

Witness Name: Emma Squire

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: ES/01 - ES/26

Dated: 31 October 2025

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF EMMA SQUIRE

I, **Emma Squire**, will say as follows: -

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1. I make this witness statement in response to the request sent to me by the UK Covid-19 Inquiry ("the Inquiry") dated 5 September 2025 ("Rule 9 request") for Module 9, which concerns the economic interventions taken by the UK government and devolved administrations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic from 1 January 2020 until 28 June 2022 ("the relevant period").
2. This is the first witness statement that I have made to the Inquiry. I am asked to address matters of relevance to the roles I held at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport ("DCMS") during the relevant period. I held the role of Director of Arts, Heritage and Tourism at DCMS from 9 April 2018 - 23 November 2023. During that time, I was temporarily promoted to Director General for Culture, Sport and Civil Society from 15 November 2020 - 28 March 2021 and again from February 2022 - July 2022. I additionally took on the role of co-Director of the Economic Response Directorate ("ERD") between March and June 2020.
3. I have had sight of the DCMS corporate witness statement submitted to the Inquiry in Module 9¹. I have relied on what is said in the corporate witness statement insofar as

¹ Signed by Sam Lister on 16/09/2025.

factually relevant to the Rule 9 request and where any observations align with my personal recollection. I have, however, limited this to avoid extensive repetition.

SECTION 2: QUALIFICATIONS AND BACKGROUND

4. From 1 November 2025 I will be the co-CEO of Historic England, having joined the organisation in November 2023 as job-share Director of Regions. Before this, I worked at DCMS for over 5.5 years in the aforementioned roles.

5. Prior to my tenure at DCMS, I held the following roles in government:

- Director, Ministerial Strategy, Department for International Trade (“DIT”), 2016 - 2018
- Principal Private Secretary to the Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (“BIS”), 2015 - 2016
- Deputy Director, Strategy, BIS, 2014 - 2015
- Deputy Director, Local Growth, BIS, 2012 - 2013
- Deputy Director, Access to Finance for SMEs, BIS, 2009 - 2011
- Head of Energy Branch, His Majesty’s Treasury (“HMT”), 2008 - 2009
- Nuclear Unit, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (“BERR”), 2006 - 2008
- Energy Review Team, Department of Trade and Industry (“DTI”), 2006
- Multi-lateral Trade Negotiations Team, DTI, 2004 - 2006.

6. Before joining the Civil Service, I worked for two years in government affairs in the pharmaceutical industry in Brussels.

SECTION 3: ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7. My primary responsibility as Director for Arts, Heritage and Tourism at DCMS was to ensure the directorate delivered on its top-level objectives: (1) to improve people’s lives through access to culture, heritage and libraries for all, (2) culture led regeneration for communities, making places attractive to live, work, invest and visit, (3) drive growth and promote the UK to the world by increasing productivity of the tourism sector, and (4) protect and preserve culture, heritage and treasure for future generations. In respect of each, I

oversaw the generation of evidence and analysis and engaged in policy work in line with ministerial objectives.

8. The directorate's work extended to supporting ministers in discharging statutory functions including library superintendence, the designation system (listing and scheduling buildings and monuments), export deferral for cultural objects of national significance, and the provision of schemes (such as the Government Indemnity Scheme for museum loans).
9. Alongside this, I sponsored 29 Arm's-Length Bodies (including the Arts Council England, 15 national museums & galleries, the British Library, Visit Britain/Visit England, the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic England). I also oversaw the delivery of programmes including the UK City of Culture, the Museums Estates Development Fund and the Culture Development Fund. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this included oversight of the Culture Recovery Fund, initially £1.57 billion, that supported around 5,000 heritage and cultural organisations at risk of failure due to lost income due to the pandemic.
10. I was also the interim Director General for Culture, Sport and Civil Society from 15 November 2020 - 28 March 2021 and again (this time in a job-share arrangement) from February 2022 - July 2022. This role required me to oversee the Sport & Gambling directorate and the Civil Society and Youth directorate for an interim period while a competition to appoint a permanent director general was undertaken.
11. At the onset of the pandemic, discretionary work of the Arts, Heritage and Tourism directorate halted, and the directorate's efforts turned to:
 - a) Engaging with charities and businesses in the sectors the directorate oversaw to understand the implications of the pandemic, the issues they were facing, and their questions. We did this directly and via expert Arm's-Length Bodies (notably Arts Council England, Historic England and Visit England), providing regular government updates to them, and gathering specific information to feed into policy making.
 - b) Working via DCMS's Covid-19 Hub ("the Covid-19 Hub"), with teams across government coordinated by the Cabinet Office ("CO"), on developing and disseminating guidance for each sector on non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g. restrictions, closures and latterly safe reopening).

