presented with a model that says this is
15 what is going to happen; I want to be able to say,
16 "Well, I've got a different point of view, which I think
17 is reasonable on this aspect and I want to be able to --
18 the assumptions to be reiterated and I want to see what
19 it is."

20 And I think that is an important lesson in general.

21 **Q.** Accepting that, though, that is, isn't it, an argument
22 for transparency about the model that you are using? In
23 other words, you can't begin to probe the assumptions
24 unless (a) you know about the model and
25 (b) -- (overspeaking) --

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1 of confidence" and laying that out. Did you find that
2 a helpful approach?

3 **A.** From my recollection of it was that it needed some, you
4 know, prodding and pushing on my end, and probably my
5 officials, you know, because I'd asked them to, to get
6 it to do exactly that, rather than being presented with
7 slightly more "Here it is".

8 I think it took a bit of iterating to kind of have
9 that be the approach.

10 And again, as I said, that's where the engine that
11 was meant to pull stuff together was, but -- and it was
12 presenting the scenarios, from memory, but as I said, it
13 took a bit of prodding to get them to adopt that type of
14 transparent approach on all the assumptions underlying
15 what was being -- the assumptions underlying the output
16 that was then in the slides.

17 **Q.** If you get to the point of the roadmap, by then, things
18 were starting to come together in that way, weren't
19 they, in terms of --

20 **A.** -- (overspeaking) -- yes, I forget the exact date that
21 the taskforce was created but I think, not to cover too
22 much old ground, it definitely was a helpful thing.

23 **Q.** Right, okay.

24 **A.** I mean, not least because, again, it's a small point,
25 but I think Treasury is used to working with the centre,

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1 with the Cabinet Office and Number 10. I think, you
2 know, even if there's not a formal structure, there's
3 a lot of muscle memory about those three bits of
4 government working together. You know, DH is less used
5 to that. Probably institutionally. And that,
6 especially, is why this taskforce function was -- is so
7 important because it properly made sure everything was
8 getting joined up at the centre.

9 Q. Okay. Thank you.

10 Can we move on to the next topic: funding. And in
11 particular, devolved administrations funding.

12 Now, helpfully, you've been both Chief Secretary to
13 the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, so you're
14 probably well placed to answer my first question, which
15 is, essentially, who makes these decisions on devolved
16 administration funding? Is it the Chief Secretary to
17 the Treasury or the Chancellor, or is all this done in
18 conjunction, in terms of the actual allocations?

19 A. I think it's probably quite a broad -- a broad question.
20 In normal times, much of this is mechanical.

21 Q. Through the Barnett formula?

22 A. Yes, which I, you know, which is a big -- big topic --

23 Q. Well, we're not getting into that topic, so --

24 A. Yeah, no, but there's a -- you know, there's
25 a mechanical way in which funding for the devolved

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1 to spent time with you going over ground we've covered
2 with Mr Barclay, and -- and others, but I just want to,
3 given you've done both jobs, just pick up your view
4 about a future framework, please, if we can.

5 And essentially, the Inquiry's expert,
6 David Phillips, has suggested there should be
7 essentially a combination of guarantees and/or some
8 capacity for borrowing, additional borrowing for the
9 devolved administrations, but for that to be determined
10 on an *ad hoc* basis, depending on what the nature of the
11 future emergency is, and how it develops. Where do
12 those propositions sit with you, having performed both
13 functions?

14 A. Again, I'm quite loath to be prescriptive, because
15 I think every shock is -- is likely to be -- to be
16 different, and require --

17 Q. Pausing there, he's not prescriptive, he's suggesting it
18 should be *ad hoc*.

19 A. Well, I -- so I'd tend to -- to agree with that -- that
20 sentiment.

21 I think my overall reflections are, I think
22 certainly on the economic side, the vast majority of the
23 economic interventions were UK-wide. So I think it's
24 just -- you know, of all the things we're likely to
25 discuss today and tomorrow, with the exception of

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1 administrations is allocated as according to a set of
2 formulas where, when UK Government, even in peacetime,
3 you know, has a regular budget, that will trigger a set
4 of funding conventions for Scotland, Wales and
5 Northern Ireland according to this set -- set formula,
6 and that has been the case for a long time.

7 Typically, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury deals
8 with the DAs on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis. That
9 wouldn't be the Chancellor, so I did that as CST. And
10 that -- that continued. So they're the primary person
11 that has meetings with the finance ministers, the
12 quadrilateral group -- it's called Finance Ministers'
13 Quadrilateral, FMQs, they happen on a periodic basis.
14 And I -- again, it's out of the scope of this, so I'm
15 jogging my memory here, but I remember, as CST, I was
16 having conversations with the various finance ministers
17 about -- you know, there's always things that people are
18 looking to tweak or improve about the various mechanisms
19 that govern funding, borrowing between the DAs and --
20 and UKG, so I -- I remember having meetings like that
21 on -- on those issues during that time.

22 Q. Now, we know and we've heard evidence about how the
23 usual funding frames were developed during the pandemic,
24 the introduction of the Barnett guarantee for the
25 devolved administrations. I just really -- I don't want

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1 grants, all the other big economic interventions, you
2 know, Universal Credit, furlough, self-employed, all the
3 loan schemes, Statutory Sick Pay, rebate scheme, all of
4 those were UK-wide interventions. So I think that --
5 and I think that was a good thing. I think that was
6 appreciated by the devolved administrations, and there's
7 lots of evidence from them about, I think, their
8 appreciation for those and the reflection that they
9 could not have delivered those themselves.

10 It reflects the benefit of the UK Government and --
11 and having the benefit of the UK Government balance
12 sheet at times like this, because I think that would
13 have been probably difficult otherwise.

14 So that's the first thing. So lots of the funding
15 really relates to that other half of the spending that
16 we talked about at the beginning that was on public
17 services, less than it does the economic interventions,
18 but so it's important to have that distinction so we
19 know what we're talking about.

20 And, look, my approach is, then, and I think
21 probably -- I think the upfront guarantee is a -- is
22 a good balance between the various considerations. You
23 know, it's obviously helpful thing for Scotland, Wales
24 and Northern Ireland's governments, administrations, to
25 have some certainty about -- about funding, rather than

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1 have to wait for the announcement. Clearly, that is of
2 benefit. I recognised that, which is why we did that
3 the upfront guarantee, and you heard from Steve about
4 that. We increased it multiple times.

5 And that balances the -- the need for the
6 UK Government, though, ultimately, to have control over
7 UK Government borrowing and debt. All right? You know,
8 UK Government politicians are elected, they are
9 responsible and accountable for our (unclear) borrowing
10 and debt levels. We -- you touched on it in the
11 previous session, ultimately I was making the decisions
12 about what to spend and therefore borrow, and then I had
13 to take responsibility for making sure that we paid that
14 back and standing up and explaining why their --
15 people's taxes were going up after the fact.

16 So, that -- that's a hugely important part of
17 democratic accountability and those are hugely important
18 decisions. And it's -- you know, I think the
19 UK Government at -- whenever it is can't outsource to
20 anyone that.

21 So what the guarantee does is give that flex but
22 still provide the government with, kind of, overall
23 control over the total quantum.

24 And borrowing, as you said, is the other way for
25 that to happen. Now, we did do that in the pandemic,

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1 Can I just pick up one other issue about devolved
2 administration funding that really stems from your
3 explanation, quite -- quite proper explanation, that
4 most of the big interventions here were for the UK as
5 a whole, and you spoke about CJRS. And I think, just --
6 the emergence of Omicron perhaps provides a basis for --
7 for exploring this point, and there was an issue about
8 reinstating CJRS, given the emergence of Omicron, and
9 you had some advice about whether, if the devolved
10 administrations mandated premises closures before the
11 UK Government had, they should be able to access a CJRS
12 scheme if it was re-stood up before England had moved to
13 those restrictions. And your decision, ultimately, was
14 no, they shouldn't be able to access the scheme.

15 So the position was that if Scotland locked down two
16 or three weeks before England, say, then employers in
17 Scotland wouldn't have had access to the UK-wide scheme
18 in that period.

19 Now, in this pandemic, things were symmetrical, more
20 or less --

21 A. More or less.

22 Q. -- in terms of impact, so I'm not really making this
23 point as a critique of what happened here, but,
24 of course, going forwards, if there was another
25 pandemic, it might not land in that way, it might be

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1 and we increased the borrowing flexibility. We -- we
2 allowed more flexibility on what are called CDEL to RDEL
3 switches, where devolved administrations have a budget
4 for capital expenditure and day-to-day expenditure and
5 normally you limit the movement between those for
6 various reasons, but we said you can -- you can do more
7 of that, and there was more flexibility about carrying
8 forward from one year to the next.

9 So it's not just borrowing, there are -- there are
10 a few other flexibilities that UK Government can deploy,
11 that, again, fit within the overall framework of UKG
12 having oversight accountability for what's happening to
13 the balance sheet, but providing, where it can, that
14 extra degree of flex to devolved administrations so that
15 they can, you know, respond in -- in the way that they
16 want.

17 And I think -- and I think your -- the expert, he
18 said -- I think his general view is what we did -- did
19 allow -- I think he said allowed them to respond
20 effectively, and I -- and I think that is -- that's
21 broadly right.

22 So the balance we struck I think is right, and
23 I think that would be my starting point for someone who
24 had to do this in -- in the future as well.

25 Q. All right. Thank you.

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1 asymmetric in its effect.

2 And I just wonder if you have any reflections about
3 how you would square that circle. You know, UK-wide
4 decisions, but what if there's that asymmetry to the
5 pandemic?

6 A. Mm.

7 You know, I -- a couple of broader reflections,
8 actually, just to finish up from the last one as well.
9 It's -- one of the things that, you know, was brought
10 up, was -- you talk about asymmetric responses in -- in
11 general, we'll come to CJRS, I -- now, look, people will
12 have different views on this, but, look, the Bar -- the
13 Barnett formula is -- you know, does provide more
14 per capita funding to the devolved administrations than
15 for England, in the first place. Right? So it's, you
16 know, roughly, depending on -- the IFS to have probably
17 the best source, but I think they would say £1.25, £1.30
18 for each pound spent in England, Wales is about £1.15.

19 Now -- so, in any case, there's more funding
20 per capita going, one might argue. Even if it's
21 a symmetric shock, there's asymmetrically positive
22 funding going. Now, the response to that would
23 be: okay, well, base needs are potentially higher. Now,
24 that is to open up a, you know, long-standing point of
25 debate. Independent commissions in the past have

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1 assessed relative needs of the DAs, and although we're
2 obviously not reopening the Barnett formula here, it's
3 kind of relevant for thinking about this in the future.

4 Now, the general sense is -- and I say this
5 generally, and not to open up a huge can of worms -- is
6 I think generally, from what I -- and again, I'm
7 a little bit out of date -- I think generally the sense
8 is that we -- we've put a floor in for Wales, so the
9 funding uplift roughly matches their extra need. So
10 that's quite well matched.

11 I think, from memory, there is a sense, from the
12 last time this was looked at, is the funding that goes
13 to Scotland is in excess of their measured need.

14 Now, again, I -- I haven't got the most up to date
15 figures, so -- so whoever is in this job is -- the
16 starting position is in, you know, there is the UK --
17 kind of, UK Government, UK balance sheet is in any case
18 allocating more money, potentially, than need in the
19 first place because of the Barnett formula. So that is
20 something that will, in any case, need to be thought
21 about in any response about asymmetry and symmetry.

22 Now, of course, Scotland and Wales, if they want,
23 also have the ability to do their own tax raising. You
24 know, we talked about borrowing, this goes to the heart
25 of this thing. Now, I, as UK Chancellor, had to stand

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1 discussed at the time. Now, look, that maybe is an
2 option. It's still, you know, that would all have to be
3 worked out, but I think that would, you know, that was
4 not something that when I recall this period, it never
5 felt like that -- that wasn't, I think, something that
6 was put to me; it was more just "This should just be
7 done." Not "We are happy to pay for this because we
8 want to do something differently, and this will be
9 paid"; it was a different type of conversation.

10 And I think, in the future, whoever is having to
11 deal with this will have to just think through that,
12 think through that question.

13 Q. So -- and I don't want to, for a moment, put words into
14 your mouth, but really, I think you seem to be saying:
15 Retain flexibility, retain an *ad hoc* ability to respond
16 to the particular emergency with a number of factors on
17 the table but you're making the point there are --
18 there's a lot lying behind this that also needs to be
19 factored in.

20 A. Yes, I think that's a good summary. And, look, the
21 UK Government always has the ability to do things
22 asymmetrically and has done in lots of different --
23 whether it's a bespoke case of a business in distress or
24 something else, the UK Government has always done that
25 in all DAs and can do. I'd slightly differentiate

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1 up and, you know, as you've said, make all these
2 difficult decisions about raising taxes to pay for the
3 pandemic support, because I thought that was the right
4 thing to do to get our public finances back in order.
5 I obviously didn't -- you know, I didn't love doing
6 that. You obviously -- you know, there's a political
7 price that comes with these things. It is what it is.
8 That was the right thing to do, I wanted to do it.

9 But you can see there where the tension is, right?

10 And that -- and that -- ultimately, if -- if the
11 UK Chancellor is the person who has to -- and the
12 UK Government is carrying the political consequences of
13 borrowing fiscally today and then having to deal with
14 that tomorrow, it's quite tricky to then say: we are
15 happy to give carte blanche to whoever it might be, you
16 know, without thinking through that implication.

17 I think that's very natural. I -- and you say
18 squaring the circle. I'm not sure there is an easy way
19 to square that circle. There will always be a slight
20 tension there.

21 Now, one way to square that circle is, as your
22 expert said, is, well, you know, the DAs can do
23 something, they can borrow from the UK Government, which
24 will be cheaper, and then pay it back over a period of
25 time, and maybe that is something that could be

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1 between things that potentially are very open-ended, you
2 know, open-ended financial commitments that other people
3 are making that the UK Government is -- that's would,
4 you know, that's -- no one in any walk of life would
5 treat those slightly differently to something that has
6 a fixed cost.

7 Q. Right, thank you very much.

8 Can we move on then to the Coronavirus Job Retention
9 Scheme as a topic, now moving into particular schemes.
10 And just by way of context the Treasury, HMRC, final
11 evaluation, concluded it was good value for money with
12 a positive net benefit to society of £50 billion, the
13 economic output would have been 1.8% lower in 2021
14 without the scheme, it saved 4 million employments, and
15 20% of employers who used the scheme, so it's about
16 a quarter of a million, would have closed permanently
17 without the scheme. And I just want to give that
18 context, for the questions that follow.

19 And in fairness, I'll just ask that this is put up,
20 INQ000588209. This is from the Inquiry's listening
21 exercise Every Story Matters. Page 107. This about the
22 extension, but it's making the point:

23 "I think the extension was a lifeline. It gave me
24 peace of mind knowing I had some income coming in."

25 So there has been generally positive evidence

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received by the Inquiry about the scheme.

Now, I think you mentioned this earlier, Mr Sunak, but there's also evidence from our expert Mike Brewer that as a scheme, it also worked well in terms of reducing what could have been an increase in inequality because of its preservation of jobs. So we take all of that on board.

Can I ask you about engagement. I think there was heavy consultation between the Treasury and the Trades Union Congress, is that right, about this scheme and standing it up, and with business indeed?

A. Yes, not just the TUC, who, you know, we had, probably somewhat surprisingly, but we had a very good close working relationship with Frances and with Kate throughout the pandemic, particularly at this phase, but also with the CBI. And obviously those were the two big organisations representing business, representing union labour.

But beyond that, we were constantly talking to lots of other business groups, as well, whether it was the BCC, the FSB, and in particular on furlough. I think the engagement -- there was a lot of engagement, which I put in the evidence but it's important, with all the various bodies of accounting and taxation, all of whom have acronyms that don't immediately spring to mind but

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everything it needed to. And so all those bits needed to, and, as I said, the kind of overall policy, once it was designed, in one sense was actually quite simple and that was one of its appeals, I think. But then it -- underneath that was a lot of detail that needed to be worked on.

Q. Can I pick up on that point about simplicity in terms of design. We heard a lot about this from Dr Tim Leunig, that one of the -- he viewed one of the beauties of the scheme was that it was so simple, that that was one of its great virtues, certainly when it was introduced in March 2020, and is that how you viewed it?

A. Yes, I think this will be -- it will be a recurring theme, I would imagine, of today and tomorrow. We go back to those overarching things that I talked about at the beginning, and complexity helps you target more effectively, is better value for money, better for ensuring the economic outcomes can return more rapidly and more efficiently, et cetera, better for -- we'll get into, I'm sure, fraud and other things, obviously it will help with all those things. What it doesn't do is allow you to move quickly, and it is very much the enemy of speed and as we've talked about, speed was of the essence at this time.

But the other thing that simplicity has, and

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Institute of Chartered Accountants and things like that, because there was a lot of technical detail to get right about the guidance and how it would work and what needed to be on the form and how people's payroll systems would interact with it.

So, you know, that degree of detailed guidance that people don't always see was incredibly important. So yes, of course there was TUC and CBI engagement and that gets a lot of probably the headline attention but, actually, all those expert bodies and accounting firms that helped get the mechanisms, the guidance, the execution, right, so this thing worked legally and operationally for businesses. It was equally as important.

Q. Yes. I mean, you talked about journalists who were waiting for it to fall over, but is that the point: that it was not just devising the scheme but also making sure it worked --

A. Yes.

Q. -- operationally it worked?

A. It worked -- operationally from a, kind of, IT perspective almost, but also just practically and administratively for businesses, and how, you know, the information they would need to provide, how their payroll systems worked, how HMRC could interact with

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universality has, is to help you with what I talked about at the beginning, about the overall reassurance, and, actually, to be able to stand up and say: this is what the government is going to do, whether it's on this or the other things that we'll come to later, which people can just easily understand and has a simplicity and universality about them, I think is probably underappreciated benefits for providing the overall kind of macro reassurance and confidence to the country, as well as operationally just being quicker and easier to deliver at pace.

So I think that's the other benefit of simplicity.

Q. Does that, in a way, minimise the danger, that you announce something and then people go to it and find they actually don't qualify, they actually can't apply because there are all these rules and requirements --

A. Yes, I think -- and obviously the simpler you can make it, and as I say, as anyone can easily understand, then the better. And what you really wouldn't want to do is have too many situations where people hear one thing and then, actually, it's very different. So that's -- again, that tends towards universality. If you're trying to have a big moment, talk to the country, give them, you know, a degree of reassurance -- if that, you know, if that press conference just read like a whole

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1 long list of T&Cs at the end of an advert, it would
2 probably undermine what you are trying to achieve, so if
3 you have too many of those T&Cs -- and again, they would
4 help you for other things but they would undermine the
5 overall objective of just providing that reassurance and
6 confidence, as I've said, as well as making it far less
7 likely that you could deliver it quickly and
8 effectively, and it would work.