- c) Building the evidence base for designing and delivering a financial intervention to support the wider cultural sector to prevent permanent closures of otherwise viable cultural organisations.

12. My attention also turned to the new ERD, launched by DCMS on 23 March 2020, which I co-led with my colleague Rhys Bowen. My role ceased in June 2020 and Mr Bowen remained director of the ERD for its final weeks before it was dissolved in July 2020. Mr Bowen had more capacity to focus on the ERD as he was able to almost completely pause work on his pre-pandemic role leading the EU and International directorate. My 'day job' was busier than ever, but I was able to bring expertise from some of the DCMS sectors most affected by the pandemic (e.g. my directorate was responsible for 5 of the 8 sector working groups established under DCMS's Cultural Recovery Taskforce²). Director responsibility for the other 3 sector working groups was spread across 3 other policy directors³. Sharing the role with Mr Bowen gave additional resilience and seven-day week director-level coverage for the ERD. The work of the ERD is discussed further in section 5 of my statement.

SECTION 4: COOPERATION AND JOINT WORKING

Ministers and senior civil servants in DCMS

13. From my perspective, there was heightened engagement with ministers, their special advisers and the most senior civil servants during the relevant period, as one would expect. There was a good flow of communication in both directions. Engagement followed usual structures but was supplemented with ad hoc engagement as required to respond to the demands of the pandemic. For example, the ERD regularly briefed Sam Lister, as lead DCMS Director General on the Covid-19 Pandemic, and Susannah Storey, as the Director General for the Economic and Sector Response Group, on the work of the directorate.

Ministers and senior civil servants in other government departments

14. In my experience, engagement with ministers and senior civil servants in other government departments was effective throughout the pandemic, building on relationships established pre-pandemic. By way of example, DCMS worked well with the Ministry of Housing,

² The 5 working groups represented the following sectors: events, libraries, museums & galleries, visitor economy and heritage.

³ Film and TV, youth and sport.

Communities and Local Government (“MHCLG”)⁴ to help shape and inform interventions delivered by local authorities (such as eligibility for business rates relief or the Small Business Grants Fund). DCMS also benefited from regular engagement with other government departments through the Economic Response Working Group (“ERWG”). This is discussed further in section 5 of the statement.

15. The department was also involved in the collective agreement process through the 'Covid O' (operations) and 'Covid S' (strategy) Cabinet sub-committees (the main meeting structures through which collective cross-government ministerial decisions on the Covid-19 response were made from summer 2020) and the various ministerial implementation groups (“MIGs”) that preceded it. I was not a member of the Cabinet sub-committees where DCMS was usually represented by ministers or by the Permanent Secretary (occasionally deputising to the Director General) as appropriate. All relevant teams in DCMS were able to feed into briefings for these meetings via the Covid-19 Hub meaning that the breadth of departmental insight and interest was represented to other departments. I oversaw contributions to briefing notes to prepare ministers and senior officials for these meetings in relation to pan-economy measures and in relation to the arts, heritage and tourism sectors. On rare occasions, with the permission of the relevant minister or senior official and the CO secretariat, I dialled in as an observer to MIGs meetings.

Ministers and senior civil servants in devolved administrations

16. Many of the DCMS policy areas most affected by the pandemic are devolved and therefore DCMS did not regularly need to work with the devolved administrations. The department maintained open communications to discuss its Covid-19 initiatives and guidance with the devolved administrations, but did not work directly with them on policy development.
17. In my experience, most devolved administration engagement was sector specific information sharing by sector teams with their counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In my core area of responsibility, sector teams shared information with devolved administration counterparts about the methodology, design and coverage of the Culture Recovery Fund in England given that devolved administrations would also receive additional funding from HMT that they could choose to invest in a similar rescue package.

⁴ MHCLG was renamed the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (“DLUHC”) in September 2021 and reverted to MHCLG in July 2024. For consistency, the department is referred to as MHCLG throughout this statement.

As Director of Arts, Heritage and Tourism I met counterparts from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in person every six months with ad hoc contact in between. Those established relationships meant that there was straightforward and easy engagement on culture and tourism specific matters during the Covid-19 pandemic at director level as well as working level.

18. Additionally, the ERD drafted a note on 1 May 2020 updating on the economic issues impacting DCMS sectors in the devolved administrations, as well as an overview of how sector teams were engaging devolved administration counterparts on the economic response to Covid-19. This note included annexes showing an overview of Covid-19 devolved administration economic impacts and engagements based on returns from sector teams [ES/01 INQ000623589].
19. The note also identified that many DCMS sector teams were undertaking weekly working level calls with counterparts in the devolved administrations to understand emerging issues and funding arrangements. It flagged that levels of engagement between the devolved administrations and DCMS sector teams varied across the department but assessed that this was proportionate considering the impacts across the Union were similar and greater engagement was occurring with the administrations in devolved sectors which were experiencing more severe impacts, for example in tourism. While inbound tourism to the UK is not devolved, meaning international travel is still the responsibility of the UK government, there is nevertheless an economic impact on devolved administrations if borders are closed.
20. The note also considered how the cross-cutting strategy functions engaged with the devolved administrations. For example, it recommended that the Covid-19 Hub was best placed to be the central lead in the department responsible for monitoring the devolved administrations' wider approach to Covid-19, with the ERD supporting the economic aspects, the Civil Society and Youth directorate supporting the social aspects and the devolution team helping with coordination and guidance. I considered it helpful to have clarity on respective roles and responsibilities.
21. DCMS's strategy function also had a devolution team which supported teams on how to engage with the devolved administrations, but did not engage with them on economic matters themselves. Where policy teams engaged the devolved administrations, strategy teams provided support or contacts where needed, for example by helping link policy teams with Territorial Offices.

22. I do not recall being made aware of any challenges with engagement. As set out above, there were clear routes through which communication could effectively take place. Engagement was mutually beneficial, particularly where focused on the areas more directly under DCMS control.

Senior officials in local government & parties external to government

23. DCMS has always maintained close relationships with its various sectors, via its many public bodies, representative groups and individual organisations, and therefore had significant expertise and experience in engaging with stakeholders. The pandemic required that DCMS further deepen these relationships, and at pace.

24. By way of example, under the auspices of the overarching Culture Renewal Taskforce, 8 sector working groups were established with representatives from around 150 key sector bodies and organisations (including trade/sector representative bodies and a blend of national and regional individual organisations). The working groups met online regularly and were chaired by DCMS ministers, sometimes delegated to a senior civil servant. The working groups' aims were to allow sector specialists and other experts to help develop, disseminate and implement guidance, as well as identify and resolve practical, sector-specific issues related to guidance. The groups also discussed actions and updates arising from the Cultural Renewal Taskforce.

25. Both the taskforce and the working groups allowed DCMS to bring its sectors more fully into conversations and access valuable evidence and opinions to inform engagement with policy decisions across government.

26. Additionally, via MHCLG and the Local Government Association, DCMS shared evidence and recommendations on a number of pan-economy interventions delivered by local government, such as the Small Business Grants Fund and guidance on eligibility for business rates relief.

27. DCMS also worked closely with relevant Arm's-Length Bodies (such as Sport England, Arts Council England, Historic England, the British Film Institute, Visit England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund) to gather intelligence, consider and adapt controls⁵, support intervention across key sectors, develop and share guidance, gather feedback on

⁵ e.g. guidance on non-pharmaceutical interventions and restrictions on the activity of sectors and sub-sectors.

its practical implementation, and design sector-specific interventions to compliment pan-economy measures.

28. This close relationship brought insight and expertise that strengthened economic interventions and minimised the risk of confusing organisations in respective sectors with inconsistent guidance and messaging. Collaboration between Arm's-Length Bodies during the pandemic set a precedent for partnership working on further funding programmes after the pandemic was over (such as between DCMS, Arts Council England and Historic England on the Museum Estate and Development Fund).