9 **Q.** And as you've told us at the outset, February,
10 March 2020, speed was really important, and therefore
11 standing this up in 55 hours was important. But you
12 yourself, you've spoken again about the iterative
13 approach to these things. Once it was stood up in that
14 simple universal way, you've also got to wear the hat of
15 the nation's bank manager and make sure that you're
16 living within your means, and did you yourself or were
17 you concerned to see okay, we've stood this up, it's
18 been stood up in a simple way but can we actually now
19 refine it as it goes to see if we can do some targeting,
20 and if we can make sure that it is targeted and
21 therefore better value for money?

22 **A.** I -- I mean, look, this is the -- this one of the grey
23 bits of kind of, in my head, you know, kind of
24 quandaries. I, you know, we spent an inordinate amount
25 of time over the summer iterating a more targeted

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1 **Q.** Because I really want to develop this --
2 **A.** Yeah, sure.
3 **Q.** -- and understand it, because I think, you know, you
4 spent a lot of time in the Treasury thinking about this,
5 and looking ahead, it's important it is considered.
6 **A.** Yes.
7 **Q.** But first of all, can we think about how you -- let's
8 leave aside the practical difficulties and everything
9 else, how you might think about targeting.
10 **A.** Yes.
11 **Q.** I mean, there are lots of different ways.
12 **A.** Yeah.
13 **Q.** You might think about, what, companies that are affected
14 by NPIs?
15 **A.** There's kind of three main ways. One is sectors, so you
16 can target by sector. The second way is to target by
17 NPI, to your point, kind of closed, open. And then the
18 third way is by looking at impact on revenue, and there
19 are different tunes you can play on that, to use the
20 Treasury parlance, of whether it's backwards looking,
21 whether it's concurrent, or -- and things. But those
22 are the three main ways that one could think about
23 targeting. And there are problems with all three and
24 advantages of all three which I'm happy to dig into, but
25 those are the three different approaches that one could

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1 version of furlough, and hours and hours of work to do
2 exactly that, on the basis, then, that, you know, we
3 were moving to a different phase of the pandemic, we
4 weren't anticipating second, third, national lockdowns,
5 et cetera, and trying to figure out how to do a more
6 targeted version.

7 Because of course, as you've said, you know, if
8 there were ways to get help to the people we want, but
9 minimise the cost and make it more economically targeted
10 to help the recovery of economic activity, that would be
11 preferable. And I spent an enormous amount of -- you
12 know, my kind of intellectual time on this topic with
13 the team at the Treasury and we did develop something
14 called JSS which never saw the light of day because we
15 ended up in another national lockdown and --

16 **Q.** This was the Job Support Scheme?

17 **A.** Job Support Scheme, yeah, which had a kind of open and
18 closed version. I have heard lots of people say, well,
19 if you had better data, you can target, and I'm
20 genuinely not convinced that even with better data, with
21 all reasonable better data that could now be collected,
22 that it would be able to design an effective, targeted
23 version of this. And --

24 **Q.** Can we hold that thought --

25 **A.** Fine --

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1 take.
2 **Q.** Can I thrown in a fourth for your consideration?
3 **A.** Yeah.
4 **Q.** Though you may be including it, I suspect, under
5 businesses targeted by NPIs, and that's geography.
6 **A.** Yes. I'm including that in -- because, obviously,
7 the -- and -- I mean, this was the big Module 2
8 discussion, and like I say, you know, the -- all of the
9 geographic -- or the geographic stuff, on reflection, I
10 did not feel like that was something that would
11 necessarily be repeated, I don't think. But in any
12 case, that is, yes, I put that in the NPI bucket, yes.
13 **Q.** Exactly --
14 **A.** If I was going to say a fourth, it's slightly different,
15 but those are the three what I call targeted things.
16 What we ended up doing is a form of targeting, but it's
17 not quite targeting, which is what we did do is what we
18 call tapering, which is changing the generosity of the
19 support. So our answer to this question, having
20 concluded -- or my answer to the question, having
21 concluded that there wasn't a way of targeting that
22 I felt comfortable with, that I thought was right, we
23 ended up doing what I called tapering which is where we
24 raised the cost to employers in a universal way of
25 participating in the scheme, which has the indirect

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1 benefit of -- for those that don't really need it, you
 2 know, it probably on the margin makes it more likely
 3 they don't use it as much because you've used -- you've
 4 raised the cost to them.

5 And that, I think, broadly worked quite well, both
 6 times that we tapered out. And so that is -- as I said,
 7 it means that is not -- it's still universal but it
 8 was -- the generosity of the scheme was designed in
 9 a different way to just raise the cost to employers
 10 which helps target by self-selection, in a way, at the
 11 cost of some people having a burden which, you know, for
 12 them might be a bit more difficult than you would like.

13 Q. Let's just pick that up and then we'll look at the other
 14 three principal ways that you sort of looked at and
 15 I think have settled on saying you reject, but this
 16 first point about tapering. I think this was a point
 17 that Dr Leunig made in reaction to the suggestion it
 18 wasn't targeted, he said, "Well, no, it is targeted,
 19 furlough was always targeted, because it's self-targeted
 20 in the sense that you assume that business wants to make
 21 money --

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. -- and it wants to make a profit, otherwise what's the
 24 point of being in business?" So it's in the interests
 25 of employers to bring their staff back when they can and

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1 tapering.

2 But let's look at the other options, because
 3 I really want to be forward looking here.

4 A. Yes, yes.

5 Q. Because next time, someone else might say, "Well, could
 6 we target a scheme?"

7 Targeting by sector. Why was that considered and/or
 8 rejected as a prospect?

9 A. And I think, just to clarify what I previously said,
 10 I don't necessarily reject them, that's probably too
 11 strong a word. I -- there is a reasonable case for all
 12 of these.

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. And in -- you know, it won't be me doing it in the
 15 future, so whoever is there might -- might choose
 16 reasonably to do something different. And fair enough.
 17 I don't think that's an unreasonable proposition. I --
 18 my reflection is I think someone in the same situation
 19 as me, even in the future, will probably end up doing
 20 the same thing, but -- for the reasons we'll go into.

21 But I -- I'm not saying I necessarily think it's
 22 a bad idea, I just think the benefits are probably not
 23 outweighed by the costs. And indeed you -- you've heard
 24 other people use that -- that phrase. That's where
 25 I probably personally end up on it, not to say that

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1 they can be profitable, therefore it is self-targeted in
 2 a sense.

3 A. In effect, yes. Although, look, obviously, you are --
 4 and I think Tim would agree with this -- he's right,
 5 what you are doing is introducing something that alters
 6 the pure behaviour or response of a business because,
 7 you know, there's this other thing that you're doing and
 8 on the margin that probably means that someone, where
 9 the business could have absorbed a cost reasonably and
 10 just dealt with a bit of reduced demand, some of that
 11 cost has now shifted on to the taxpayer balance sheet,
 12 the business is maybe not as productive as it otherwise
 13 might have been, and that is the inevitable consequence
 14 of -- but he's not wrong, of course it is self-targeting
 15 in that case.

16 Q. Yes, and I suppose it might depend on what the nature of
 17 your business is in terms of whether you're more or less
 18 inclined to bring people back?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. If you're talking about a manufacturing sort of model
 21 you need people in the factory to make widgets,
 22 therefore you bring them back when you can make money?

23 A. Widgets, yeah.

24 Q. All right. So let's leave that there, in terms of the
 25 extent to which it was targeted, and you've spoken about

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1 someone couldn't reasonably take a different point of
 2 view.

3 So, do you want to start with sector? Yes.

4 I think that we don't have -- the government doesn't
 5 have a database that has every business attached to
 6 a sector, in the first instance. Now, you could
 7 probably develop that. Sector is quite broad. Then you
 8 need subsector, third sector, et cetera. That all gets
 9 a bit cumbersome.

10 So, we didn't have anything like that, so it would
 11 have all been self-declaration anyway.

12 And then -- and then you need to figure out, well,
 13 how are the NPIs impacting each sector. And say: this
 14 sector is in, that sector is not in.

15 And sure, easy, restaurants closed. Great. Well,
 16 if your sector is hospitality, subsector is restaurant,
 17 tick. Okay, you're the person who provides the uniforms
 18 for the -- the people who work in the restaurant. You
 19 know, so your subsector is something else, right? You
 20 know, textiles or, you know -- and then your subsector
 21 is, you know, whatever it is. You know, are you in?
 22 Are you out?

23 You know, trying to figure all of that out is
 24 incredibly complicated in a modern economy.

25 And then no one is going to be binary. Even the

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restaurant is 100%, zero, lots of other things as well, "Part of my business is serving this sector, part of it is serving another sector", part of this sector is impacted, part of it is not. I -- so I just don't know if you could ever accurately figure out: well, these sectors suffer enough economic impact from the NPI so that "These sectors, tick, tick, tick", "These sectors, no, no, no."

And then even if you've got a firm, firms operate in different sectors, and then you'll end up with all these different problems of, "Well, half of my business is" -- my workwear example, you know, "Half of my business is serving this manufacturing uniforms, they're all still operating, half my business is serving the restaurant industry, they're all shut. Am I in? Am I out?"

Have we captured them even in the first place because we're focused up here on hospitality?

So, look, that -- that's the thing with sectors. So even if you had the data, which we don't, it's not obvious to me that you would end up knowing and getting it -- you could -- you could do -- you could clearly do a -- you know, you could do a job. You would spent all your time talking to all the businesses that were not included, is my sense, and it's just -- the complexity of doing that for a million businesses, I -- I just

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Q. Just pausing there, Mr Sunak, we've heard some evidence, I think, that the threshold is about -- somewhere in the 90,000 --

A. Yeah, 95 I think, from memory, yeah.

Q. So a lot of businesses wouldn't be --

A. Lots of small businesses were not registered for VAT. I think 40 -- something like -- it seems a high number, but a large chunk of the businesses that used furlough were not VAT registered, I think. So, again, you know, they -- you had no way to verify in any way on that data. We'll probably get into it on -- on some of the future things.

Now, look, in general, I think it would be a good thing for the government to have more regular income data. We'll get on to it for self-employed and for businesses. That is now happening through Making Tax Digital. So, again, not everybody loves that, but, you know, that's a good starting point for having more regular revenue data collected. So you would probably have some of that.

The issue is -- there's two different things, is -- one is, if it's backwards looking or is it contemporaneous with what's happening and then picked up in the future, it can create some quite odd behavioural incentives. So you're saying: we're going to give you

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think, in reality, is probably not one that would

work --

Q. And it --

A. -- personally.

Q. -- it sounds like the answer to that is not in better data --

A. Exactly.

Q. -- because of this, sort of, supply chain issue --

A. Exactly.

Q. -- the interrelationship between all these different businesses?

A. That's my sense, as I said. Look, we don't have the data -- or we didn't have the data then, so someone can decide whether it's worth doing it. My instinct is, even with the data, that's probably not what a policymaker in the future would -- would do. But, again, reasonable people could disagree on that point, and that would be fine.

Q. Okay. Financial impact?

A. Again, for us, there's no way to check. Right? We had no way to -- for us, doing it at the time, at the beginning, we didn't have a way to check so it would all be self-declaration.

What we did have was only for VAT-rated businesses, which have to provide that information. But for --

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support if your revenue is low. And then you'd have to think through whether, economically, that is a sensible thing.

Now, clearly, for some people it's fine because you've shut them down, the revenue is zero, nothing you can do about it. But for the people who could, if they innovated or iterated, you'd want them to produce.

And I take Tim's point -- Tim would agree with this -- we saw this improve over the pandemic. Right at the beginning everyone just hunkered down and shut down, and we then spent time saying: well, hang on, actually the rules allow you to do this type of activity, or you can -- you know, you can shift your business from doing sit-in to delivery and take out.

It -- like, you want that type of economic activity to happen, and -- and so having things that, kind of, reward almost not having that revenue would behaviourally worry me a little bit.

And -- and then, if you were setting thresholds, which -- which, ultimately, you know, we did for SEISS, you know, you -- you'll inevitably get the question: well, how much revenue decline is enough to -- to qualify for the thing?

Which, again, you'll just have to pick a thing. It won't be perfect. And people have revenue declines for

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1 NPI-related reasons, some people have revenue declines
 2 for non-NPI-related reasons, so it's not perfect anyway.
 3 But I think -- and, operationally, doing all of that
 4 is -- would be fiddly. Verifying it would be fiddly and
 5 then the behavioural reaction to it would be something
 6 to -- to think about.

7 Again, none of this is in -- you could do a version
 8 of this. It would not be an unreasonable approach to
 9 take. Like, these are not binary "yes or no" things.
 10 Again, it's just -- it's complex and it's imperfect. So
 11 you're -- you're just switching one degree of
 12 imperfection for -- for another, and you're losing the
 13 universality and speed, and therefore you just have to
 14 weigh those things up, and then -- and then NPIs is the
 15 third thing.

16 Q. Yes, NPIs is the third. But just before we come on to
 17 that, just a point that I'll just put to you now, but
 18 also you've spoken about how rapidly developing this
 19 pandemic was, and changing over time. Is that an
 20 argument against targeting of the sorts we've discussed
 21 and we'll go on to discuss? Because you might have to
 22 change the target -- it's a moving target, in other
 23 words?

24 A. It's -- well, and that was -- I mean, that was our
 25 experience over the summer and the autumn, where we

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1 the guidance for what -- even what business is -- is
 2 closed because part of the business was closed. Garden
 3 centres, I think, were kind of case in point and -- you
 4 know, the café bit of it was closed but the garden
 5 centre bit was open, and things like that.

6 So, even there, we were trying to work through all
 7 this detailed guidance and it was not going to be easy
 8 to deliver in practice, I don't think. So -- and on the
 9 geographic side, again, it sounds simple, but lots of
 10 businesses that were not in that geographic area that
 11 was subject to the NPIs would be impacted by them
 12 because they'll be part of a supply chain, and trying to
 13 pick all of that up would be -- well, you would lose it
 14 if it was geographically concentrated. It would work
 15 for a certain group of businesses but then it would miss
 16 lots of others too.

17 So again, none of these are unreasonable. We ended
 18 up developing one -- so there's -- because your overall
 19 point was right, and I cared about trying to figure out
 20 if there was a better way to do this, is there a more
 21 targeted way that would save us money and help economic
 22 activity return? And so we developed one, the best we
 23 could, as I said, it's not obvious to me the benefits of
 24 doing any of these things outweighs the costs, it's --
 25 when you've got tapering as a kind of different way to

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1 actually designed a targeted scheme and then, as the
 2 health situation deteriorated and we ended up anyway
 3 with a national lockdown, it didn't -- it didn't make
 4 sense to do that, and we went back to the original CJRS.

5 And that goes to the third bucket actually, which is
 6 the NPI one, which is exactly to your point. The -- the
 7 issue with that is, it slightly is the same set of
 8 issues we discussed with the -- the sector-behaviour
 9 approach, is: okay, NPI shuts down a nightclub or it
 10 shuts down a hospitality or large event, that's --
 11 that's fine. But all those businesses have a supply
 12 chain behind them. And how -- you know, then you end up
 13 in the same place. And it's pretty binary there.
 14 It's ...

15 Which is what JSS was. It was: if you're closed,
 16 then fine. But then we had an open version, so we had
 17 a kind of softer version. It wasn't if you were --
 18 because -- for everyone else, where -- you know, that
 19 was -- the supply chain business was still going to get
 20 some support but they were going to get less support
 21 than someone who was totally closed. And that -- and
 22 that is where we ended up. And we never introduced that
 23 scheme. It's the best we could do.

24 But even then, I tell you, the amount of hours we
 25 spent, days of trying to figure out how we would detail

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1 do something similar.

2 Q. Can I just pick up with you a few other --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- potential design points, I think more for a future
 5 emergency than for Covid. Just, they've emerged in the
 6 evidence, and just to appreciate your reflections on
 7 them. One came from Dr Tim Leunig again, which was the
 8 proposition that you should publish from the outset
 9 a list of recipients of the furlough scheme?

10 A. You know, I think that is not unreasonable. We did that
 11 later on, I think in November we introduced that. And
 12 next time around, you could do that from the beginning.
 13 I mean, I'm trying to think why people might not like
 14 that but I think we did it in general because it -- at
 15 least employees then knew, and it's one way of combating
 16 fraud, which in any case in the overall scheme, you
 17 know, fraud was much lower than people thought and in
 18 line with other government programmes developed in
 19 peacetime.

20 But again, the employees, notifying employees that
 21 they'd been furloughed and then seeing the employer, it
 22 all just helps with that to make sure that there isn't
 23 fraud there. So that would be not an unreasonable thing
 24 to do from the beginning.

25 Q. And is there another point that it might discourage

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1 companies that don't really need the money at all,
 2 they're just making --
 3 A. Yes, and I think Tim spoke about this. There were
 4 obviously a set of companies that made a decision that,
 5 you know, they were going to pay the money back because
 6 things were -- turned out better for them than they
 7 thought it would be, and it's enormously to their credit
 8 that they did that, and saying, you know, lots of people
 9 want to have a go at business lots of the times, you
 10 know, those businesses that did that deserve, you know,
 11 praise and gratitude. They didn't have to do that.
 12 Lots didn't, but they did and as you said, as the
 13 country's bank manager, I'm grateful that they did.
 14 Q. Having part-time furlough from the outset in a future
 15 emergency?
 16 A. I think, again, reasonable people could disagree on
 17 this. It's quite hard to police, and I think the
 18 nervousness would be, does it incentivise people to, on
 19 the margin, have less economic activity than they
 20 probably could or should? And I think that is -- it's
 21 just a choice in a trade-off. It was, you know, I think
 22 the first lockdown in any case was so binary that it
 23 didn't make a massive difference, I don't think, in this
 24 case.
 25 Maybe that will be different in the future. It's

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1 training about hygiene in the kitchen or if you're
 2 a barrister you can't go to court but you might do your
 3 CPD points. What do you say about that sort of --
 4 A. Yeah, I know that sounds fine. I mean, it depends how
 5 much of a burden on the employer it was, is my
 6 instinctive answer, and we're getting into, kind of,
 7 micro policy development so.
 8 I think the whole point is here businesses were
 9 under -- lots of small businesses were under enormous
 10 stress. We all thought -- well, we were worried that
 11 they were about to go out of business and the whole
 12 point about this thing was to ensure they didn't have to
 13 lay off all their employees because we wanted to protect
 14 that job match and protect that business. So if you're
 15 saying to that small restaurant or café that shut down,
 16 by the way, you still have to pay your rent, and we're
 17 going to help you with some grants over there and a loan
 18 over there but you've still got a lot of cost that
 19 you're grappling with and you're not operating, we've
 20 done the furlough thing but you have to now spend -- you
 21 know, that would be an extra cost, effectively, that
 22 you're putting on the business and I think you would
 23 just have to think through that if the whole point is
 24 you're worried about the business going out of business,
 25 then you'd probably say: let me keep you alive rather

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1 easier -- it was easier to implement it later and not
 2 worry about what I worried about because at that point
 3 you had a fixed population, so it applied to everyone
 4 who had been furloughed already. So you knew that you
 5 were not on the margin making it more likely that
 6 someone would kind of put their employees down to
 7 part-time when really they should just have to manage
 8 that in their business cost and not send that cost to
 9 the taxpayer. So it was an easier thing to do later.
 10 It was a big ask from business especially. FSB,
 11 I think, were particularly vocal about it, and it worked
 12 well and it really helped get economic activity back up.
 13 I don't have a strong point of view on whether it
 14 could or should be done from the beginning. I don't
 15 think it made a big difference in this instance, and
 16 again, it's a trade-off, really.
 17 Q. This was some -- an idea that emerged from the evidence
 18 of Kate Bell on behalf of the TUC. The proposition that
 19 employers should be required to provide training to
 20 employees during the period of furlough to prevent
 21 deskilling of the workforce. How does that -- I'll give
 22 you an example. If you're a baker, or to use
 23 Dr Leunig's example, you're a patissier and you're
 24 making choux buns, I think was his example, you can't do
 25 that but you might do some health and safety training or

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1 than figure out if, you know, any extra costs --
 2 although in principle clearly, you know, if you've got
 3 the time it feels like a sensible thing to do.
 4 I think there has been some survey evidence that
 5 suggests that something like 40% of people -- it was in
 6 your evidence somewhere or maybe it's in my evidence --
 7 I think something like 40% of people did undertake some
 8 type of training whilst they were furloughed and
 9 obviously now with all the AI tools that we have, it's
 10 quite easy for people to do lots of things online and
 11 free and they'd have the time to do that.
 12 I'm not sure about putting an obligation on the
 13 business necessarily would serve the ultimate aim of
 14 trying to protect the business and the job.
 15 Q. The scheme allowed people to take on work for another
 16 employer; so if you were furloughed you could work for
 17 another business. Do you think, which presumably is
 18 a good thing in terms of churn in the labour market,
 19 people might find a different job they're actually
 20 better at or better suited to and they could move on.
 21 Do you think that was well enough publicised, this
 22 ability to work elsewhere?
 23 A. To be perfectly honest, I don't have a strong
 24 recollection of that particular policy and how we
 25 communicated it, or how it worked or how well taken up

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1 it was. You'll have to forgive me.

2 **Q.** No, not at all.

3 Can I just pick up one other thought that's emerged,

4 and then we'll take the lunch break.

5 This came from Dr Brewer, one of the Inquiry's

6 experts, and has been picked up in the evidence, the

7 idea that you could have a right to request furlough.

8 And the point Dr Brewer was making was that whether an

9 employee was furloughed or not was a decision for their

10 employer. So they may not want to lose their job. They

11 may not want to be made redundant.

12 If they were made redundant, then they fell into

13 Universal Credit and -- and welfare. And,

14 comparatively, that could be quite a significant fall in

15 income. Not their fault, is the point he was making.

16 So that there should be a right for them not to demand

17 that they're kept on, but to at least request, through

18 a process, that they be kept on through furlough.

19 **A.** I think that is -- look, I'd have to think a little bit

20 more about that. I mean, probably instinctively I'm not

21 sure that's what I would do, not least because,

22 especially if you're going to put, as we did, the

23 tapering requirements on employers, where they would

24 have to contribute more, then having someone kind of be

25 able to force their employers, because then you are

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1 **MR WRIGHT:** My Lady.

2 Mr Sunak, can we pick up, as I said we would, the

3 position in the autumn of 2020 with the decision to

4 extend the Job Retention Scheme and not to implement Job

5 Support Scheme, Open and Closed. We understand that the

6 furlough scheme, Job Retention Scheme, was due to end on

7 31 October 2020, to give some context, and was then

8 going to be replaced by the Job Support Scheme as part

9 of the winding down of furlough, essentially.

10 That was the economic planning, if you like, working

11 up the Job Support Scheme whilst looking to end the Job

12 Retention Scheme, but in terms of the health picture,

13 I think, as your statement acknowledges, in that autumn,

14 so early September onwards, there were various

15 contingencies being worked up in Whitehall in terms of

16 the health position, is that right, one of which was the

17 potential towards a further national lockdown if

18 infection rates continued to increase?

19 **A.** Yes, I think that's a fair summary. We went into the

20 design process for JSS on the basis of the initial

21 roadmap exit plan that had been developed and then

22 I think the tiering system that was put in place. So

23 JSS was very much designed for that world.

24 I think, as I alluded to in the statement, we always

25 knew there was uncertainty around the potential spread

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1 effectively forcing them to keep you on not full time

2 but at a cost, that seems a bit tricky, right? Those

3 two things then work against each other, and I think

4 ultimately it's, you know, the employer is the one that

5 is making the decisions about their workforce. The

6 government forcing them to make those decisions -- I'm

7 not -- you know, that doesn't strike me as being quite

8 the right approach and as I said, would make any type of

9 employer contributions and tapering much harder to

10 defend, and make it more likely, then, that people are

11 just let go, which I think would not be the outcome that

12 we wanted.

13 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you. Well, Mr Sunak, I'll leave it there.

14 After the lunch break what I want to pick up on CJRS is

15 the approach in the autumn of 2020 when JSS was shelved

16 and furlough was extended.

17 So we'll pick that up as an issue after lunch, if we

18 may, my Lady, and we're not very far behind my plan,

19 so -- we're slightly behind but that's my fault, not

20 yours. But we'll make it up this afternoon.

21 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much. I shall return at 2.00.

22 (1.01 pm)

(The Short Adjournment)

24 (2.00 pm)

25 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Wright.

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1 and path of the virus so I'm sure during that period

2 there were discussions we had knowing that that might be

3 an option that would have to be brought back, if it went

4 a particular way.

5 So that was always there, and then ultimately, as

6 the health situation deteriorated and the tiering system

7 went and we went back to a national lockdown, it

8 obviously made more sense just to bring CJRS back.

9 **Q.** Yes, thank you. Or -- well, not bring it back, but

10 just --

11 **A.** Just to extend it. I was just going to correct myself

12 as well, just to extend it and not introduce JSS as

13 planned.

14 **Q.** Because I think the direction to HMRC to extend came on

15 the day it was due to end, which was 31 October, that's

16 the -- (overspeaking) --

17 **A.** Yes, which I think -- because that was also -- from

18 memory, I'm just trying to check -- I mean, I think it

19 was -- it was -- was that also the day that it was

20 decided that we would change the health restrictions and

21 enter another lockdown, from memory. Around -- the

22 things were linked, in that sense.

23 **Q.** Yes, that's right. The two -- the two things were

24 coming together. But, in terms of timing, I mean it's

25 obviously not ideal, from a business planning

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1 perspective, to think one thing may happen and then be
2 told another was going to happen, at short notice.
3 That's a slightly different issue, which I'll come back
4 to, to whether, operationally, there were any risks in
5 leaving the decision that late. Or was the position
6 that because CJRS was up and running and you knew it
7 worked and was deliverable, that there wasn't a great
8 operational risk in switching to CJRS rather than
9 bringing in JSS?

10 A. I don't think there was any operational risk, from
11 memory, at all, because, as you've rightly said, anyway
12 it was already in -- in operation and people were used
13 to it.

14 So that -- that bit was fine. If anything, you
15 know, there -- there would have been operational risk
16 about whatever -- when you do something new. So, in
17 that sense, I have no memory that that was an issue at
18 all. Obviously it was far from ideal that the situation
19 had deteriorated so quickly, but -- and that meant that
20 we -- we had to change what we were doing. But that was
21 very much in response to the deteriorating health
22 situation, which was, you know, obviously not something
23 that we were in control over, and -- and it was --
24 I think -- I still think right, for all the reasons we
25 discussed earlier, right to have tried to develop

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1 phrase.

2 Yes, that is also an important set of
3 considerations, and it makes sense to weight those
4 considerations, especially as you're out of the worst of
5 the health situation and then can start to iterate
6 policy in that direction, and that's what the plan was.
7 And then obviously the health situation deteriorated and
8 therefore we had to adjust on the economic support side.

9 But, as I said, I don't think it was wrong to have
10 planned for JSS and to have done the work on it and be
11 prepared to implement it, had the health situation
12 carried on as originally expected. That was also the
13 right thing to do, and if this happened again in the
14 future, I think someone should look to do that as well
15 at the appropriate time.

16 Q. Now, I accept that this next question I want to put to
17 you might be characterised as -- you could be criticised
18 for ending something too soon, you could be criticised
19 for something going on too long. This is the perfection
20 of judgement about timing. But when you look back over
21 CJRS, it was stood up again or continued,
22 31 October 2020, and then eventually ended. Do you
23 think some overreliance crept in on -- to furlough, that
24 it could have been withdrawn sooner? Or how were you
25 making that decision?

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1 something that could be more targeted.

2 And still, as I said, I think that was the right
3 thing to have done and to have spent time on and -- and,
4 if we hadn't ended up in that health scenario, would
5 have introduced. And I'm sure it would not have been
6 perfect either, but I think that was a worthwhile thing
7 to have pursued.

8 But as the health situation then deteriorated very
9 quickly, it made sense to -- to stick with CJRS, and
10 then it's -- that was it, really. There's not much more
11 I can probably add to that.

12 Q. No. And so, from the Treasury's perspective, the health
13 situation is determining the economic response?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. We've already covered that ground. But does this also
16 go back to the other responsibility you had as
17 Chancellor, which is not to spend money where you don't
18 need to spend it? It's all about withdrawing or
19 reducing support when that's appropriate, as well?

20 A. Yes, of course, and that, it goes right back to the
21 beginning and, you know, all those different economic
22 objectives we have: of course, value for money, you
23 know, minimising fiscal cost, and allowing that
24 effective recovery of the economy so that resources are
25 allocated efficiently, to use a slightly more wonky

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1 A. You know, I think this is something where we have to be
2 really careful about hindsight and I think, and again,
3 with the greatest respect, obviously, to my Lady and
4 yourself, Mr Wright, I think the right question to ask
5 is: at that moment in time, you know, was it
6 a reasonable judgement to make? And, you know, I
7 believe that it was.

8 We were -- everyone was worried, anxious about what
9 would happen to unemployment when furlough ended. There
10 were perfectly credible voices who wanted it to go on
11 for longer than it did, including obviously the TUC.
12 I think at least one if not two or three of the devolved
13 administrations' finance ministers and leaders, I think,
14 the then opposition, now government, members of, and
15 beyond. So there clearly was, as I said, a debate to be
16 had about it.

17 I thought our approach was about right in that what
18 we did do, and I think Tim alluded to this in his
19 evidence, as well, is, because of the tapering and the
20 necessity for employer contributions in those back end
21 few months, you saw -- I don't have the figures to hand,
22 but you did see, as we expected, a pretty, you know,
23 strong decline month on month over the last few months
24 and what we're really talking about when someone asks
25 this question is, it's probably a matter of two months.

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1 Because the restrictions really only ended fully in
2 July, at the end of July, and this went on for two more
3 months.

4 So I think we're talking about two more months where
5 the fiscal cost, and I think if you look at it -- and
6 I'm sorry I don't have the figures to hand -- but the
7 fiscal cost for those last two months was probably very
8 small because the numbers were low and the employer
9 contributions were higher.

10 So, you know, was it a reasonable judgement to do
11 what we did? I think it was. I think there's nothing
12 you can -- and, you know, hindsight, as we've said,
13 sure, when it ended, there was not a big spike in
14 unemployment that people feared, and it was fine. So
15 maybe that argues for being able to have done something
16 sooner. If this thing happens again, it's not obvious
17 to me that there's some learning from that period that
18 would make it easier for someone in my position to make
19 that balance any better than they will have at the time
20 to weigh up these various things, right? There will be
21 a public debate, there'll be people saying both things,
22 they will be looking at all the different bits of data,
23 as I was, about the decline in people on furlough, the
24 resumption of economic activity, et cetera, all these
25 things, taking all these inputs, and just having to make

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1 two months. And, as said, could it have ended two
2 months -- we'll never quite know what would have
3 happened if we did end it at the end of July. I think
4 in the scheme of things it's -- it was kind of
5 a reasonable judgement to make, in one general sense.

6 Q. I certainly don't want to apply any, sort of, perfect
7 hindsight to sort of judgements, Mr Sunak, and I didn't
8 mean to imply --

9 A. No, no, and I wasn't implying that you were, but I think
10 it's just ... yeah.

11 Q. Just to take that a bit further, I suppose one of the
12 questions might be: is it possible to, in a future
13 emergency, or would it have been possible in this
14 emergency, to devise criteria that were published, known
15 that when these things happen, it will end? Because
16 that would be another way of looking at the end of
17 something, to say: well, when these factors are all
18 aligned, then we will bring it to an end.

19 A. I can certainly appreciate the appeal of something like
20 that, the kind of mechanical thing. Having sat in the
21 chair and had to make the decision, I'm not sure it can
22 be reduced to: here are three formulas, and if X is 5
23 and A equals 2, then yes, it goes on, and if they're
24 less than that, it stays.

25 It's a subjective judgement based on a range of

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1 a judgement. And as, as I said, because of the employer
2 contributions the cost was lower and that was a good
3 thing, and in the round, we're talking about two months.

4 It's not obvious to me that there's a specific
5 learning, as I said, that would help someone next time
6 around fine-tune it by a month better. But again,
7 reasonable people can disagree.

8 Q. I mean, the fact there wasn't a big spike in
9 unemployment, I mean, turning it on its head, might be
10 seen as a good thing. In other words, if this was meant
11 to preserve jobs --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- then the fact that lots of people haven't been made
14 unemployed when it ends might -- might suggest
15 a positive?

16 A. No, no, but I think the point that some people would
17 make is, because there wasn't, therefore you may have
18 been able to do it earlier. That is the logic.

19 As I said, it's not logic that I necessarily
20 disagree with, but (unclear) there's -- there'd be no
21 way to test the counterfactual. And my point is I think
22 in -- I don't think anyone would really say it should
23 have ended whilst there were still restrictions,
24 which -- and they only finished at the end of July. So,
25 I think what we're talking about here is a matter of

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1 different variables, which I'm not entirely sure could
2 be reduced to -- to a mechanical formula, is my -- is my
3 sense of it.

4 So -- again, we did have a version of that.
5 Obviously the Prime Minister put those tests in place
6 for thinking about exit from roadmap. But again, they
7 were part quantitative, part qualitative assessments.
8 So it's not as if, from the outside, someone could have
9 perfect certainty about what -- what it would mean.
10 They could have reasonable understanding, but it -- they
11 were not mechanical formulas, even there.

12 So, again, we're down to talking about a couple of
13 months. Could we have -- you know, could there have
14 been some set of things we talked about we would have
15 ended it a month or two earlier? I don't know.

16 And I think the thing is, again, you're monitoring
17 this data, Mr Wright, day by day, as things were
18 reopening. There were four-week gaps, four or five-week
19 gaps between each thing. So something had to open, or
20 we reduced -- you know, released some restrictions.
21 Then you needed to see how the economy reacted. Were
22 businesses reopening? Were they bringing people back?
23 How were people -- were people going out and doing those
24 activities again and spending money?

25 You had to watch that happen in real time.

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1 So I'm not entirely sure if you could have done it
2 far in advance anyway, is the other thing. Because
3 it -- you did -- you know, you -- this stuff was
4 changing in front of your eyes by the day.
5 Q. Just turning that proposition of criteria on its head
6 and looking at it the other way, from a sort of business
7 certainty and public confidence perspective, what about
8 in a future emergency saying, "Well, while certain
9 things are happening, it will not be withdrawn"? So
10 turning it on its head. So, in other words, "Whilst
11 we're still locked down, it won't be withdrawn", or
12 "Whilst we are under a certain level of restriction", or
13 again, do you think all the same sort of problems apply?
14 A. I'm just trying to think. Effectively, that was what
15 was the case because we had run it to the end of
16 September. The roadmap, as I said, released the
17 restrictions at the end of July. The employer
18 contributions and things started coming in in July, as
19 well. So that was all telegraphed, I think in the
20 spring, so people had lots of time to plan.
21 And I'm sure, I'm sure I said -- I can't quite
22 remember -- and the implicit understanding, I'm sure,
23 was: and if things change we'll reevaluate because we'd
24 done that -- at that point we'd done that two or three
25 times already. So I think that was a kind of given,

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1 But again, I think it's hard, without hindsight, to
2 really know if you could have had a high conviction
3 different view, not least, as I said, because lots of
4 very credible people -- and it's easy to say now and
5 after it ended -- at the time, and I remember being in
6 Parliament and all the interviews I did -- I was getting
7 a lot of pushback on the idea this was ending, and all
8 the questions I was getting were the opposite, and, as
9 I said, you know, from members of the then opposition
10 and more generally, it was very much, "This is too
11 premature and you're just wanting to withdraw support
12 and you're focused on balancing the books again," and
13 there we go.
14 Q. Understood. Can I just pick up on one more point on
15 this, though, developing on that point: that those who
16 say, oh, it should have carried on for longer, it could
17 have carried on for much longer. From an economic
18 perspective, so I'm not talking about the fiscal cost of
19 the intervention but in terms of a longer-term cost or
20 damage to the economy, are there reasons not to have
21 a furlough scheme going on too long --
22 A. Yes.
23 Q. -- that are important?
24 A. Yes, absolutely. And I don't think there would be an
25 enormous amount of disagreement amongst that, at least

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1 that if things got materially worse then we would
2 obviously re-look at the situation.
3 But I think my sense is at the time then we'd given
4 people a good amount of time to plan and we could handle
5 a little bit of flex if the roadmap slipped to the
6 right, which it did do, by, I think one step was delayed
7 by four weeks, from memory. So I think that turned out
8 to be sensible that we had erred a little bit on the
9 side of caution because, actually, we needed some of
10 that buffer and for it still to then be tapering off as
11 the economy was fully open, so that was, you know,
12 sensible, but again, you could argue if that hadn't
13 happened, it would have looked a little bit of a worse
14 decision, because it, you know, it would have maybe then
15 been a month more than one was needed.
16 So as I said, I think my broad thing is, I think
17 we're talking about a matter of weeks, at most two
18 months, really. And for me, it's hard to reduce it to
19 something so formulaic. So, giving people some
20 certainty, probably erring a little bit on the generous
21 side to deal with any bumps in the road, having the
22 employer contributions coming in so you've got that
23 tapering and self-selection at the same time. That
24 seemed to me to strike a reasonable balance which is
25 what we did.

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1 I hope not, because markets allocate resources
2 efficiently for the most part and that is individual,
3 private businesses, people making those decisions. And
4 what, you know, when government starts intervening
5 trying to preserve things in stasis, that is fine for
6 temporary shocks that are specific, but as that becomes
7 more permanent -- and it's not just furlough schemes,
8 it's all sorts of things that governments can do -- you
9 know, what you are doing is interfering with the normal
10 mechanism of the market and in general, you know, you're
11 potentially preserving businesses and jobs which in the
12 long run aren't actually viable or sustainable and
13 that's never a good long-term thing for the economy,
14 you're inhibiting its productive growth, and, you know,
15 what the government should be doing is allowing that
16 process to happen, and obviously providing the support
17 for people with training, skills, making sure new
18 businesses can be created easily -- you know, because
19 what you want in a dynamic economy if you want
20 a fast-growing economy is you need that, you know, you
21 need that process to happen -- you need those businesses
22 which, you know, sadly are not sustainable or viable,
23 you know, to fail. You need new businesses to take
24 their place. Investment needs to go to where it has
25 a highest return. People need to be in jobs which

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1 actually are sustainable and can pay them a good wage,
2 not ones that are being propped up artificially by
3 taxpayers.