HMT

29. DCMS engaged with HMT regularly early on in the pandemic through weekly director-level calls to discuss policy development. These generally involved Mr Nico Heslop, as strategy director overseeing the Covid-19 Hub, and Mr Bowen and/or myself. We used these calls to summarise DCMS priorities and to interact with HMT colleagues on developing policy interventions. There was also a regular deputy director-level call twice weekly to streamline conversations with HMT, prioritise key issues, understand HMT policy thinking and assess the likelihood of success for DCMS interventions [ES/02 - INQ000623586]. On occasion, Mr Bowen or I would also join the deputy director-level calls to chair them, i.e. to summarise overall priorities, keep to time, and bring in relevant leads on different items. A shared policy tracker was additionally used for DCMS to report live issues to HMT and they would in turn provide responses [ES/03 - INQ000623479]. We would also engage with HMT's spending team (led by Deputy Director John Staples). We initially had daily meetings with HMT's spending team and then as required. We used these meetings to have an effective feedback loop regarding the impact of Covid-19 on our sectors and the effectiveness of the measures to date (see, for example, [ES/04 - INQ000623473]; [ES/05 - INQ000623474]).

30. DCMS strategy teams, which included the ERD, engaged with HMT specifically on matters related to pan-economy measures and identifying issues with measures for DCMS sectors, particularly in relation to those organisations/individuals who may be struggling to qualify for financial support. The ERD's engagement on pan-economy measures is discussed further in section 5 of my statement.

31. I also engaged with HMT in my capacity as Director of Arts, Heritage and Tourism. We worked bilaterally with HMT on additional programmes, such as the Culture Recovery

Fund and the Sport Survival Fund, to supplement pan-economy interventions that were tailored to certain DCMS sectors, such as the sports and cultural sectors - i.e. sectors that relied on mass gatherings which were not possible during the pandemic.

32. During the relevant period, I did not personally encounter challenges working with HMT. HMT's approach and the adequacy of level of information, coordination and information sharing was as I would have expected it to be. There was strong and transparent two-way communication on sector specific interventions in particular, such as between the Culture Recovery Fund and the Sport Survival Fund. While DCMS was predominantly focused on the needs of the sectors it represented, HMT had a number of wider factors to balance. HMT took on board input from a range of sources, including wider government, and then made decisions in the round. This meant that DCMS proposals were not always taken forward. For example, DCMS engaged with HMT regarding the self-employment income support scheme particularly concerning freelance workers in the creative industries [ES/06 - INQ000623495]. DCMS provided stakeholder feedback and evidence of the impact on DCMS sectors owing to ineligibility for the scheme, but HMT didn't agree to any further changes to the eligibility criteria. To the best of my recollection, this decision took into account the administrative burden that a more nuanced approach that would have captured more self-employed would have required and the greater risk of fraud. DCMS acknowledged that it was "... clearly difficult for HMT to devise an easily implemented fix for this group that did not introduce significant fraud risk" [ES/07 - INQ000623499].

SECTION 5: ECONOMIC RESPONSE DIRECTORATE ("ERD")

33. The ERD was established in DCMS on 23 March 2020 as the scale of economic considerations grew. It was a focused resource to support DCMS sectors in identifying and addressing the economic challenges arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the government's response thereto. My colleague Rhys Bowen was appointed to head up the ERD: he had a sound footing in economic policy from previous roles at HMT. I was appointed alongside him to bring sector knowledge to the role. Together it was felt that we would have more resilience and be able to provide seven-day week cover. We led two deputy director-led teams with the following responsibilities.

34. The strategy and coordination team - led by Deputy Director Chris Heaton:

- a) provided strategic leadership and coordinated the work on the economic issues of Covid-19 impacting DCMS's sectors
- b) situational awareness, including tracking key economic issues and commissions
- c) supported sector team engagement with their stakeholders
- d) led on briefing for parliamentary, ministerial and official level engagements on economic response issues
- e) identified upcoming issues that were likely to arise for DCMS sectors, mapping upcoming milestones.

35. The economic policy team - led by Deputy Directors Nick Russell, Euan Macmillan and Duncan Parish:

- a) economic policy development - worked across government to develop policy responses to Covid-19 economic issues impacting DCMS sectors and ensure the post-Covid-19 business environment supported economic growth in DCMS sectors
- b) economic policy delivery - supported sector teams in helping their stakeholders access and implement government's suite of economic policies in response to Covid-19
- c) rapid response - provided assistance to key individual stakeholders in economic difficulty and identified appropriate measures to support them.

36. The Europe and International directorate ("EUI"), led by Rhys Bowen, paused almost all international work and pivoted to resource the ERD.

37. The ERD was set up to support DCMS policy teams in identifying and addressing the economic challenges faced by its sectors and specific businesses with significant issues and provided a focal point for the department's response to economic issues. It also sought to engage with pan-economy measures being led by HMT, working to ensure the specific characteristics and needs of DCMS sectors were considered by HMT officials. The ERD led on economic response advice and briefing to ministers within DCMS and acted as a single point of contact concerning the economic challenges faced by DCMS sectors for other departments. The ERD was also the single point of contact for businesses with

significant issues, playing a crisis response function for major businesses in DCMS sectors with such issues that would impact on the local, regional or national economy. The ERD would feed into HMT's 'Project Birch' (an emergency programme providing financial support to businesses) if a major company in a DCMS sector was at risk of failure.

38. Discussions on establishing a team to coordinate DCMS's economic response to the pandemic began in March 2020 involving senior civil servants (largely deputy directors) from teams within DCMS's corporate strategy directorate. Driving the establishment of a dedicated ERD was the recognition of the scale of the ask in this area: DCMS sectors would be some of the most impacted by lockdown measures and experience the first wave of economic impact. A single team to capture the picture for DCMS sectors in totality would facilitate cross-government communication, creating a single point of contact on pan-economy measures for other government departments. It would also relieve pressure on sector teams to allow them to focus on sector specific work (such as engaging in two-way information gathering, developing and influencing guidance for sectors on non-pharmaceutical interventions, or working up and delivering sector specific financial interventions).

39. A paper, sent to the Executive Board on 25 March 2020, set out the senior leadership, responsibilities and key products of the ERD and showed a workflow process indicating that sector/policy teams would input into the ERD [ES/08 - INQ000623584]. On 30 March 2020, relevant teams in DCMS were informed of the following information on the ERD [ES/09 - INQ000623482]:

- a) the purpose of the ERD
- b) roles and responsibilities within the directorate including sector team leads/points of specific contact
- c) ways of working with the ERD including:
 - i) a direction for teams to add significant new economic issues affecting their sectors into the appropriate 'trackers'
 - ii) the requirement for teams to notify ERD of any requests/plans for meetings with HMT, BEIS, the Department for Work and Pensions ("DWP") on economic issues, as well as wider discussions with other government departments or other stakeholders

- iii) clearing all advice on economic issues with senior ERD officials before submitting to ministers.

40. During the life of the ERD, where questions arose around responsibilities, these were swiftly resolved. An example would be deciding when to hand over the relationship with a specific company in distress from the relevant sector team to the ERD, to liaise with HMT as part of Project Birch.

41. Also in March 2020, a cross-government 'explainer' on the ERD was created and shared with other government departments [ES/10 - INQ000623472]. This document set out the purpose, responsibilities and structure of the ERD, and the operational approach other government departments should take when engaging with DCMS on economic issues relating to the pandemic.

ERD engagement

42. From 3 April 2020 until late June 2020, the ERD circulated updates to sector teams following its daily meetings, which included information on cross-cutting issues, details of cross-government meetings, relevant government announcements, analysis, and emerging issues (by way of example, see: [ES/11 - INQ000623489]; [ES/12 - INQ000623583]. In addition, the ERD circulated a Covid-19 Economic Response Sector Engagement Bulletin - this was an internal bulletin to DCMS sector teams [ES/13 - INQ000623501]; [ES/14 - INQ000623514]; [ES/15 - INQ000623521].