4 So absolutely, in the long term, that is not
5 a sensible feature of any, you know, market-oriented
6 economy.

7 **Q.** So your decisions about ending these sorts of supports
8 were not simply, what's the fiscal cost per month of
9 this continuing, but also, is there reaching a point
10 where carrying on may do more harm to the economy than
11 stopping?

12 **A.** Yes, and it goes, again, all the way back to that
13 conversation we had at the beginning, if you just
14 remember, I set out those four or five economic
15 objectives. This was one of them. It was about when
16 the time is right, allowing normal economic activity to
17 resume and that normal, you know, normal market economy
18 to function, because in the long run, that's the best
19 way to raise people's living standards and grow an
20 economy.

21 **Q.** Okay, thank you.

22 Those are my questions about the Job Retention
23 Scheme. I'm going to move on to the Self-Employment
24 Income Support Scheme now. I think we've covered most
25 of CJRS, I hope we have. Is there anything, before

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1 So that's just to give some sense of the scale, and
2 the assessment of how the scheme landed.

3 I'll ask the question in the way that -- I'm sorry
4 to keep going back to Dr Leunig, he obviously made an
5 impression, but I'll ask the question, really founded in
6 the way he put it, and so we can have your response to
7 this: that there was an extent, he felt, that this
8 scheme was really a trade-off of -- between an economic
9 case for support and a moral, political case for
10 support. Because this was a very vocal political group
11 lobbying for support, whereas morally, perhaps --
12 I don't know if "morally" is the right word, but that's
13 how he put it -- not as deserving as the job support
14 through CJRS.

15 What was your rationale for the scheme and why do
16 you say it was necessary and important, Mr Sunak?

17 **A.** I think, taking a step back, it was, at its most simple
18 level, you know, the government stopping people from --
19 from working and doing what they wanted to do. And,
20 therefore, having some responsible to, you know, support
21 them through that period. And that applies, you know,
22 equally to those who are self-employed as it -- as it
23 does to those in work.

24 And of course, you know, we've spoken through the
25 economic theory of, you know, scarring and labour

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1 I move on, that you wish to add about the scheme, any
2 point of learning about the scheme, or have we covered
3 that in the questioning?

4 **A.** I think we've had a good comprehensive discussion on it.
5 I think we've covered the reflections as we went
6 through. So --

7 **Q.** Okay.

8 **A.** -- if anything occurs to me I'll -- (overspeaking) --

9 **Q.** There will be an opportunity --

10 **A.** Tomorrow, yes, but I -- I think that we -- I think we've
11 covered everything that I've thought through, so ...

12 **Q.** So, Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, and again,
13 I'll just give some high-level statistics from the
14 evaluation that was conducted into that scheme, just to
15 put this into context.

16 So this was an income replacement scheme for
17 self-employed people. The total benefits created by the
18 scheme were estimated to be £19.3 billion, with an
19 accompanying social cost of £5.1 billion.

20 Payments were made quickly post-launch. There was
21 an application date of 13 May. By 25 May 2020, so
22 12 days later, 88 per cent of claims had been paid out
23 and 99.4% of Self-Employment Income Support Scheme
24 claims were paid within the government's own target of
25 six working days from the application.

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1 matches, and that's all true, but actually, put the
2 economic bit aside, there's just a slightly more
3 fundamental thing that, you know, everyone was going
4 about their day-to-day life, trying to work hard,
5 provide for their families, build a better life,
6 government comes in and says, "No, sorry, we're not
7 going to let you do that any more", and I just didn't
8 think it would be right to then not have something to
9 say to those -- those people to support them through it.
10 And that's really what the self-employment support
11 scheme was about.

12 And it broadly -- not perfectly, but broadly -- was
13 designed to give comparable support to those who were
14 self-employed as those who were in employment.

15 I think Tim, in his evidence, also said that he
16 thought it was perfectly reasonable to him as -- as an
17 economist that the self-employed and the employed
18 should, in some loose sense, have the same level of
19 support, and -- and this is the, kind of, closest
20 that -- that we could do, and that was what he said,
21 and I -- I think that is -- that's right, in a nutshell.

22 And we can get into the design of it, but that was
23 the -- the, kind of, thesis behind doing it, from my
24 perspective.

25 **LADY HALLETT:** Can I interrupt, sorry?

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1 **MR WRIGHT:** Of course, my Lady.

2 **LADY HALLETT:** Does the economic scarring argument apply to
3 the self-employed too? Because an awful lot of
4 self-employed people -- I confess I have an interest
5 here, having been self-employed for a long time -- but
6 don't -- put me to one side -- don't a lot of
7 self-employed people contribute to the economy, keep
8 the -- don't you have the economic scarring argument can
9 apply to a lot of self-employed businesses --
10 **A.** You know, I -- look, not to (unclear) I think if --
11 if Tim was here, he might say the difference, my Lady --
12 I don't know if I'll make his argument for him, not
13 mine -- but I think he would say that the difference is
14 that nothing stops you, as a self-employed individual,
15 doing what you want to do thereafter, whereas if you're
16 employed and you lose your job, you can't automatically
17 just go back to doing what you want -- were doing
18 before. That, I think, is -- not to put words in his
19 mouth, but he might have said something to that effect
20 when he was there. That's what he might say, that they
21 are different.

22 I tend to broadly sympathise with your perspective
23 on it. At the end of the day, these are people who we
24 wanted to make sure that they were still able to be
25 economically productive and active when possible. And,
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1 was the right thing to do, and I -- and I would do it
2 again if it was me, and quite candidly, I'm highly
3 confident that if this ever happens again, whoever is in
4 my shoes will do something very similar as well.

5 But I'm just, at least, trying for the sake of you
6 having a full set of arguments. But I think --
7 I thought Kate's evidence on this was quite compelling
8 as bringing it to life how someone who was self-employed
9 actually would have the same scarring type of impact
10 that you would have from someone who was employed.

11 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you.

12 **MR WRIGHT:** And as with the Job Retention Scheme was speed
13 of delivery and simplicity an important feature of the
14 scheme?

15 **A.** Yes, as -- you know, simplicity, especially -- and
16 I think we haven't touched on it, but just, actually,
17 your last question of the last session. The -- you
18 know, there is an enormous amount of operational
19 pressure that's put on HMRC at this moment in time, and
20 then we'll come on to Universal Credit this afternoon,
21 and the DWP systems. And, you know, I would think it's
22 easy to kind of abstract that away, particularly for
23 people who are not used to having to deliver things on
24 the front line, and the scale of these things is
25 enormous. You have to remember that. 10 million people
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1 therefore, providing someone support to them would make
2 that more likely.

3 And I think the TUC provided some good evidence on
4 this point, and I think Kate was quite good on this
5 particular point: that -- I think she gave the example
6 of a self-employed salon or hairstylist or beautician
7 who would have, you know, had a bunch of things, may
8 have even had -- paid rent in somewhere, and -- and if
9 they had not been supported, all of that would have
10 gone, would have had to sell all of that, broken all
11 those relationships with wherever she was, those client
12 relationships, et cetera, and therefore would not as
13 easily be able to bounce back. And it's effectively
14 like having been let go in a company.

15 **LADY HALLETT:** Yes.

16 **A.** So I think Kate -- Kate will give you the example of
17 something that very much is in line with what you said,
18 and that was my general sense. Now, I mean, you know,
19 Tim would say that's perfectly fair, it probably doesn't
20 apply to everyone in quite the same way as it did with
21 people in jobs. But I -- hopefully I've given you as
22 fair as I can --

23 **LADY HALLETT:** You're very good at playing devil's advocate.

24 **A.** Well, I try to be fair. Obviously I introduced the
25 scheme and believe in it, so of course I think that it
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1 were furloughed. A million businesses were interacting
2 with the HMRC CJRS system and then 10 million people
3 were getting rebates through.

4 On SEISS, 3 million people. Again. So it's not
5 just a kind of simplicity for speed, a simplicity for
6 communications and reassurance which we've touched on;
7 there's also a simplicity because, you know, what you
8 don't want is for the organisation to be overwhelmed,
9 for the systems to be -- to break down. They only have
10 the capacity to do so much and you know, there's a --
11 actually, even in peacetime that is the case, as
12 Chancellor afterwards, when you're sitting down with
13 HMRC and you're figuring out: here are the various
14 upgrades we can make to the tax system, if we invest
15 here, what systems can we do? You know, it's not as if
16 you can do everything at once. And I had those
17 conversations with them on Making Tax Digital, it was,
18 well, you want us to design this over here, you want us
19 to do that over here, and this, that, well, thanks,
20 Chancellor, actually we can't do all of that at once,
21 please tell us which order you want us to do it in.

22 And that's not unfair and obviously at this period
23 that was also the reflection and they would constantly
24 say, rightly, say: look, we can handle this. If you
25 want us to do this, this and this, it's going to take
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1 you that much longer or we're just simply going to get
 2 overwhelmed and then things won't work properly.
 3 So I think that aspect of it I think is worth
 4 highlighting.
 5 **Q.** Yes, I mean, really, you could have promised all sorts
 6 of support but if it was actually undeliverable --
 7 **A.** Yeah.
 8 **Q.** -- then it wouldn't have been support at all; it would
 9 have just been an empty promise.
 10 **A.** Exactly, and that then obviously damages confidence and
 11 reassurance and all the rest of it. So -- and then
 12 again, you have to trust -- of course, I -- and you
 13 probably heard this from other people giving evidence,
 14 I always was on the pushy end and demanding end, whether
 15 it's with my officials in the Treasury or with HMRC,
 16 what's the quickest timeline? Why can't you do more?
 17 Why can't we do it faster? But ultimately you don't
 18 want things to fall over. I think that would be
 19 a disaster. So ...
 20 **Q.** And if you look simplicity as between CJRS and SEISS, in
 21 CJRS, this was administered through the PAYE system
 22 which gave you a monthly snapshot of employment,
 23 real-time information, but -- so that's pretty good data
 24 and it's regular. But under the Self-Employment Income
 25 Support Scheme, you were looking at Income Tax Self

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1 fraud.
 2 And then, as soon as we passed the deadline for
 3 that, we were able to bring them in. But that's why the
 4 ITSA system was used, and as I said, in one sense it was
 5 very good because it was an accurate database of people
 6 and their incomes. The flipside was it was -- the data
 7 in it was out of date and I'm sure we can talk about
 8 what that would look like in the future.
 9 **Q.** Can we pick up about the data point now and come on to
 10 the point you've just made about appetite for risk, and
 11 fraud. In terms of the future and data, and you've
 12 mentioned this already, Making Tax Digital, and you've
 13 said that this is something HMRC was working on and it's
 14 now working much further through the system; can you
 15 just explain what it is and how it will change
 16 potentially these sorts of judgements for a Chancellor
 17 in the future?
 18 **A.** Yes, I think we are -- and I -- I have to confess, I'm
 19 not sure where the new government is with the roadmap,
 20 but before I left the Treasury, we'd put in place,
 21 together with the ministerial team, a new roadmap for
 22 Making Tax Digital, partly so that in the future, this
 23 type of situation would not happen.
 24 And what that means is, HMRC will be able to collect
 25 more income data, more -- or sorry -- the same data more

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1 Assessment and there's a time lag, isn't there, in terms
 2 of filing?
 3 **A.** Yeah.
 4 **Q.** And so did that present an immediate challenge in terms
 5 of deliverability?
 6 **A.** Yeah, well, it presented -- well, in one sense it made
 7 things very easy because there was no other way that you
 8 could do this other than relying on the ITSA system, the
 9 Income Tax Self Assessment system. It was the only
 10 database that we had in government at HMRC that told us
 11 who was self-employed, how much had they earned, right?
 12 So there was no alternative.
 13 So in that sense that was clarifying and made things
 14 simple, but then that meant that that came with a set of
 15 constraints, notably the data, as you alluded to,
 16 Mr Wright, is quite out of date, and that's a feature of
 17 our self-employment assessment system where you file
 18 your tax return the following January after the tax year
 19 ends, and so lots of people who were newly self-employed
 20 in the most immediate preceding tax year to the on-set
 21 of the pandemic had not yet filed a tax return, and we
 22 had no anyway of knowing who they were, how much they
 23 earned, and it was therefore not possible to bring them
 24 into the system at the outset without taking on what
 25 I considered to be unacceptable, you know, risk on

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1 regularly.
 2 **Q.** Quarterly returns, is that right?
 3 **A.** Quarterly returns exactly.
 4 **Q.** Yeah.
 5 **A.** And as I say, forgive me for not remembering the precise
 6 details of who that applies to when, but the broad
 7 principle is the system will be much more up-to-date
 8 with what's happening in people's lives than it was when
 9 I was doing this, and that will make this easier. Fair
 10 to say, before the pandemic, when things like that had
 11 been mooted I don't think everyone was, you know,
 12 jumping up and down and being super excited about doing
 13 that, because people would prefer to have the time and
 14 do it later, and all the impact it might have on
 15 people's cash flow and taxes, but, you know, the
 16 pandemic showed why it was -- it would be beneficial, at
 17 least from this perspective, to have that quarterly tax
 18 information from Making Tax Digital.
 19 **Q.** Okay. You didn't have luxury of that. You had Income
 20 Tax Self Assessment, and you've explained why, therefore
 21 the newly self-employed weren't eligible in the early
 22 cohorts of this support.
 23 Can I just pick up, you referenced the risk of
 24 fraud. Now, presumably that's because if you wanted to
 25 include the recently self-employed, you'd have to

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1 effectively self-certify or have some method of
 2 self-certifying that they were, in fact, self-employed,
 3 they did in fact have income and they were in fact
 4 eligible.
 5 **A.** The whole thing would be completely -- just as you
 6 described.
 7 **Q.** Yes, so that's the first point. Is there not also --
 8 and we picked this up with Sir James Harra in his
 9 evidence -- there was also a -- and this touched on
 10 something you said earlier about the pressure HMRC was
 11 under -- not only would there have to be
 12 self-certification but there would have to be a manual
 13 process --
 14 **A.** Yes.
 15 **Q.** -- of checking an accreditation which goes hand in hand
 16 with that --
 17 **A.** And that goes to the point I was -- I was talking about
 18 earlier, just the operational demands on HMRC. Any time
 19 that HMRC have to start doing any degree of manual
 20 verification of anything, or spot checking of any kind
 21 of scale, clearly the resource implications are
 22 significant. Which is why, when you've -- ITSA is
 23 great, because it can all be done largely digitally.
 24 And that -- that means that there isn't a huge human --
 25 human component to that bit, so that -- Jim is

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1 **A.** I can't recall specifically on that, on that discrete
 2 intervention. But more generally on SEISS, because it
 3 had to be designed in a way with various different
 4 criteria, all of which were necessarily imperfect, there
 5 was a continual debate, discussion, re-look at policy,
 6 to see what could be tweaked, if things could be
 7 changed. Not least because there was a huge amount of
 8 incoming into the Treasury about all of these issues.
 9 So I -- absolutely was not the case that, you know,
 10 stood up, announce it, off you go, done.
 11 I think the entire time that this scheme was in
 12 place, in terms of incoming to "Please can you change
 13 this", "Please can you change that", "What about this?",
 14 it's probably the scheme where we had about the most of
 15 that, actually. And that -- and that goes to the
 16 earlier question on targeting on CJRS. You know, here,
 17 this was targeted. It was imperfectly targeted because
 18 that's all you could do, and then you spend a huge
 19 amount of time with all the people who are not captured
 20 and feel that they should be, and then trying to figure
 21 out if you can tweak the design. And so that's kind of
 22 an interesting observation on that.

23 But I -- I can't remember on that specific one, but
 24 as a general point I would say that there was constant
 25 looking at all aspects of this to see if -- if there are

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1 absolutely right to make that point.
 2 And you see that in other areas.
 3 Now, you make some exceptions for some very small
 4 groups of people with a particular case, and we --
 5 I think, you know, women on maternity leave and things
 6 like that, on CJRS, we made some very specific manual
 7 flexibilities, because we felt that that group of people
 8 really should not be disadvantaged in any way, and it
 9 was a small enough group of people that we could manage
 10 a manual workaround. But to Jim's point on this, that
 11 would have been a huge undertaking.
 12 **Q.** Now, we know that, in the devolved administrations,
 13 support schemes were stood up to support the newly
 14 self-employed who weren't eligible for the UK-wide
 15 Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, for example the
 16 Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund in Scotland.
 17 And I asked Kate Forbes about this when she gave
 18 evidence, and I put it to her, was it really a question
 19 of the Scottish Government had a greater appetite for
 20 risk than the UK Government? You know, it was willing
 21 to take the risk of self-certification.
 22 But did you consider exploring that, and engaging
 23 with the devolved administrations to see if there's any
 24 learning there, or had you made a decision that the
 25 risks and the processing obstacles were too great?

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1 things that could be tweaked, changed, iterated, as we
 2 went through. Because, you know, by its design, it
 3 was -- you know, was certainly more imperfect than CJRS
 4 was.
 5 **Q.** So if you think about the heat you got externally from
 6 the imperfect targeting of this scheme, amplify that --
 7 **A.** Yeah.
 8 **Q.** -- a hundred fold and think about how CJRS would have
 9 gone if you'd have tried to target it?
 10 **A.** I think that is a fair -- a fair reflection or takeaway.
 11 **Q.** Okay, can we just run through another couple, if you
 12 like, hard edges in the scheme. And this goes to this
 13 targeting point you've made.
 14 The 50% self-employed income test, so this was --
 15 you had to have at least 50% of your income from
 16 self-employment to be eligible under the scheme, and
 17 there was no tapering. It was effectively a cliff edge.
 18 Can you just help us with the rationale for that --
 19 **A.** Yes.
 20 **Q.** -- and whether you considered a taper and why it was not
 21 workable.
 22 **A.** I think, it's interesting in how you introduce the
 23 question, Mr Wright. You talk about the hard edges.
 24 I think that's -- that's exactly it. One person's
 25 targeting is another person's hard edge, and those are

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1 two sides of the same -- the same coin.

2 So, you know, an abstract discussion about targeting
3 is all good and well from an economic theory
4 perspective, and then here is an example where we're
5 going to go through, now, the various things we did to
6 try to target it, and we end up having the conversation
7 about the hard edges, completely reasonably. But
8 I think it just illustrates the challenge with -- with
9 this, because there is no perfect targeting. And -- and
10 anyone who comes here and says, "Well, with this bit of
11 data it would have been, you know, perfect", I think is
12 probably not being, you know, I think realistic about
13 this in the future.

14 So I think you have to accept -- well, I'm not
15 avoiding your question, we'll get into it -- that you
16 have to accept, on all these things, there's always just
17 going to be a trade-off. And I think I'd say reasonable
18 people can disagree on those trade-offs but -- you know,
19 targeting is beneficial for objective 4 and 5, and --
20 but it's less good for 1, 2 and 3, and some people are
21 going to feel aggrieved. So that is the nature of it.

22 But on the 50% criteria, again, this, you know, this
23 was something that was suggested by officials which
24 I agreed with. The idea here was: look, remember all we
25 are doing here is we are -- people are going to opt in.

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1 than two-thirds of your overall income, you know,
2 doesn't seem an unreasonable approach to take. So --
3 and that's what this criteria, that's what this criteria
4 did.

5 And I think that the, from memory, the median kind
6 of self-employment income from those people who were not
7 eligible because of this criteria was, I think something
8 like £4,000 or £5,000, right? So it was not their
9 primary source of overall -- of overall income, and we
10 could target help on those for whom it was.

11 That was the thesis behind this particular
12 threshold. And then again, you could, you know, there
13 was certainly advice that had an option of two-thirds
14 which would have been stricter. We went with 50% which
15 was a little bit more broad and generous.

16 **Q.** And in terms of 50%, two-thirds, no magic in the
17 numbers --

18 **A.** No.

19 **Q.** -- you just had to arrive at a number --

20 **A.** We had to arrive at number and I think, reasonably,
21 people could have done two-thirds, 50% is at least the
22 majority of your income is coming from employment, seems
23 a kind of minimum bar to cross, to be calling yourself
24 self-employed or to have a scheme that's supporting you.
25 So that seemed probably the generous interpretation

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1 And that's an important thing, actually, which we should
2 come to, but people are going to opt in to saying that
3 they need this, so that is really our only kind of
4 check, you know, it's not the same as someone who is
5 putting someone on furlough. We don't know about this
6 person's circumstances, really. Are they affected by
7 the pandemic? Are they the person who is a stylist or,
8 you know, we've closed down that industry, effectively,
9 we've prohibited close contact, or are they someone who
10 is happily carrying on working? We don't know.

11 So it is right to try to target where we can to
12 minimise the fiscal impact and sharpen it a bit on those
13 who really need help.

14 The 50% criteria was designed to say, look, there's
15 lots of people who have some self-employment income but
16 what the scheme is really there for is to help the
17 people's whose life largely is dependent on
18 self-employed income, you know, who are self-employed;
19 the self-employment activity that they carry out is
20 really the main way that they and their family have
21 financial security.

22 So, you know, in that vein, saying that your
23 self-employment income had to be -- and I think the
24 advice recommended two options: either greater than 50%
25 or you could have been a bit stricter and said greater

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1 relative to 66% or two-thirds.

2 **Q.** Now, I appreciate this next question may sound like --
3 well, you could say -- you could pick anybody who is
4 a loser and put a scenario, but I just want to pick this
5 up thinking about the most vulnerable, economically
6 vulnerable. For those who, say, had a low-paid job and
7 a small pot of self-employed income on top of that, that
8 self-employed income might be what made the difference
9 between the wage that they earned in their job and being
10 able to provide for their family.

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** They would fall in the gap in the scheme, but what would
13 your reaction to that be, in terms of how you can design
14 out of that, how anyone can design out of it?

15 **A.** Well, I mean, they can't. So you will -- I'm a hundred
16 per cent sure, with everything that we did as big and as
17 comprehensive as it was, and we talked about the scale,
18 you will always be able to find individual people who,
19 for whatever reason, don't quite meet the exact criteria
20 because of their particular circumstances. It would be
21 wrong to pretend otherwise. Of course that was the
22 case.

23 But what you can then do is make sure you've got
24 lots of different types of support so that even if
25 someone doesn't get something over here, they will get

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1 picked up over here. And that's why -- we'll come on to
2 Universal Credit later this afternoon, probably the
3 person that you're describing would be eligible for
4 Universal Credit and would have benefited from the
5 changes we made there.

6 Similarly, we also provided the hardship fund to
7 local authorities, which was the most discretionary of
8 pots, which was effectively a way of saying that for
9 people who, for whatever reason, just need some extra
10 help who we have not been able to find through all these
11 dozens of things that we've set up, they can talk to
12 their local authority at a very local level and those
13 people know those families and get that extra assistance
14 from them.

15 And so that was a -- and then we topped that up
16 a couple of different times through the pandemic so
17 there was always funding there. You know, I could go
18 on. But straight away, those are two other things that
19 probably would have helped the person that you're
20 describing.

21 Q. So I think your principal point is, whilst I am in my
22 questioning focusing on one scheme at a time and looking
23 at that scheme in isolation and identifying gaps in it,
24 you would say that this is one of many schemes that
25 government was introducing and you have to look at the

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1 on those who, you know, earn less than 50K, it meant
2 that around 5% of people were ineligible. So it was
3 not, in the scheme of things, a huge number, and the
4 average income of those people was, I think, £200,000.

5 Just, again.

6 Now, that's me sitting in the Treasury looking at
7 the macro statistics. You absolutely could find someone
8 who, £50,001, I'm confident of that, but in aggregate,
9 we're talking about 4-5% of people, average income of
10 about £200,000. So that's the backdrop. So given that,
11 you know, why -- you know, also then why not a taper?
12 Look, tapers are complex. I mean, anyone who has tried
13 to sit there with that HICBC taper will tell you that
14 and in this particular instance there were two reasons
15 we didn't do it. One is, as you heard from Jim Harra,
16 the perm sec at HMRC, it would have delayed
17 implementation significantly by a matter of several
18 weeks, I think, from memory but he's been clear about
19 that, so a taper would have delayed implementation
20 because of the complexity of it.

21 And generally you do tapers because there's
22 a behavioural impact of them, and you're trying to not
23 have economic behaviour be distorted by a cliff edge,
24 and that's the rationale for doing tapers generally.

25 Now, in this instance, you know, these were, in

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1 panoply of support --

2 A. Absolutely.

3 Q. -- in different ways that was available and not just
4 look at hard edge in scheme A --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- rather than ...

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Right. Having said that, can we just pick up one other
9 hard edge, if you like, which is the other untapered
10 hard edge of the £50,000 income criteria. So earn
11 £50,001, no support. Earn £49,999, support. And in
12 particular, I'm just interested in the consideration
13 given to a taper, because there'd been a taper in the
14 high-earning child benefit.

15 A. Child benefit charge.

16 Q. And if you did consider it, why you didn't. The
17 rationale, please.

18 A. So I think first again, we're trying to target this
19 thing on those who most need it, and 50K just being
20 the -- as it was then, the threshold for higher rate
21 tax. So the first thing is, this did not mean that that
22 many people as a percentage were ineligible. I think
23 the number was 4 or 5%, so as a result of this -- I'll
24 get on to the taper question in a minute -- so as
25 a result of this bit of targeting, focusing the scheme

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1 theory, one-off payments based on an income that you had
2 earned in the past. So there was less argument that
3 this was going to have a behavioural impact and
4 therefore was worth the extra time, delay and hassle of
5 putting in a taper, especially given the -- as
6 a percentage, smaller number of people who were actually
7 impacted by it in any case.

8 Q. So a potential claimant couldn't think: well, I'll delay
9 putting in that invoice because I don't want to go over
10 the amount, because we're talking about a year past --

11 A. Well, it was a backwards-looking -- (overspeaking) -- it
12 was a backwards-looking thing. You couldn't do anything
13 about it anyway.

14 Q. No, all right.

15 I just want to pick up, I suppose, looking at this
16 the other way, the other argument, there was elements
17 that were too generous in the sense that -- and this is
18 a point that Dr Brewer picked up in his report, that you
19 could say the lack of conditionality, it being
20 a condition that you have lost income to a significant
21 extent meant that some self-employed people who didn't
22 really need the support were being given it. And that
23 got tightened up over time, didn't it, in terms of the
24 certification?

25 A. Yes. And again, I didn't see one. I'm not sure that

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1 I've seen a way that you could have done that during
2 this, for -- I mean, we had the long conversation on
3 targeting in CJRS, which I won't repeat, but there is no
4 way to do that during.

5 What we did do and could do -- because I don't
6 disagree with the premise at all, of course I'd rather
7 really focus this on people who most need it, of course
8 I would prefer to do that -- when we could, we did. And
9 you saw -- but that really took until 2021, because by
10 then, you'd had, you know, a, kind of, year of the
11 pandemic, and what you were able to do then for the last
12 two grants, I think it was, in the summer and autumn of
13 2021, you were able to say: well, you know, we had
14 a pandemic last year, you know, spring 2020 to spring
15 2021, so now we're going to separate these grants out
16 and it's going to be a function of how much your revenue
17 declined in -- or your income declined or trading
18 profits declined in the last year.

19 So, as soon as we could inject some degree of
20 targeting, we did. And I think that was sensible.
21 We -- so we had two levels of grant depending on your
22 turnover, income, or income decline.

23 Again, reasonable people would disagree,
24 potentially, on where you set those thresholds, but the
25 principle I agreed with. When we could do it, we did do

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1 And, you know, again, someone would have to model
2 that out. You know, it's not a crazy idea, and I think
3 someone would want to work through all of that to see if
4 it was feasible or practical.

5 But absent that, I haven't seen it a way you could
6 do the targeting in real -- real time in that first year
7 of the pandemic.

8 **Q.** But in terms of having a suite of policy options
9 available, if it was deliverable and there was the
10 legislative power to do it, something worth exploring
11 and at least having on the table?

12 **A.** Not an unreasonable thing to explore.

13 I think the other thing that we did do, and which
14 I thought was, probably underappreciated, was, you know,
15 kind of a good amount of behavioural economics.

16 In -- in the application forms for SEISS, there
17 was a -- you know, there was a kind of affirmation that
18 you -- which had no real legal force, but it -- you
19 know, you had to, kind of, tick something that says, you
20 know, "I have been impacted by the pandemic", and -- or
21 "My business has been impacted by the pandemic and
22 therefore would like to claim this grant", or some
23 variation of that language or -- and then it got
24 tightened up over time into something called
25 a reasonable belief test, or "I have a reasonable

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1 it. And, you know -- but I don't know how you could
2 have done that during the previous year very easily.

3 The only thing I have heard, and I think this is
4 probably something for people to think about in the
5 future, is -- and I think actually maybe Dr Brewer
6 mentioned this, was -- was whether one might want to
7 consider a clawback if turnover didn't ultimately fall
8 down. So, in that 2021 year, you could say: we're going
9 to give these SEISS grants; if it turns out next year
10 when you file your tax return that you're fine, then
11 we'll have that grant back.

12 **Q.** Claw it back through self-assessment?

13 **A.** You can claw it back through self-statement.

14 Now, I think you need some extra legal powers to do
15 that, from -- from memory. Because I think we looked at
16 it the following -- I think you need primary
17 legislation, from memory. But I -- you know, you
18 need -- I think that would require legislation.

19 There's obviously an operational complexity to
20 that -- the next year, which, you know, HMRC would be
21 best placed to answer as to how feasible that -- that
22 is. And it would obviously have a behavioural impact on
23 the margin, because people would then be figuring
24 out: well, I might not bother working because I'd rather
25 have the grant.

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1 believe that I have ...", et cetera.

2 And as I say, I don't think it had legal force but
3 it had quite a good behavioural force, that just, you
4 know, on the margin hopefully make people think: should
5 I really be claiming this? And actually, you know what,
6 interestingly -- and I was just checking the numbers
7 before today -- given that anyone could have got this
8 thing, right, there was no real way -- you know, there
9 was no reason that they shouldn't get it even if they
10 were working in reality, the first grant had an
11 application rate of -- a take-up rate of 77 per cent.
12 So, even in that first grant, with very little of
13 this -- a quarter of the people self-selected in not
14 claiming it when they could have. Then that went down
15 to 69%, 65%, 58%, and by the last grant it was 38%.

16 So, just kind of interestingly, even when people
17 were able to -- to claim -- I thought it was a good
18 affirmation of human -- human behaviour but it's
19 quite -- you know, it's quite good actually. And that
20 nudge, I'm sure, making people tick that box, you know,
21 would have contributed to -- to people actually not --
22 not taking it if they didn't really need it. Which is
23 a good thing. And those numbers tell a story of an
24 improving economy through the pandemic as well, and
25 people adjusting. But I think the nudge is worth

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1 bearing -- I would certainly recommend that in general.
 2 **Q.** Those figures may be an argument against conditionality,
 3 in the sense that, again, if you assume the general
 4 economics people want to go out and earn money and make
 5 profit, then -- and then when they can, they will?
 6 **A.** Yeah. The flip side here is that they -- they could do
 7 that and still get the grant. And that's the great
 8 challenge of this, you see. That is different to --
 9 to CJRS and the employer discussion. And that is the
 10 challenge with this scheme, is that you could do that
 11 and still claim the grant. But that's why we had the --
 12 the nudge, that you had to tick, which, in theory,
 13 should -- should help with that, and then later on --
 14 and we had the other criteria and then, obviously, when
 15 we had the revenue information -- I think we called it
 16 a financial impact test, FIT test or FID or something
 17 like that, which we introduced.
 18 **Q.** And I know this is fairly granular but I just want to
 19 pick it up briefly on the, sort of, fraud front. We
 20 understand there was an issue about being able to check
 21 across between SEISS and Universal Credit, to see if
 22 people were claiming both, and that was really a data
 23 issue?
 24 **A.** Yes, I saw that in the evidence that you supplied to me
 25 last week. I must say, it's not something

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1 they thought I'd, you know, just said "Fine",
 2 I'd then -- you know, I'd come up back to it a month
 3 later because someone had said something to me or I'd
 4 thought of some new idea or someone had pitched some new
 5 idea to me about how we might fix this issue.
 6 No, so it was not a desire not to. I mean, we spent
 7 a lot of time -- and I think, you know, HMT evidence
 8 will show that we spent a lot of time and effort trying
 9 to figure out if there was a solution here.
 10 I mean, look, in a nutshell, the ITSA system, the
 11 tax system, can't distinguish between dividends that
 12 people receive as a return on capital and dividends that
 13 people are receiving effectively as a form of labour
 14 income; right? We have no way of knowing, looking at
 15 the HMRC system, what those -- you know, dividend is
 16 dividend. It could be dividend from someone who is
 17 doing absolutely no work, as a nice equity portfolio and
 18 is clipping a dividend, and great. And over here
 19 there's somebody who is a company owner manager and that
 20 is effectively their -- their income every year. And we
 21 have no way to differentiate between those two things.
 22 And that is the challenge.

23 And we looked at all sorts of ways of trying to do
 24 it. There's a closed company director tick box on
 25 forms. We went through that. But not everyone ticks it

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1 that I recall --
 2 **Q.** Well, I won't take it any further.
 3 **A.** -- during -- as I say, during the pandemic itself.
 4 And, look, clearly if there's -- if there's a way to do
 5 some checking that would -- I don't know who would --
 6 I don't know who -- I couldn't quite tell who wanted the
 7 data. It felt like DWP wanted the data from HMRC,
 8 rather than the other way round. But it's not something
 9 that I remember being ever raised with me.
 10 **Q.** No, all right.
 11 One other particular group I just want to pick up
 12 on, just for your reflections, really, is this company
 13 owner managers. So those who essentially own companies
 14 and choose to pay themselves through dividends rather
 15 than drawing a salary, so they're receiving their income
 16 in a different way. And, I mean, really, did the
 17 decision not to do something for that group come down
 18 to, well, if they chose to manage their tax affairs in
 19 that way, that was a matter for them? Or what's your
 20 rationale?
 21 **A.** No, it's not that. We actually -- you know, much like
 22 JSS and -- as I was saying about this scheme, this was
 23 something that we kept coming back to, to look at
 24 different ways. And the team probably got tired of me
 25 going over this and over this again. And every time

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1 and not the right people that do tick it even do
 2 necessarily fill it in properly.
 3 The timing of dividends is obviously very much in
 4 the gift of the director, so it's not as predictable.
 5 And we looked at whether you could use accountants, but
 6 they still don't eliminate the need effectively for
 7 self-certification, with obviously all the fraud that
 8 comes with that.
 9 And there really was no -- no one actually knew how
 10 many people this was. So what we did know is that
 11 about 3.3 million people file tax returns that have
 12 dividend income in there, but I think, broadly, most
 13 people thought the number of company owner managers, in
 14 the classic sense of it, probably was around about
 15 700,000. And that's where you can start to see the
 16 issue. So if you just took all the dividend income and
 17 said we'll do a version of SEISS for dividend income,
 18 I think three out of every four grants that you would
 19 have handed out would have gone to people who actually
 20 dividends were just, you know, a return on their savings
 21 and not -- you know, not their labour income.

22 And that's -- and that is a very, very tricky thing
 23 to resolve.

24 I think -- I'd just say, I think your expert,
 25 Dr Brewer, looked at this and I think he agreed that it

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1 was very -- in his words, very difficult to establish
2 something, and there would be very large forward risk in
3 doing something.

4 But, you know, we did look at it multiple times,
5 believe you me, and just couldn't quite find a way
6 through.

7 Q. So this wasn't a decision not to support a group; it was
8 a decision very much that you would have looked at
9 something if you could; couldn't find a way of doing it
10 in a deliverable way that minimised unacceptable levels
11 of fraud and so on?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And by the sound of it, you've come at this every which
14 way, and there still isn't an obvious solution that
15 presents itself?

16 A. No. I don't -- I don't think that there is, really, is
17 my -- was my reflection on it.

18 Again, someone in the future might decide something
19 different. I mean, you clearly could. I mean, you
20 could clearly just look at everyone who had dividend
21 income and a tax return and send them the equivalent of
22 a SEISS grant, calibrate it. You would do that with
23 the -- three-quarters of grants by volume and -- and
24 more by pounds going to people who you were not really
25 trying to help. So I -- you could accept that, but

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1 A. Yes, that was something that weighed on me quite heavily
2 throughout the pandemic, was an understanding that young
3 people were particularly at risk, and that's because
4 they were two and a half times more likely to work in
5 the most affected sectors. And we also know that if
6 young people have a bad interaction with the labour
7 market early in their careers, if they're not able to
8 find stable work when they're young, that has an impact
9 on them for a long time to come, and it goes back to the
10 scarring that we talked about right at the beginning.

11 So, you know, I was particularly worried about this
12 cohort throughout, and, you know, obviously different
13 modules have looked at the impact on education and those
14 outcomes but, you know, even for those young people who
15 were just entering the labour market, those early years
16 are really important in getting into work habits,
17 finding good, stable employment. That sets you up for
18 life, and obviously what was happening with the pandemic
19 was disrupting that.

20 So, you know, I had that in the back of my head and
21 Kickstart was a way to target a job intervention
22 programme at that group, and try and help them make sure
23 that they have that experience of being in the labour
24 market and being in work.

25 Q. And we understand from your statement that the Treasury

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1 I don't -- to me, that would not seem like the right
2 judgement to make.

3 Q. Thank you very much.

4 I'm going to move on now from the self-employed
5 scheme into Kickstart, and just again some context.

6 Now, this was part of your plan for jobs announced
7 by the Treasury on 8 July 2020. A £2 billion fund to
8 create hundreds of thousands of high-quality six-month
9 work placement. It was aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds on
10 Universal Credit deemed to be at risk of long-term
11 unemployment. Funding covered 100% of the national
12 minimum wage for 25 hours a week, and the associated
13 employer National Insurance contributions, and the
14 employer minimum automatic enrolment contributions.