43. The ERD coordinated conversations on economic response issues with other government departments, particularly HMT, BEIS and DWP, working with the DCMS Covid-19 Hub where appropriate. The aim was to ensure that cross-government conversations were aligned and to inform policy development in a way that reflected DCMS's sector interests ([ES/16 - INQ000623581]). The ERD was represented by Mr Bowen and me at director level at the Economic Response Working Group ("ERWG") with chairing rotated between HMT, CO and BEIS. On occasion, a deputy director would attend on our behalf. DCMS used the ERWG to highlight concerns about economic policy proposals and shape the development of economic measures. ERWG meetings were held weekly at the beginning of the pandemic. Please see a list of these meetings contained within the Annex to this statement

44. To participate in intelligence sharing on economic impacts of the pandemic, the ERD focussed on BEIS-organised meetings for economic departments (which included the ERWG). For example, when the resumption of international travel was being considered, I represented DCMS on the cross-government forum led by Department for Transport. The lead DCMS Director General on the Covid-19 Pandemic, Sam Lister, tended to represent DCMS on decision-making committees for senior civil servants with input from ERD and the Covid-19 Hub as relevant. On occasion directors, including me, would act as alternate if the Director General was not available.
45. The ERD led on economic response advice and briefing to ministers and ensured that advice was placed within the context of wider intervention. For example, the ERD updated ministers on the detail of pan-economy interventions in development and once announced, our assessment of the degree to which DCMS sectors would benefit, the reaction of our sectors, and options to go further. The ERD also sought steers from the DCMS ministers on additions or changes to pan-economy measures that they wanted us to prioritise in discussions with officials in other government departments. Briefings to ministers included, *inter alia*, advice/information on: DCMS's approach to the coronavirus economic response [ES/17 - INQ000659705]; the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (e.g. [ES/18 - INQ000659706]); the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (e.g. [ES/19 - INQ000623502]); and the medium-term economic support for DCMS sectors (e.g. [ES/20 - INQ000659708]).
46. The ERD was also responsible for providing or feeding into briefings for the Secretary of State for meetings with other government department ministers, including the Chancellor, such as EBRIG. The ERD also provided briefing for and attended the official-level EBRIG meetings (see, for example, [ES/21 - INQ000659707]; [ES/22 - INQ000659709]). A list of these meetings is contained within the Annex to this statement. At EBRIG-O meetings, DCMS would either be represented by the relevant director general, or occasionally, by Mr Bowen or me. Our role was to feed in DCMS views on emerging proposals to help shape them, ensuring that the implications for DCMS sectors were articulated, and to bring information back to the department to factor into our ongoing analysis, evidence gathering and policy work.

DCMS's Strategy Functions

47. DCMS's strategy functions in response to the pandemic comprised the strategy, policy and fiscal events team ("SPFE"), the Covid-19 Hub and the ERD. We were able to delineate

the respective roles of these central coordination teams and its leadership so that directors could deputise for each other as required. The three teams worked together to act as a single point of contact across the breadth of DCMS sectors. They were informed by sector specific insight from DCMS policy teams and were able to represent the totality of DCMS interests in relation to pan-economy issues and help ensure consistency.

48. At the start pandemic, the SPFE team shifted its focus to Covid-19 related activity, as well as carrying out the key functions of a fiscal events team. It was the central coordinating team for all Covid-19 related policy and commissions while policy teams shifted their focus to the specific needs of the sectors they each represented.
49. The Covid-19 Hub was subsequently established in March 2020 and took on the cross-cutting coordination function from the SPFE - which initially included both economic and health/lockdown related coordination on behalf of the whole department. With the establishment of the Covid-19 Hub, the SPFE was then able to focus on the upcoming spending review, working closely with the Covid-19 Hub on economic priorities and particularly the crossover between fiscal events and broader Covid-19 economic priorities.
50. The Covid-19 Hub was quickly followed by the creation of the ERD, which focused on the strategic economic response to the pandemic, as the scale of economic considerations grew beyond the scope of the Covid-19 Hub and individual sector teams.
51. Very quickly, (as noted above with a paper to the Executive Board on 25 March setting out the remit of the ERD), structures were established whereby the newly established Covid 19-Hub oversaw the coordination for DCMS of all aspects of the pandemic, with the ERD specialising in pan-economy measures and specific companies in distress. In addition, sector directorates (including Arts, Sport and Civil Society) fed into the ERD on pan-economy matters but also worked on sector specific guidance (with the Covid-19 Hub) and sector specific fiscal interventions.

Reflections on the ERD

52. The ERD was stood down on 19 July 2020 when its responsibilities transferred to sector teams and the Covid-19 Hub. Most key decisions on pan-economy measures had been taken and implemented by this point and more focus was on the delivery of sector specific schemes (grants and loans) including for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, for sports, and for culture/heritage. Residual work was reallocated to the Covid-19

Hub or to individual sector teams.