15 And in terms of assessment, the evaluation found the
16 majority of leavers at seven and ten months, that's 63%
17 and 66%, were in work, said that the skills and
18 experience they'd gained had been important in helping
19 them find work.

20 And you've spoken already, Mr Sunak, about your
21 desire to support employment and jobs in the pandemic,
22 and putting that at the forefront. This is targeting
23 young people, in particular, and trying to get them into
24 work. Was there particular significance in trying to
25 target that group of young people, 16 to 24?

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1 was particularly involved in the design of Kickstart,
2 and -- but also that you had a very keen personal
3 interest in that scheme; is that right?

4 A. Yes, I mean, I saw that. I'm not entirely sure what
5 that meant. I had a personal interest in all of these
6 things because I needed to make sure they all worked and
7 ultimately I was responsible and accountable for the
8 overall economic response. But this, as an idea
9 actually came from the TUC, and probably, you know,
10 Frances and Kate probably won't love me if I keep
11 referring to them, but we had a good, productive working
12 relationship during this period and it was something
13 that they had called for.

14 Others had called for it, as well, from memory, but
15 I distinctly remember Frances O'Grady, as she was then,
16 Baroness O'Grady now, and Kate talking about this. It
17 was modelled on something called the Future Jobs Fund,
18 which was a programme that had existed in 2008, from
19 memory, and actually, you know, I have heard it and
20 I thought, you know, that sounds good, and we should be
21 looking at something like that because of the concerns
22 I had about the impact on young people, and I mentioned
23 it to Thérèse Coffey at DWP, and as you've seen from her
24 evidence, you know, they took the idea and they led it,
25 essentially.

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1 I mean, obviously, we worked very closely together
 2 and this is a good example of that policy partnership
 3 and the cells, and we were doing things really closely
 4 together, iterating together, yeah, but they obviously
 5 had primary responsibility for delivering this scheme
 6 and we designed it together and off they went, and did
 7 it, and Mims Davies who was the junior minister at the
 8 time, took a lot of personal ownership of it, and it was
 9 a great collaboration, and I'm -- you know, I was always
 10 really, you know, lots of the things we did made
 11 a difference to people and your stories and video brings
 12 that to life, but I particularly, you know, meaning
 13 young people who because of this scheme were in a job
 14 that they may not otherwise have had and them being set
 15 up for life I thought was a particularly good and
 16 positive outcome.

17 **Q.** Now, the timing of the implementation of Kickstart, we
 18 understand it was stood up quite quickly, announced in
 19 July, and was going live in November of 2020. Was that
 20 because, at the time it was announced, the expectation
 21 was that furlough would have ended on 31 October, and
 22 therefore there may be a spike in unemployment, and
 23 there may be a lot of young people who would need help
 24 getting into jobs?

25 **A.** Yeah, exactly as you said. It was designed in the
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1 work, good that we'd got it up and running and, you
 2 know, this point about minimum viable product, the --
 3 this really is proof of the, you know, the test and
 4 learn iterative approach to policy making. And this is
 5 the thing, it's like we were saying, you know, one
 6 person's targeting is another person's hard edge.

7 That, again, people like the sound of test and learn
 8 iterative policy making, when what that means is what
 9 you put out there straight away is, by definition, not
 10 going to be perfect, most likely, but you're
 11 prioritising getting it out there. That's what the
 12 minimum viable product is. We know it's going to
 13 basically work, and we'd rather just get it out there
 14 (a) because then it can start to make a difference and
 15 we can learn as we go and adjust it as we go and do that
 16 in kind of reaction to what's happening in reality,
 17 rather than in sitting in the meeting room. And this
 18 was a good example of that type of approach to policy
 19 making.

20 Again, you know, not optimally in the end able to be
 21 executed because another lockdown got in the way, which
 22 was, as you said, frustrating.

23 **Q.** Can I pick up that point about developing as you go.
 24 I mean, it was -- the indicative target was for
 25 a quarter of a million placements. Ultimately, there
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1 context of the pandemic, and the restrictions are all
 2 winding down, the support schemes are winding down,
 3 we're going to focus now on, you know, jobs and creating
 4 new jobs and getting people into jobs, and this is one
 5 that -- an intervention that would be targeted
 6 particularly at young people.

7 **Q.** Of course, had you known what you came to find out in
 8 November, the timing suddenly looks different, come
 9 November, when we're going back into lockdown and you're
 10 extending furlough. And did you find that frustrating,
 11 really, that the scheme had been stood up very quickly
 12 and I don't -- you might know what it means, but it was
 13 described as a minimum viable product?

14 **A.** Yes.

15 **Q.** In other words, it was stood up as --

16 **A.** Yes.

17 **Q.** -- it could do what it said on the tin but it wasn't
 18 particularly well worked or long worked up?

19 **A.** No. Of all the things that were frustrating to me
 20 during this period that particular one probably was not
 21 that high on the list but, of course, it was
 22 frustrating, because it, you know, it meant that this
 23 thing was not up and running in the way that we would
 24 have imagined when we announced it.

25 You know, that said, it's good that we'd done the
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1 were 168,000 young people who had the benefit of a
 2 Kickstart place. One issue was whether the eligibility
 3 should be expanded beyond Universal Credit, and so
 4 should include young people who were receiving JSA, for
 5 example, a legacy benefit, or expanded to include people
 6 who were in receipt of a PIP, personal independence
 7 payment, disabled people.

8 If there wasn't the take-up and if you were learning
 9 as you went, do you regret not expanding it to fill the
 10 places that were envisaged and expanding its reach?

11 **A.** I can't recall the kind of micro eligibility decisions
 12 and what the exact basis for each of those was. I think
 13 part of the reason that it didn't end up -- I mean,
 14 still 150,000 young people benefited from this, and
 15 enormous credit to the team at DWP who did stand it up
 16 and deliver that because I think it made a huge
 17 difference to those young people, it was because,
 18 actually, the economic recovery was stronger than we had
 19 anticipated it would be. I don't think that should
 20 necessarily be a sign of failure of the scheme.

21 Actually, we didn't see the spike in youth unemployment
 22 that everyone had predicted when furlough ended, the
 23 economy, we know, after all the revisions happened
 24 two years later, recovered far faster during this period
 25 than initially it was given credit for, and unemployment
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1 stayed relatively low.

2 And actually, so it's because the -- we go back to
3 this point before -- the private sector, the regular
4 market function in the economy was happening, and jobs
5 were being created, and so there was less need for the
6 subsidised jobs through Kickstart in that sense.

7 You know, it was -- you know, I don't think -- you
8 know, you want to focus in on a group of people who
9 really need it, that is what it was designed to do and
10 I think it did that effectively. And again, different
11 people might have wanted to weight different things, but
12 I can't recall the individual reasons for which bits of
13 the Universal Credit system we were targeting, but
14 I think it was particularly people who had been impacted
15 by the pandemic or were at risk of being impacted by the
16 pandemic, as we'll come on to later on in the UC
17 discussion, some of these other benefits are not linked
18 to the labour market or work requirements in quite the
19 same way, or their legacy benefits where people have
20 been on for a longer period of time.

21 **Q.** Okay.

22 Just so I understand, just to finish this area and
23 then we'll be about ready for the afternoon break, the
24 Treasury had worked up the policy. You'd announced it
25 in July as part of the -- but the DWP was doing the

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1 the taxpayer money.

2 You know, that test was probably too tight at the
3 beginning and Thérèse identified where we could -- we
4 could broaden that out and just change the application
5 process so it was quicker, and I worked through that
6 with her. But her and her team did an exceptional job
7 of getting this properly rolled out and getting these --
8 these youngsters, you know, a great job that could then,
9 hopefully, set them up for life, particularly in
10 a difficult economic environment.

11 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you.

12 My Lady, that completes that topic, and I'm going to
13 move on next to the uplifts to Universal Credit and
14 Working Tax Credit. So a minute or so early, but is
15 that a convenient moment?

16 **LADY HALLETT:** I'll forgive you a minute or so.

17 **MR WRIGHT:** Thank you, my Lady. That is very kind.

18 **LADY HALLETT:** I shall return at 3.30.

19 (3.13 pm)

(A short break)

21 (3.29 pm)

22 **LADY HALLETT:** Mr Wright.

23 **MR WRIGHT:** Mr Sunak, I'd like to turn, in this final
24 session for today, to the subject of the uplift of £20
25 that was applied to Universal Credit and to Working Tax

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1 delivery, effectively; is that right?

2 **A.** No, but we worked on the policy together as well.

3 **Q.** Yes.

4 **A.** Yeah.

5 **Q.** Sorry, I didn't mean to imply they weren't involved in
6 policy --

7 **A.** Yeah.

8 **Q.** But once you'd worked up the policy, they were
9 responsible for delivering --

10 **A.** Yes, yeah, that's right.

11 Yeah, I know -- again, I know the team at the
12 Treasury were -- I -- there's probably some board that
13 was set up, I don't know how they do these things, and
14 I would have wanted to keep an eye on things as well
15 as I -- same as I did when we get on to loans tomorrow,
16 or these interventions here, you know, I would still
17 keep an interest on them and do meetings to check in on
18 progress, discuss with Thérèse Coffey. Because we had
19 to iterate. You know, we were iterating as we went. We
20 changed the application process. It was -- the top
21 criteria at the beginning was quite tight on something
22 called the additionality test, getting technical, but,
23 you know, we wanted to make sure that these jobs were
24 jobs that ideally would not have existed without the
25 support, so they were really doing something good with

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1 Credit. This was announced on 20 March 2020,
2 implemented from 6 April 2020, and then there was an
3 extension to the 12-month -- the initial 12-month uplift
4 that was formally agreed at a trilateral meeting on
5 26 February 2021, with the extension being announced on
6 3 March 2021, and the uplift ending on 6 October 2021.

7 So that's just to give some context. The idea, as
8 a starting point, that there should be an uplift to
9 those benefits, did that originate in the Treasury
10 with you?

11 **A.** I can't honestly recall. I would imagine the Treasury
12 were talking already to DWP about various things,
13 I think we'll come on to it later, the Statutory Sick
14 Pay, for example, those conversations were already
15 happening. I remember them happening quite vividly on
16 Statutory Sick Pay because there were also legislative
17 aspects of that that we needed to implement.

18 So I can't say that it necessarily came from the
19 Treasury versus DWP or some conversation between them --

20 **Q.** I know you had a lot of things crossing your desk.
21 I don't want it to be a memory test. Let me just put up
22 INQ000588230, this is the statement of Will Quince, who
23 was the minister in the DWP, paragraph 17.

24 His recollection was that a commission came from you
25 as Chancellor, on around 17 March, to the DWP to explore

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1 an increase. So it certainly seems to have been
 2 Treasury to DWP, according to Mr Quince's recollection.
 3 A. Yes, well, I'll trust Will's recollection. I was --
 4 I was obviously doing a lot at that time and asking for
 5 lots of things in lots of different areas, but I don't
 6 want to try to, you know, suggest that it was all from
 7 me not knowing exactly where it came from.
 8 Q. No, and in fairness, the evidence is slightly unclear
 9 about really who was driving the policy, and I'll just,
 10 again, just out of fairness to you, Lady Coffey said,
 11 effectively, that the overall policy was being decided
 12 by her, but that you had to sign the cheque,
 13 effectively.
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. Mr Quince recalled that the decisions were really made
 16 jointly by Lady Coffey and you, as Chancellor, so that
 17 was --
 18 A. Yeah.
 19 Q. -- how he saw it. I mean, it may not really matter but
 20 do you have a clear recollection of who was making the
 21 decision?
 22 A. I'm sure, if the former Prime Minister were sitting
 23 here, he would probably say it was actually him -- the
 24 rest of us could decide what we like, but actually the
 25 decision was left with him at the end of the day.

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1 A. Yeah.
 2 Q. So it appears at an early stage you, or the Treasury was
 3 certainly thinking about recipients of Universal Credit
 4 or Working Tax Credit. I mean, but was there,
 5 effectively, a formal strategy in terms of how you were
 6 keeping that strong eye on the most vulnerable? Or was
 7 it evolving in an iterative organic way in the same way
 8 as all the other interventions were developing? But
 9 just you were keeping them in mind?
 10 A. Well, I mean, you have to remember at this time, and,
 11 you know, 20 March, I mean, this is where every single
 12 day we were doing something, and something quite
 13 significant, and trying to tackle all the different
 14 aspects of economic policy, you know, loan guarantees
 15 over here, support for those Universal Credit. We'd
 16 already done a bunch of things in the budget for
 17 Statutory Sick Pay changes, you know, grants and
 18 business rate relief, for hospitality businesses.
 19 So I think this is a period where you were trying to
 20 just hit everything, you know, because you knew that
 21 this was going to impact everyone pretty much in the
 22 country, and so I don't think there was, quite frankly,
 23 the time to really sit there and spend a day designing
 24 some overall, you know, big strategy plan that you could
 25 work to. It was just the knowledge that we had to move

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1 I can't, I honestly can't remember. I think there
 2 was -- look, economic policy was generally driven out of
 3 the Treasury, I was driving it across the board at this
 4 moment in time. There are a few particular things about
 5 DWP policy because the Secretary of State has a legal or
 6 has a statutory role in the setting of various benefit
 7 levels and has to undertake various reviews according to
 8 statute. So from a legal perspective, he or she has to
 9 be the one that formally makes the decision,
 10 potentially. So it might be some reflection of that,
 11 which I'm sure the teams can check.

12 But look, I, as a general sense, we -- I set out
 13 those criteria at the beginning of what we were trying
 14 to achieve. I, of course, in the context of all the
 15 different things we were doing, was -- would have spoken
 16 to my team about well, you know, what do we do for those
 17 who were the most vulnerable? You know, what do some of
 18 those interventions look like? Of course, I would have
 19 said something like that and that would have led to
 20 flurries of commissions in work and then start going
 21 through options.

22 Q. Yes, I'm pleased you referenced that because I was going
 23 to pick that up actually, you know, looking, as you put
 24 it, the strong eye on the most vulnerable. This came at
 25 an early stage on any view, 17 March?

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1 incredibly quickly in all these different areas of which
 2 this was an important one, and that's why the work was
 3 being done, and this is probably exactly in parallel to
 4 the work on furlough, the work on CBILS, the work on
 5 grants. I mean, all those things were happening at
 6 exactly the same time.
 7 Q. And from your perspective, was this about alleviating
 8 economic hardship in general, or, as with all the other
 9 interventions we've discussed, was this about taking
 10 steps to minimise/alleviate economic hardship arising
 11 from the pandemic?
 12 A. The latter. The latter. And, you know, that was --
 13 none of these things are perfect, by the way, as we've
 14 discussed, but the general objective here was to support
 15 those who were the most financially disadvantaged or
 16 exposed as a direct result of the pandemic, especially
 17 those coming to Universal Credit for the first time,
 18 potentially, and, in doing that, wanting, as with
 19 previous discussions we've had, and other interventions,
 20 provide that assistance very quickly. And here in
 21 particular, the conversations we've had previously about
 22 things that are simple, universal, that can be delivered
 23 at scale and understood, had a particular benefit,
 24 because the reassurance part in this area was
 25 particularly important.

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1 Q. And so -- and I don't want to get into the background
2 politics of the welfare state and so on and so forth,
3 but from your perspective, and the reason I'm asking the
4 questions is so we can look at the objective and how it
5 was delivered, but from your perspective, this was about
6 providing support arising from the pandemic, not to
7 making changes generally in welfare provision in
8 ordinary times?

9 A. Yeah, I think that -- yes, in terms of the interventions
10 that we were designing, yes. And by -- you know, by
11 nature, as almost everything that we've spoken about
12 was -- you know, was temporary. These were temporary,
13 targeted interventions designed to deal with the
14 particular issue that we faced.

15 Q. And that's an important qualification you've just made,
16 from your perspective. When you signed off on the
17 uplift, from your perspective this was always temporary,
18 by which I mean linked to the economic emergency
19 presented by the pandemic?

20 A. Yes. And, indeed, that was the legal position as well.
21 It was not a permanent uplift. The mechanism for
22 delivering it was one that it lasted for 12 months.

23 Q. So, from your perspective, it was always going to end at
24 some point. We'll discuss the extension --

25 A. The extension, yeah.

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1 Q. And so you are making the point there again, as you did
2 with self-employed income support, it's necessary to
3 look at all changes that were made --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- not just one thing at a time?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. That's a very important point. And actually you've
9 jogged my memory, because one of the other interventions
10 that was particularly helpful for self-employed was Time
11 to Pay, which I should have mentioned in the previous
12 session we had, which was announced in the budget, but
13 this gave self-employed people and -- and businesses
14 more generally, but particularly valuable to
15 self-employed people, an ability to delay their tax
16 payments.

17 Q. Yes.

18 A. And that, that actually was taken up by lots of people.
19 We extended it. We made it particularly much more easy
20 to access, generous terms and, you know, we know it made
21 a difference to people. And it's just another example
22 of something else that was there which particularly
23 actually ended up helping those who were self-employed.

24 But your broader point is absolutely right: there
25 are so many different things going on at the same time.

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1 Q. -- but it was always going to end, and there shouldn't
2 ever have been confusion about whether it was or wasn't
3 going to end at some point, because it was
4 pandemic-related support?

5 A. Yes, yes.

6 And I think you can contrast it to something else we
7 did, which -- I'm trying to -- I think we announced at
8 the budget, which was also in the welfare system, and
9 that was a permanent change and that was a significant
10 increase to local housing allowance, the LHA, which was,
11 from memory, about a, you know, billion-pound increase
12 to the Welfare Bill, that benefited, you know, over
13 a million and a half people, and increasing the level of
14 those -- of that benefit. You know, that was
15 a permanent. It happened to come in at the same time as
16 these things, so obviously, as a marginal change, was
17 particularly beneficial during this pandemic period, but
18 there was no suggestion that that was going to be
19 unwound. That was a -- we'd made that permanent change.
20 And it started at the same time, it was incredibly
21 helpful, it was announced at the budget. That change
22 was designed to be permanent.

23 So, you know, some welfare things we did were
24 permanent. Others, like this, were deliberately
25 temporary.

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1 Q. I just want to focus initially about the objective of
2 the uplift.

3 A. Mm.

4 Q. And I preface these questions, it may seem at times that
5 there's an element of semantics, but it is important to
6 identify from your perspective what the objective was
7 because we've heard evidence from others about what they
8 thought the objective was, and I just want to establish
9 from your perspective what -- why you were doing this.
10 The way you put it in your statement, and I'll ask for
11 it to be put up on the screen so we can see it.

12 It's INQ000661483, and it's page 267 of Mr Sunak's
13 statement, please. Paragraph 1005. There we are.

14 You say:

15 "... the government's objective was to support those
16 most financially exposed or disadvantaged as a direct
17 result of the pandemic. It was determined that this was
18 best achieved through the two benefits which were both
19 means-tested benefits and available where an individual
20 suffered a reduction to their income as a result of
21 reduced hours or unemployment which created or further
22 exacerbated low income."