53. In my view, the ERD was effective in capturing and distilling the key issues affecting DCMS sectors and in giving evidence-based input on the design of pan-economy measures affecting those sectors. The ERD was not ultimately the decision maker on pan-economy measures, and not every DCMS recommendation was adopted, but we did successfully shape some interventions in the light of our evidence on the needs of DCMS sectors. I believe that our input led to some small but important changes or clarifications in eligibility criteria for certain pan-economy measures. For example:

- a) Following evidence received from DCMS stakeholders regarding their difficulties in providing security against loans, the ERD on behalf of DCMS successfully advocated for the removal of the requirement for businesses to place a personal guarantee against directors in relation to loans [ES/23 - INQ000182280].
- b) DCMS engaged with HMT and MHCLG following DCMS sectors reporting challenges when accessing the Business Rates Relief Scheme. As a result of this engagement, live music venues, markets and art galleries (where art is for sale or hire) were expressly listed as eligible for business rates relief in subsequent guidance from MHCLG and the Local Government Association [ES/24 - INQ000623585].
- c) Additionally, DCMS were focused on ensuring, where relevant and applicable, the measures in the BEIS Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill additionally covered the 19,805 Charitable Incorporated Organisations (“CIOs”) within the same timeframe. The ERD recommended that the Secretary of State agree that DCMS should seek that the measures be extended to include CIOs and that DCMS should work with BEIS to achieve this outcome [ES/25 - INQ000623074].

54. More generally, in my view, the ERD met its objectives of providing leadership and coordination within DCMS on the economic issues of the Covid-19 pandemic impacting DCMS sectors. The structures established in DCMS allowed us to coordinate across the whole of DCMS and prioritise the areas to influence. The ERD ensured the department's contributions on discussions in relation to pan-economy financial measures were timely, comprehensive and consistent. The ERD also supported comprehensive engagement for parliamentary, ministerial and official engagements on economic response issues and enabled DCMS to work across government on the policy responses to Covid-19 economic

issues. This included insight on the practical experience of seeking to access pan-economy measures for organisations in DCMS sectors which led to some changes and clarifications, as highlighted above. The ERD helped to reduce duplication within DCMS through supporting individual sector teams with assisting their stakeholders to access and implement government's suite of economic policies. The ERD also freed up sector teams to focus on sector specific matters. We established good processes in terms of communicating to sector teams and gathering information from them in return: understanding the sectors' specific economic challenges and nuanced differences.

SECTION 6: INEQUALITIES, IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

55. As a public body, DCMS is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty ("PSED") contained within Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. DCMS officials took responsibility for complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty, as introduced in the Equality Act 2010. As a long-standing civil servant, I am cognisant of the PSED.

56. The Covid-19 Hub provided cross-cutting leadership on policy to mitigate/prevent the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on some demographic groups. The ERD additionally gathered and shared evidence on groups disproportionately impacted by pan-economy decisions, such as in relation to the higher-than-average proportion of self-employed workforce in the culture and creative industries sectors and the subset of freelancers who were less able to benefit from the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme (**[ES/26 - INQ000659710]**).

57. More generally, as Director of Arts, Heritage and Tourism, my teams also worked with the cultural sector to encourage and support digital access to theatre and virtual tours of heritage sites to contribute to the wellbeing of creators and the general public during lock down. My directorate advocated for keeping libraries open to support vulnerable groups and worked with colleagues in civil society to use departmental underspend to expand two reading programmes to reduce loneliness. In addition representatives from organisations involving disabled artists or supporting disabled audiences, notably Ramps on the Moon (who support the mainstream cultural sector to elevate the place of disabled people within their organisations) and Attitude is Everything (who connect disabled people with music and live event industries to improve accessibility) were represented on and actively participated in the relevant sector working group chaired by DCMS and meeting regularly.

58. We were able to feed in evidence on the accessibility and eligibility for schemes in relation to specific sub sectors or types of worker/applicant in DCMS sectors. In some instances (such as on the requirement for a personal guarantee to access certain loan products) this led to changes to the eligibility criteria for the scheme. We were also able to secure some sector specific interventions (for the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, sport, and culture) to compliment the pan-economy fiscal interventions, owing to HMT recognition that certain sectors had features that made them more vulnerable.