23 And the first point to note there is the point
24 you've made in your evidence: that this was, so far as
25 you were concerned, Mr Sunak, to support those exposed

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1 or disadvantaged as a direct as a result of the
 2 pandemic.
 3 **A.** Yes.
 4 **Q.** Now, I suppose that can mean lots of different things,
 5 because you might be disadvantaged as a result of the
 6 pandemic, or financially exposed, because the costs go
 7 up, for example. So you may not have lost any income
 8 but you may find that it costs more to be at home
 9 because you've suddenly got to pay to heat your house
 10 all day or you've got to educate your kids at home. But
 11 I don't get the impression that that's what you mean by
 12 financially exposed. Do you mean people who had lost
 13 income or employment and therefore were claiming
 14 Universal Credit, or did you mean people who generally
 15 found themselves financially impacted?
 16 **A.** I mean, this was, as you described, and it says in the
 17 bottom of the highlighted bit, this is where people had
 18 an impact on their ability to work, and that would then,
 19 either because their hours were reduced or reduced to
 20 zero or made it less hard (sic) for them to get a job,
 21 because of the various restrictions in place, and that's
 22 what this was geared to. Which is what then, you know,
 23 led to the design of this particular policy and we'll
 24 get into why we did it the way we did, and as this says,
 25 why we chose the particular basis for the uplift that we

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1 **Q.** -- benefit. But if there were additional upsides, ie
 2 that, generally speaking, all low-income households are
 3 supported by the additional money and therefore find it
 4 easier to cope with costs, or that there's an additional
 5 advantage of some element of fiscal stimulus because
 6 people have got more money to spend, then those are --
 7 they're not really trade-offs, they're sort of win-wins,
 8 they're --
 9 **A.** No. And it's not that we weren't aware of them, right.
 10 **Q.** No.
 11 **A.** Because those are not all bad things to have happen at
 12 this period either. And as I'm sure we'll hopefully
 13 have time to get into, when you look at the various
 14 measures of household income, disposable income,
 15 inequality, poverty, deprivation, et cetera; all those
 16 things in general either were constant or improved in
 17 many cases compared to the pre-pandemic years. So
 18 clearly this did have the benefit of more generally
 19 supporting lots of vulnerable people, which was
 20 something that we obviously knew going into it that it
 21 would do.
 22 **Q.** Yes.
 23 **A.** So it was nice that it was able to do both things.
 24 **Q.** I mean, I don't want to jump ahead but you've made
 25 a very valid point there about those figures, and we've

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1 did, because it's, as we'll get into, linked to those
 2 employment outcomes and that work, and targeting people
 3 for whom -- people for whom earnings are a significant
 4 proportion of their overall income. And because it's
 5 that income that is facing the biggest change because of
 6 the pandemic, and the fact that it was shutting down the
 7 economy and therefore people couldn't work, or couldn't
 8 find a job, or had their hours reduced, and that was the
 9 bit that it was trying to get at.

10 That said, a general increase in the standard
 11 allowance, you know, does just have the obvious benefit
 12 of, in general, putting more money into the welfare
 13 system in a very broad-based way, it has a macroeconomic
 14 benefit of being a pretty effective fiscal stimulus in
 15 normal times because the multiplier on that type of
 16 spending is typically very high. So, you know, there
 17 are other benefits or consequences of doing that that
 18 have a more general application, but this is what we
 19 were trying to get at, by doing it.

20 **Q.** Right. So the objective was to support incomes of those
 21 who had either lost their job or seen a decline in
 22 income as a direct result of the pandemic. That's why
 23 it's focused on Universal Credit, which is
 24 a work-related --

25 **A.** Related, yes.

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1 heard about those statistics in the module, but
 2 I suppose, again, it left you, as Chancellor, in
 3 a position where ultimately you'd have a hard political
 4 choice about not making it permanent. You were giving,
 5 in these times of crisis, but, from your perspective,
 6 you always knew you were going to have to take away
 7 again?

8 **A.** Mm.

9 **Q.** Which would have that negative effect on those
 10 households?

11 **A.** Yes, although at that point that the temporary support
 12 ended, by definition, we were trying to time that with
 13 the removal of all the things that had created the
 14 negative shock in the first place. So we were just back
 15 to a status quo ante, in some sense. So, you know,
 16 shock comes. Right that we put support in to help
 17 people through the shock, and when you remove the shock
 18 -- and obviously there's a, you know, ramp-up, which we
 19 went into previously, but in general, if we've gone back
 20 to a status quo ante world, where that shock isn't
 21 there, we're not closing businesses down, people can
 22 work, everything is opening and recovering, then it's
 23 not unreasonable for -- in a general sense, for policy
 24 to return back to where it was, not least because, as
 25 we've discussed at the beginning, and you just alluded

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1 to, you know, all of these things have a fiscal cost.

2 And, you know, it was my job to make sure that we
3 could manage that. And obviously that has an impact on
4 future taxes, which I had to deal with, and that, you
5 know, the -- I don't think anyone wants to, you know,
6 pay a great deal more tax. And in the back of your
7 head -- and there's a limit to how much we can borrow.
8 So all of these things are reasonable things for people
9 to think about as things returned to normal.

10 **Q.** I don't want to get into sort of the raw politics of it
11 and what lies behind the welfare system, but your
12 position, as you said earlier, you're a fiscal
13 conservative, and your view was: we'll give the support
14 while the pandemic was there; when it ends it will be
15 withdrawn because it's there to support during the
16 pandemic, and we return to normal state.
17 **A.** That's very much my approach. And that is what we did,
18 I think, across the suite of interventions. You know,
19 whether it's CJRS, SEISS, we'll get on to loans and
20 grants tomorrow. But actually, here, actually slightly
21 kind of different to all the others, where there are no
22 real legacies of the pandemic intervention, this is the
23 one area where there actually is, in a sense,
24 a permanent change. And that was because -- we're
25 jumping ahead to the ending of this but, you know,

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1 **Q.** And again, not getting into the sort of the politics of
2 this, but this aligns with what you said earlier about
3 believing in supporting people through jobs and work and
4 employment, and providing support in that way?

5 **A.** Yes, and I -- particularly as the economy was open and
6 growing, and my general view is -- and actually, the
7 Prime Minister's view, at the end of the day, it was
8 also the Prime Minister's view, and I believed it, and
9 the Prime Minister at the time believed it, and
10 I believe it now, actually supporting people into work
11 and giving people the security and dignity of a good job
12 and then allowing them to keep far more of their
13 hard-earned money rather than the state taking it in
14 taxes is in general a good thing, and the kind of
15 effective tax rate for people who are moving off
16 Universal Credit into work was quite high. I think it
17 was 60% or higher.

18 Think about that as a marginal tax rate and it's
19 quite high, and what I was able to do at the end is
20 reduce that somewhat, quite meaningfully, which again,
21 supports an objective of helping people into work, which
22 is long term the best route to financial security for
23 them and help them, you know -- well, help them keep
24 more of their money, move into work, provide financial
25 security and resilience for them and their families and

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1 whilst the temporary uplift in Universal Credit ended,
2 you know, what I did at the end was permanently change
3 the way the welfare and tax system interact by changing
4 what's called the UC taper rate. And what that does is
5 essentially reduce the rate at which your benefits are
6 withdrawn as you earn more money.

7 So, in effect, it effectively acts like a tax cut
8 for those who were moving into more work from welfare.
9 And that's -- as I said, that's something that lots of
10 people had called for.

11 I thought that was a sensible thing to do as
12 a permanent change to our tax and welfare system.
13 Obviously it costs money. That was a decision I made.
14 I think it cost £2 billion or something. And from
15 memory at the time it helped 2 million people.

16 And that was -- as I said, unlike all the others in
17 this area, there was a permanent change to the area of
18 policy. It was not the same as a permanent uplift in
19 Universal Credit but it was a change to the
20 Universal Credit system, but done in a way that
21 particularly increased, you know, the incentive and
22 therefore the reward for people who were moving into
23 employment from welfare and making sure that they could
24 keep more of the money that they were earning, which
25 I thought was a good, sensible thing to do.

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1 also hopefully have an impact on reducing poverty levels
2 as well.

3 **Q.** Well, I think we've dealt with, from your perspective,
4 the policy objective. It seems to have been clear,
5 a temporary measure, aimed at the pandemic, will be
6 withdrawn at the end, and then you've talked about the
7 other changes you made.

8 Can I pick up, then, against that background with
9 the fact that the uplift -- a decision was made that the
10 uplift would not apply to legacy benefit claimants. So
11 it would only apply to Working Tax Credits or Universal
12 Credit. And can you help us, from your perspective, why
13 that decision was made? Was it made for operational
14 reasons? We've heard a lot about the old IT system and
15 it took five months, I think, it was said, to plumb in
16 every year any changes in the levels of benefit and the
17 whole thing would fall over, or was it taken not to
18 apply it to legacy benefits because that would be
19 inconsistent with the overall objective, as you've
20 identified it, of the uplift, ie to compensate those who
21 were newly unemployed or seen a reduction because of the
22 pandemic?

23 **A.** I think, first and foremost, it just simply wasn't
24 possible, operationally. I think as a, you know, again,
25 I can't remember the exact conversations at the time,

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1 and we should get into -- it also would not have as
 2 clearly supported the policy objective, but in a sense,
 3 we can have that academic, you know, discussion and go
 4 through why, but it just simply, operationally, was not
 5 doable. And I think you've got evidence from the
 6 officials at DWP, and the bit that stood out to me which
 7 I remember -- I mean, you know, the whole point about
 8 Universal Credit was it is this new system. The old
 9 system is very creaky, very old, and it's simply not
 10 possible, as one of them said -- I forget whether it was
 11 a DG at DWP or the director of Universal Credit --

12 Q. I think it was Neil Couling at -- (overspeaking) --

13 A. Yes, you had two different ones, but I think one of them
 14 said it is just simply not possible to digitally uprate
 15 mid-year, but I think the bit that stood with me from
 16 Neil is where he said the risk of system failure was too
 17 great to go ahead with a change, that was the advice at
 18 the time. And the risk -- there was a risk that
 19 benefits just stopped altogether.

20 So that, you know, that's from the people and, you
 21 know, I'm not the one on the front line of grappling
 22 with these things and I haven't worked in that
 23 department, but the very strong opinion of all the
 24 people who have to do this and make sure everyone on
 25 those systems gets the support that they're entitled to,

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1 say, "Fine, it will delay all these other things" or "It
 2 will mean we can do it, it will take two months." There
 3 was none -- of those, I don't think, that we've
 4 discussed were "The whole thing will collapse", or "It's
 5 just simply not possible." This was in that category,
 6 and I think that was a consistent view from the
 7 ministers who were there, Will Quince, and Thérèse
 8 Coffey, I think agreed with that view. Obviously, they
 9 were best placed, not me, to diligence that view. But
 10 that was very much the consistent view across DWP
 11 amongst the officials and the ministers. And --

12 Q. And what about -- sorry.

13 A. That's a helpful distinction that you've made between
 14 some of the HMRC operational things which were, as I've
 15 said, as you've highlighted rightly, are different.

16 Q. Yes. Sorry, I didn't mean to talk across you.

17 A. No, no, no, no, sorry --

18 Q. And so far as the policy debate, if you like, about
 19 whether providing the uplift to claimants of legacy
 20 benefits was consistent with the policy, where did you
 21 stand on that?

22 A. Yeah, I think, as I've said, it's important that this is
 23 a theoretical debate, because it, in any case --

24 Q. Couldn't be done --

25 A. -- it was not doable, but I think from a policy

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1 were all saying that this simply isn't possible, and you
 2 risk trying to do anything here, and the whole thing
 3 might just collapse entirely.

4 So first and foremost, I just think that they were
 5 so unequivocal about that, that -- and we should get
 6 into the policy discussion in a second, and I'm very
 7 happy to have that, but I think I just would be -- there
 8 was no ambiguity. It wasn't "Well, if you're happy to
 9 take some risk maybe it's fine, and use your risk
 10 judgement." It was pretty binary. It was "You cannot
 11 do this, it won't work, we can't do it. If you try and
 12 make it happen, the thing will most likely just
 13 completely collapse."

14 That was very much my recollection of it at the time
 15 and re-reading the evidence from everyone and the
 16 advice, that kind of aligns with my memory of it.

17 Q. So this goes further than, for example, the discussion
 18 we were having earlier about HMRC --

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. -- and the pressures they were under? That was
 21 operational pressure, but this was actually a stark
 22 warning that the whole thing would fall over?

23 A. Yes, yes, I think, actually, it's a helpful distinction.

24 There were things, as we were saying with Jim, he could
 25 do a workaround, he could do a manual thing and he would

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1 perspective, there's a number of reasons why targeting
 2 these legacy benefits was, you know, was not in keeping
 3 with the main policy objective. I mean, first and
 4 foremost, was that the majority of the claimants, you
 5 know, for example on Employment and Support Allowance,
 6 you know, were not required to carry out work or they
 7 didn't have work requirements built into their
 8 eligibility. So by definition, the -- you know, you
 9 might suffer a drop in income or not be able to get any
 10 income, it was irrelevant to your benefit eligibility
 11 and what you would receive, and I think child tax
 12 credits, by definition, were not working enough to
 13 qualify for Working Tax Credits, again. So that would
 14 be in that category.

15 I think your expert, Dr Brewer, talked about some of
 16 the other legacy benefits in there, and I think maybe
 17 Carer's Allowance and PIP, but just please bear with me
 18 because my memory of each precise benefit at the time
 19 might not be precise but I think he also said, look,
 20 many of those legacy benefits were not, you know, were
 21 not designed to provide income protection and when
 22 people lost hours or work that, you know, they were
 23 there regardless of that, which is why they didn't meet
 24 the policy objective.

25 And that I think is first and foremost the reason.

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1 I think secondly, because, by definition, they were
2 legacy benefits, and they were quite old, anyone who was
3 new to the welfare system, and therefore directly
4 impacted by the pandemic in that sense, would be on the
5 Universal Credit system. They wouldn't be on the --
6 they wouldn't be going onto these legacy benefits.
7 Right? The people on these systems would have been
8 there for a while, whereas anyone newly affected by the
9 pandemic would go on to Universal Credit. They wouldn't
10 come to these benefits, so you wouldn't be capturing
11 anyone directly newly affected who's moved onto welfare.

12 And then probably the last couple of things are, it
13 was always possible for people, if they wanted to, to
14 move onto Universal Credit if they, you know, if they so
15 chose. Now, you know, people will say well, they might
16 be worse off, and for some people, that might have been
17 true, for sure. But I think the numbers at the time
18 were, for the vast majority -- maybe as much as 70%,
19 I think, as someone has put in the evidence -- it would
20 have been actually financially better off had they made
21 the move.

22 Now, that was never an explicit policy objective of
23 any of this, but it was just something to know, that for
24 at least 70% of people on legacy benefits would be
25 better off going on to UC anyway, so that was available

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1 people in particular?

2 **A.** Well, I think we -- there was some gateway that had
3 prevented, previously, disability claimants from
4 transitioning onto UC. That was removed at some point.
5 So that, again, for those group of legacy benefits would
6 enable them to move onto UC. And then, you know, so,
7 more broadly, it goes back to what we're trying to
8 achieve, because those benefits hadn't changed, and for
9 those people who would -- were not working and would not
10 have seen a change to their incomes as a result --
11 because my memory of what the benefits that they
12 received was designed to do was to support them with
13 living costs. So it's a totally different benefit. And
14 so that's why the policy objectives are slightly
15 different.

16 And obviously there was a regular increase in those
17 benefits, as I said, because the uplift happened at that
18 budget and then came into force in April as it was.

19 **Q.** I turn this argument on its head and look at it the
20 other way in terms of applying the uplift to Universal
21 Credit, to all Universal Credit claimants. Looking at
22 the other way, with public money in mind, did it mean
23 that some people were getting an uplift that they were
24 not intended to receive, if it was intended to be
25 applied to those who were new claimants and/or had seen

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1 for them.

2 And maybe -- I mean, lastly I think in the budget,
3 not that this was particularly relevant, but it -- for
4 this conversation, but it's just context, legacy
5 benefits had been frozen, from memory, for four,
6 five years, and the spring budget, that budget
7 that I did in 2020, I think we uprated them in line with
8 inflation and removed the benefits freeze, so they were
9 actually getting an uplift for the first time in some
10 time as compared to the last few years as well.

11 So those were a range of reasons why it didn't, as
12 I said, fully align with the policy objective, or there
13 was a mitigation that was in place that may have helped.

14 **Q.** Well, thank you for that full answer, but -- so it comes
15 back to this: you couldn't do it anyway, even if you'd
16 want to, but if you had been able to, operationally,
17 those were all reasons why it didn't align with the --

18 **A.** Yeah.

19 **Q.** -- policy objective?

20 Thinking about the most vulnerable, economically and
21 otherwise vulnerable, do you accept the counterpoint
22 that, particularly those in receipt of disability
23 benefits, PIP payments and others, that by not applying
24 the uplift to legacy benefits, they were
25 disproportionately going to be impacted? Disabled

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1 a drop in income? In other words, those that had been
2 claiming Universal Credit for some time.

3 **A.** By -- and obviously by definition, yes -- I mean yes.
4 You know, the same as we've discussed in all of these
5 things. That's the downside in universality.

6 **Q.** Was there a way of avoiding that, though, and targeting,
7 therefore, only new claimants? The reason I ask is, if
8 the objective is to support people who have lost their
9 income because they've lost their job, and therefore
10 they're having to have recourse to benefit, if you could
11 have only helped those people you might have been able
12 to help them proportionately more?

13 **A.** But you have to remember it's not as simple as that,
14 because as well as brand new people coming onto the
15 system, there's also people who were already on the
16 system whose hours are reduced as a result of the
17 pandemic that would still fall into that same category.
18 And then -- so then you would have to capture those
19 people, as you rightly should, and then you're into
20 a question of, well, whose hours are being reduced
21 because of the pandemic, whose hours are reduced because
22 they're doing something themselves? Or whatever it is.
23 So you quite quickly end up in, I think, probably an
24 uneasy place to start differentiating between all these
25 people.

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1 And my understanding, again, is that -- and it's in
2 the evidence -- and I think you heard this from Will --
3 it goes back to the operational complexity.

4 Again, we sit here now and it was all fine.
5 Universal Credit saw something like a 3 million, you
6 know, increase in claims. I mean, a more than doubling
7 of claims to Universal Credit in a matter of weeks.
8 Let's be clear, if that had happened before Universal
9 Credit, the system would have fallen down. Right? So
10 all the people, as before -- and I can't take any credit
11 for that -- all the people who preceded me who designed
12 that system, implemented that system, probably with lots
13 of people telling them it was a waste of time or they
14 were doing something wrong, they all deserve an enormous
15 amount of praise, because had we not had the brand new
16 Universal Credit system and had it embedded for the
17 years that we had before the pandemic came along, it
18 would have been awful for millions of incredibly
19 vulnerable people. The old system would have just not
20 coped at all with that volume of new claimants coming to
21 it.

22 So we were also conscious of that. You know,
23 there's -- we needed to make sure that whatever we did
24 was operationally going to be deliverable and not
25 collapse, particularly because we're dealing with really

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1 vulnerable group of people and provide those broader
2 benefits that we talked about, you know, I thought it
3 was a sensible and right policy to pursue.
4 Q. So we're seeing the same sort of problems across all of
5 the three big, simple interventions, if you like: Job
6 Retention Scheme, self-employed scheme, uplift, which is
7 that targeting sounds great but when you start to try
8 and do it, you either have hard edges, cliff edges that
9 leave lots of people shouting "What about me?", or it
10 becomes operationally impossible?

11 A. Yes, and -- or then -- and undermines the benefit you
12 get from a simple message that everyone can understand
13 and take some confidence and reassurance from. And
14 look, I would say, just because people, you know, shout
15 at you and get upset at you is not a reason not to do
16 it, right? Like, we're in the business of -- well, at
17 least I certainly -- you try and be in the business of
18 trying to do the right thing for the country, and it's
19 not always easy, and people do get upset with you and
20 you like them to, you know, generally come along with
21 you on the journey but sometimes they don't, but that's
22 life. But I did that on the self-employment scheme and
23 did get all that criticism, but I just thought it was
24 the right thing to do, and was happy to justify it. And
25 similarly, when I had that budget in spring '21 and, you

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1 vulnerable people who need this support in a timely
2 fashion. And that's what also pushed us towards the
3 simplicity of a flat rate change to the standard
4 allowance without any microtargeting beyond that.
5 Because there's multiple different versions of what you
6 just said, Mr Wright. You know, you could vary the
7 amount for different groups of people, you could target
8 these people over here who are new, but not everyone
9 before. There's all sorts of targeting you could have
10 done. But -- and I think the -- again, from the
11 official, he said, you know, this avoided, obviously,
12 the complications, and the director of UC has put in
13 evidence that they simply don't believe the department
14 could have implemented a more targeted approach in the
15 desired timeframe, and I think Will Quince in his
16 evidence specifically says it just -- you know, that
17 talk of targeting fails to appreciate the pace of events
18 and the complexity of the systems and the high risk of
19 inequity that this could create.

20 So, you know, is a flat rate universal standard
21 allowance increase perfectly targeted? Of course it
22 isn't, but for delivering what we needed it to do, being
23 able to be done without collapsing the system, and to be
24 able to be communicated very simply with that
25 universality to provide a broader reassurance to a very

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1 know, raised taxes to start paying back this money,
2 again, I did it because it was the right thing to do.
3 And of course people were upset about that.

4 So, you know, just that in and of itself is not
5 a great reason, but let's be honest, you know, we're
6 talking about politics and people are responsive to
7 public opinion, so we should be conscious about that
8 and, you know, recommendations and other things, have to
9 be, I think, realistic about what is possible and what
10 is not, and it also goes to what you were saying before:
11 it is not as easy to withdraw these things, you know,
12 it's all very well putting them in place, you know, when
13 you say, "Okay, that temporary thing is finished and now
14 we're not going to do this anymore and now you have to
15 start paying it back", it's not as if everyone says,
16 "Ooh, you know what? You did tell us that and it's all
17 fine"? Of course, they don't, right, and you wish it
18 were so.

19 But that said, on this particular thing, I actually
20 think there wasn't an appropriate targeting that could
21 have been done. It wasn't that people would have been
22 upset with me or not, I just didn't think it was the
23 right thing to do for what this intervention was, or it
24 would have risked an enormous amount of complexity which
25 would then have undermined the policy objective.

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1 Q. I'm going to come on now to look at the extension,
2 because --
3 A. Yes. Just before that, Mr Wright, I just want to finish
4 off on legacy because obviously we're forward looking as
5 well, I know obviously, my Lady, you will want to think
6 about forward, this debate on the legacy, in any case,
7 is one where it is firmly in the rearview mirror because
8 the transition, I think will be completed by next
9 spring, from memory. So, you know, this is one where,
10 you know, look, I did what I did and together with the
11 other ministers will take responsibility and
12 accountability for that.

13 It wasn't possible in any case, so I don't think
14 there's, you know -- having said there's an academic
15 discussion, but this, thankfully, won't be relevant in
16 the future, if it ever comes up again, because everyone
17 will be on the Universal Credit system.

18 Q. Yes, with its enhanced IT capability --

19 A. Which -- and we now know it can cope with something that
20 is -- as I said -- I'm glad I've remembered that,
21 because I really would say all the people who did that
22 deserve a lot of thanks, because it was -- I think it
23 went from 2.5 million claimants to 5.7, 5.8, in a matter
24 of weeks. You know (unclear) this is -- going back to
25 our previous thing, we've got 3 million people claiming

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1 There was some disagreement, wasn't there, between
2 DWP and the Treasury as to how (a) whether there should
3 be an extension, (b) if there was an extension, how it
4 should be configured, the Secretary of State for DWP was
5 arguing for splitting it, reducing the -- one part to
6 £10 then £10 for a child. Or -- also you were exploring
7 the possibility of a one-off lump-sum payment as an
8 alternative.

9 So can you, from your perspective, explain to us
10 where you sat with, first of all, whether there should
11 be an extension, initially, and then how that should be
12 delivered: whether a lump sum or retaining a flat rate?

13 A. Yes, so I think probably -- I think this is actually
14 a good example of Cabinet decision making, working quite
15 well, I think, actually. There was completely
16 good-natured constructive discussions between Thérèse,
17 me, and the then Prime Minister, about this issue, lots
18 of good meetings, lots of going through the options. To
19 your point earlier, everyone working from the same set
20 of shared facts, figures, analysis, from DWP and HMT
21 about the options. I think the thinking evolved, we
22 started discussing this probably in the autumn and
23 obviously the health situation then was changing, but
24 between then and when we ended up making the final
25 decisions going into the spring budget.

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1 for SEISS, we've got a million businesses, 10 million
2 people at HMRC, we've got an extra, you know, 3-plus
3 million people accessing the Universal Credit system.
4 These are huge numbers that we're talking about, and
5 happening in days and weeks.

6 Q. Did that also feed into your assessment as to whether to
7 provide a flat rate or to change the rate depending on
8 the composition of households?

9 A. -- (overspeaking) --

10 Q. Because that was certainly discussed.

11 A. And the decision, and again, I think we'd do the same
12 again, was the flat rate, for all the reasons we've just
13 discussed, did exactly what we needed it to do.

14 Q. Simple, easy to communicate, and easy to stand up?

15 A. And deliverable.

16 Q. So when it came to the extension of the uplift, I mean,
17 these benefits were uprated for a year, until 2021.

18 That's the endpoint, unless something is done. It's not
19 a question of withdrawing it; it's just it's been
20 a one-year uprating?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. But there became a discussion about the extension, and
23 the discussion presumably became necessary because of
24 the health position in the nation and restrictions
25 continuing, and so on and so forth.

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1 So I think my thinking may well have evolved during
2 that period.

3 And I think where we ended up was what I, you know,
4 I think was, again, why did we do it? It aligned with
5 the other things we were doing. You know, we're going
6 to go through all the different interventions. They
7 broadly align -- or the economic interventions, if you
8 look at how they were all phased out, they all broadly
9 align with the health restrictions phasing out. If you
10 put a chart up, we had it in one of the bits of
11 evidence, you know, we thought about it across the
12 piece, the loan schemes, the grants, SEISS, or the last
13 SEISS grant, CJRS, Universal Credit, it wasn't as if one
14 thing was ending here, one thing was ending there, one
15 thing was ending there. They were all, actually, if you
16 look at them, being done in a pretty consistent and
17 coherent manner, and again, all of that was driven by
18 the changing health picture.

19 So, you know, this ending at the end of September at
20 the same time that SEISS ended, that CJRS ended, that
21 the grants ended, again, you will see a kind of
22 similarity amongst all of these things. So that's kind
23 of where we settled on.

24 I think it's not unfair that there's a bit of
25 disagreement about the -- about that, you know, the

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1 Secretary of State for Work and Pensions arguing for,
2 you know, more money for the welfare system, it was ever
3 thus, and I'm sure it will always be ever thus in
4 general.

5 Q. Can I pick that point up? I mean, Mr Quince was quite
6 candid in his evidence about this in that he took the
7 view, well, we've got the money in the system now, let's
8 try and make it permanent, really, let's try and land it
9 permanently.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Now, this is, would you say, you going back to your
12 ordinary state as Chancellor of the Exchequer, which is
13 a responsibility to overall government spending and
14 budgets, and was this the point at which you'd been
15 looking at this as an economic intervention related to
16 the pandemic. That's how it had come in. That's still
17 how you were looking at it, but the DWP was moving on to
18 thinking about it in terms of: can we bank this going
19 forward?

20 A. I think, Will, if you asked him, would probably not
21 disagree with your characterisation of it. And I think
22 if you look at his evidence, you know, I think he said,
23 "I can't say I disagree with the final decision made by
24 the Chancellor, competing fiscal priorities, complex
25 trade-offs", you know, totally reasonable for him to

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1 have the choice on Universal Credit, which I can't
2 remember, we clearly decided to do it six months.

3 And so that was -- you know, that's where we
4 settled. And, as I said, I think it was entirely
5 reasonable, given everything else we were doing. And
6 then, as we discussed earlier, what happened at the end
7 of that was a permanent change to the Universal Credit
8 system, which made it more generous for, as people moved
9 into employment and worked, and essentially, as I said,
10 reduced the tax rate on them for working more.

11 Q. Can I just pick up the point about lump sum payments in
12 the context of legacy benefits.

13 Accepting what you've said about, for operational
14 reasons, you just couldn't deliver the uplift to legacy
15 benefits, we have now moved on quite a long time in the
16 pandemic by the time of the extension. Had other work
17 been done to see whether it would be -- or an uplift to
18 legacy benefits would be deliverable, payable by a lump
19 sum, if the policy objective had shifted, so that you
20 could do something about that?

21 A. I can't recall. I do -- I remember early in the
22 pandemic, it was certainly the case -- and I think
23 you've had evidence on this point -- that it
24 certainly -- it simply wasn't possible to do one-off
25 payments for legacy benefits. I think the quote in the

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1 make the case, and at the end of the day, you know, the
2 Secretary of State, myself, the PM, we sat through,
3 actually, very constructively went through the options,
4 settled on the extension, the one-off payment was for
5 Working Tax Credits because it could only operationally
6 be done that way, the way that that system worked. It
7 was either a one-off payment or 12 months, from memory.

8 There's a -- there's a debate amongst the people
9 that spent time on this about one-off, whether large
10 lump-sum payments are necessarily great or not great for
11 people.

12 Q. Just jumping in there, I think the Treasury was really
13 saying to the DWP -- you were pointing out to them
14 there's actually some evidence the other way, that
15 people cope perfectly well with lump-sum payments?

16 A. I think, you know, there's a reasonable debate about
17 that amongst people. In the end I'm not sure it was
18 ever -- whether it was possible or not for Universal
19 Credit. I don't know. It might have been. But it was
20 also -- we did do the six months. I think that's fine.
21 Working Tax Credits, it had to be done in that way,
22 because the system is not able to do six months' worth
23 of payments. So we did it that way for Working Tax
24 Credits, operate -- it was an operationally-driven
25 decision rather than a policy decision. And if we did

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1 evidence is, you know, they'd never tested the emergency
2 payments system at that scale, and that they would need
3 at least six months to go through all of that.

4 And I don't recall, you know, when all that work
5 started. Given all the other demands on DWP's time,
6 that -- I'm not sure where that was. Thankfully, it was
7 in place by the time of, you know, spring 2022, when we
8 were responding to the energy bill shock, and we were
9 able to use that emergency payment system that had, at
10 that point, been improved or whatever it was that needed
11 to happen to it so we could use it to deliver effective
12 lump-sum payments.

13 So, again, in terms of the future, that has now been
14 done, but I think legacy payments in the future won't be
15 an issue, so --

16 Q. Because everyone will be on Universal Credit --

17 A. On Universal Credit anyway. But in any case, it had
18 been done by spring 2022, which was good, because we
19 used it to respond to the energy shock.

20 Q. I'm sorry to get into what you might consider to be the
21 weeds of details at 4.20, but just on the -- when the
22 decision to uplift was actually made, I just wonder if
23 you can help us with this. There seemed to be a few
24 meetings, key meetings, in February of 2021. There was
25 one on 4 February where the Secretary of State, the

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1 Prime Minister and yourself had a trilateral. You had
2 a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister on
3 8 February where we know that Universal Credit was
4 discussed, and you say in your statement you agreed to
5 proceed on 17 February 2021.

6 And then there's a further trilateral meeting
7 on 26 February.

8 Can you help us at all with, if you -- I mean, your
9 statement says 17 February you agreed to proceed. Was
10 it likely at the bilateral with the Prime Minister on
11 8 February, do you think, or was it a sort of continuing
12 dialogue?

13 A. I honestly can't remember, but the budget was on
14 3 March, and it was announced at the budget. And this
15 is something that -- everyone is a bit more intimately
16 familiar with OBR processes now, but that was
17 something -- you know, is the kind of thing that you
18 would need to have communicated to the OBR, you know,
19 some period of time before 3 March, maybe. And I tended
20 not to do things last minute, so that, I would imagine,
21 would have been towards the end of February, maybe the
22 20th or something.

23 So that feels about right to me, but I can't
24 honestly remember beyond what I've put in my statement
25 as to where it was.

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1 point. And, again, it's the same as all of the
2 interventions. You know, we'll go over the others
3 tomorrow, but all the ones we've been through today all
4 had a -- and most of it was all announced at the spring
5 budget, you know, in that -- 3 March, where there were
6 roadmaps for CJRS, for SEISS, business grants,
7 et cetera, Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit. All of
8 that was announced: here's the plan, here's the exit
9 roadmap from the pandemic, here's how the economic
10 support is going to taper off over the next six months.

11 And look, there's always people who would want to
12 create and lobby and create news and talk to people to
13 try to get energy around the idea it should be extended.
14 Of course that's going to happen, but I guess the person
15 who's doing that job, whether it was me then or someone
16 in the future, they can't stop people from agitating or
17 lobbying for it to be made permanent and suggesting
18 there are reasons it should be. That's always going to
19 happen. And I would have been consistent, I would
20 imagine throughout the -- you know, we'd set out a set
21 of taperings or finality to these schemes, and that's
22 what we're doing.

23 Q. Yeah. We understand that the DWP itself didn't do any
24 monitoring or evaluation of the uplift in terms of that
25 very narrow intended target group. I accept the wider

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1 But, look, the Prime Minister was intimately
2 involved in all of this, and, you know, would have
3 signed off on the final decisions, as he would because
4 of -- all the budget decisions he would go through with
5 me and sign off on them, and this was something that
6 he'd had the meetings with Thérèse and me on and
7 ultimately took the final decision.

8 Q. In terms of, then, the uplift ending -- and again, it
9 wasn't that a decision was taken to end it; it was just
10 that it had been extended --

11 A. Mm.

12 Q. -- and so it then came to its end, and that's probably
13 the right way of looking at it.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. It's not a new decision not to end it. But looking
16 back, and you having been very clear about what your
17 objectives were and why you were doing this, and
18 accepting that the DWP, in terms of extension, were
19 pushing to try to land it permanently, as a -- do you
20 think that public communication could have been clearer,
21 should have been clearer, that -- from the very outset:
22 "Don't get used to this", putting it bluntly, "This is
23 a temporary measure. That's all it's ever going to be"?

24 A. Look, I can't recall each individual instance that I was
25 asked. I can't imagine that I was ambiguous on that

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1 point you've made about, if you like, the unintended
2 benefits to everybody who received it, in terms of
3 poverty and living standards and so on. But in terms of
4 its actual economic objective, of cushioning the blow of
5 those who lost their jobs or lost income, are you aware
6 of whether the Treasury did any evaluation or not? And
7 if not, isn't that important, if you're spending money
8 in that way, to evaluate it?

9 A. Yes, I mean, we -- look, we do know a range of things,
10 and I think it's worth, just in the time we have,
11 because this was something that, as I said at the
12 beginning, was an objective of mine: to support the most
13 vulnerable. And I'm proud of what the government did,
14 and everyone who worked on this achieved. And like
15 everything, nothing is perfect. But I think you've
16 heard evidence from lots of people, including the expert
17 witnesses, you know, who have been clear that, you know,
18 what we did made a considerable difference to those
19 low-income households, so much so that, you know,
20 according to Dr Brewer, you know, deprivation and
21 poverty didn't actually seem to increase during this
22 period, given -- which is surprising, given the economic
23 turmoil, and actually the official data shows that the
24 number of -- the proportion of households living in
25 relative poverty actually fell from 22% to 20% during

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1 this period of time.

2 The number of children in poverty fell, according to
3 the Child Poverty Action Group, and some of the academic
4 research that has been done by Blundell and others
5 showed that income inequality fell during the pandemic.
6 And then DWP do do a survey, the HBAI survey, the
7 Households Below Average Income survey, and we have some
8 data from that which shows that the proportion of people
9 facing food insecurity was lower in this pandemic year
10 than it was the year before. Disposable incomes of the
11 poorest fifth were higher and, actually, material
12 deprivation, because we've talked about costs previously
13 as well, were lower.

14 So even if there wasn't a formal DWP evaluation
15 done, which is obviously a question for them and maybe
16 it can be done, there's an enormous amount of official
17 data, academic research, survey data and the Treasury
18 published distribution analysis at all the events
19 showing all these things that I've described,
20 demonstrating that in aggregate, the policy objectives
21 supporting the most vulnerable people in society, you
22 know, by and large, did a good job of delivering on
23 that, and all of the data that I've just been through
24 would demonstrate that.

25 And again, of course it's not perfect, but -- and
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1 that's why we had the Hardship Fund, you know, which
2 would pick up anyone who was really in need, the local
3 housing authority uplift we talked about, and others,
4 but, you know, by and large, these interventions
5 targeted at this group of people worked, and averted
6 what the Resolution Foundation said could have been a,
7 you know, living standards disaster, and actually helped
8 cushion that considerably and protect people.

9 So, you know, I think I'm -- as I say, I'm grateful
10 to all the teams who worked on it. I thought they did
11 an excellent job.

12 **Q.** Mr Sunak, I can't promise I've finished questions on
13 Working Tax Credit, so I'm going to ask you to keep your
14 finger in the page, as it were, overnight, just because
15 we've covered a lot of ground in a relatively short
16 period of time and I want to go back over my notes
17 overnight just to check there's nothing else I want to
18 ask you about.

19 But, my Lady, I wonder if that's a convenient moment
20 for now?

21 **LADY HALLETT:** It is. It's been a long day both for
22 Mr Sunak and, I'm sure, for you, Mr Wright.

23 I'm sorry we've got to ask you to come back
24 tomorrow, Mr Sunak, but the team are very conscious that
25 you have to get away by lunchtime, and I promise you
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1 that you will be leaving here before we break for lunch
2 tomorrow.

3 **THE WITNESS:** Thank you very much.

4 **LADY HALLETT:** So I shall return for 10.00 tomorrow morning.

5 **(4.28 pm)**

6 **(The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)**

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