SECTION 7: MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

59. The Inquiry has asked me to comment on the messaging platforms that I used during the relevant period. I primarily communicated via e-mail, meetings and telephone calls. My use of platforms such as WhatsApp was very limited and did not extend to making policy or funding decisions. There were a small number of WhatsApp groups I was a part of which included some senior officials and ministers. This was to facilitate speed of round-the-clock communication and maintain open lines of communication when not physically co-located and for logistical purposes. Policy and economic decisions were not taken through these interactions.

SECTION 8: ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS / CONCLUDING REMARKS

60. In my opinion, DCMS demonstrated its collegiate culture, flexibility and agility in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Standing down or significantly reducing business-as-usual functions, and standing up new functions at pace, was key to the department's ability to respond to the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic. We successfully pivoted staff to new roles (as well as to online/remote working) swiftly to focus on what mattered most for our sectors. Pivoting the work of the Europe and International directorate to the new ERD, and setting up the Covid-19 Hub, are both examples of this. Once set up, the Covid-19 Hub hit the ground running incredibly well, coordinating across the range of sector teams and ensuring interdependencies were captured, the breadth of departmental interests were represented in interventions in key cross-government fora, and information was cascaded effectively. Similarly, the ERD was successful in providing leadership and coordination within DCMS on the economic issues of Covid-19 impacting DCMS sectors.

61. In my view, it was sensible to have more than one senior official (both in the ERD at director level and the Covid-19 Hub at deputy director level) to 'tag-team' and bring additional

resilience and round the clock coverage. I would recommend this structure in the future. With hindsight, while the department moved swiftly to staff both the Covid 19 Hub and the ERD, I would have advocated for also increasing resources in sector teams such as the one I led (Arts, Heritage and Tourism) more quickly. More staff in sector teams would have provided additional bandwidth and resilience. In the short term, colleagues in sector teams paused 'business as usual work' and pivoted to different roles and responsibilities to reflect the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic but were not initially allocated additional headcount, though this did come later.

62. Overall, I agree with the department's reflection that it was largely successful in its efforts to provide financial support, prevent business failure and preserve jobs. Important lessons were also drawn from the experience, and the department's various evaluations show where improvements could be made. For example, improving data collection methods to inform better decision making around resourcing and priorities, which I believe would enable the department to be even more agile, in the ways I've described above.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed:

Personal Data

Dated: 31 October 2025

Annex

Secretary of State and official-level Economic and Business Response Ministerial Implementation Group (EBRIG) meetings with DCMS attendance

Date	Meeting
16-Mar-20	EBRIG (M)
19-Mar-20	EBRIG (O)
23-Mar-20	EBRIG (M)
26-Mar-20	EBRIG (O)
27-Mar-20	EBRIG (M)
31-Mar-20	EBRIG (M)
2-Apr-20	EBRIG (O)
7-Apr-20	EBRIG (M)
9-Apr-20	EBRIG (O)
15-Apr-20	Extraordinary EBRIG (O)
16-Apr-20	EBRIG (M)
20-Apr-20	EBRIG (O)
23-Apr-20	EBRIG (M)
27-Apr-20	EBRIG (O)
30-Apr-20	EBRIG (M)
4-May-20	EBRIG (O)
12-May-20	EBRIG (O)
14-May-20	EBRIG (M)
21-May-20	EBRIG (O)

DCMS Economic Response Working Group meetings

Date	Meeting
25-Mar-20	Economic Response Working Group
1-Apr-20	Economic Response Working Group
8-Apr-20	Economic Response Working Group
22-Apr-20	Economic Response Working Group
29-Apr-20	Economic Response Working Group

6-May-20	Economic Response Working Group
13-May-20	Economic Response Working Group
20-May-20	Economic Response Working Group
27-May-20	Economic Response Working Group
3-Jun-20	Economic Response Working Group
10-Jun-20	Economic Response Working Group
17-Jun-20	Economic Response Working Group
24-Jun-20	Economic Response Working Group
3-Jul-20	Economic Response Working Group
8-Jul-20	Economic Response Working Group
15-Jul-20	Economic Response Working Group
21-Jul - 20	Economic Response Working Group
28-Jul-20	Economic Response Working Group