

# Public Accounts Committee

## Oral evidence: Digital Services at the Border, HC 936

Monday 1 February 2021

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Members present: Meg Hillier (Chair); Gareth Bacon; Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown; Peter Grant; Mr Richard Holden; James Wild.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, Tom McDonald, Director, National Audit Office, and David Fairbrother, Treasury Office of Accounts, HM Treasury, were in attendance.

Questions 1-114

### Witnesses

I: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Permanent Secretary, Home Office; Paul Lincoln, Director General, Border Force; and John Gillan, Senior Director, Border Force Systems and Change, and Senior Responsible Owner for Digital Services at the Border, Home Office.

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General  
Digital Services at the Border (HC 1069)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Matthew Rycroft CBE, Paul Lincoln and John Gillan.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 1 February 2021. Today we are looking at the Home Office programme, Digital Services at the Border, which is its latest effort to upgrade IT systems that protect us at the border by checking who is entering our country. This work began in 2003. It was reset a few times, in 2011 and 2014, and was supposed to have been delivered by 2019, so it has been, like a number of Home Office projects, beset by delays, cost overruns and missed deadlines. The Public Accounts Committee has been looking at this a long time. Indeed, members of this Committee, including me, have had a longer hinterland on this than all our witnesses. We are very concerned that the delays and issues are still there, and want to ask questions of our witnesses about why the delays have taken place. We particularly want to probe the extra costs to the taxpayer of these delays.

We have a few questions before we get into the main session. I welcome Matthew Rycroft, permanent secretary at the Home Office, which he joined last March; Paul Lincoln, director general of Border Force; and John Gillan, senior director for Border Force Systems and Change at the Home Office, so he is the senior responsible owner for this project.

Mr Gillan, I just want to be clear on when you started being responsible for the programme, because it was not in your biography.

**John Gillan:** I started as the SRO in December 2018.

Q2 **Chair:** And that was your first engagement with the project?

**John Gillan:** Yes, it was.

Q3 **Chair:** Thank you. Before we go into the main session, I want to ask you, Mr Rycroft, to give us an update on the data loss that was reported in January when tens of thousands of criminal records were lost. Can you update us on what the situation is right now?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, I can, Chair; thank you for the opportunity. As the Policing Minister has set out in Parliament, the maximum number of records deleted in error over the weekend of 9 and 10 January were 213,000 offence records, 175,000 arrest records and 15,000 person records, but I can assure the Committee that the risk to public safety is



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minimal. All those deletions relate to “no further action” cases. We are confident that the data is all recoverable, and we are in the process of recovering that data. I can also say that over 99% of the potentially deleted records are over 10 years old.

Q4 **Chair:** Can you be clear about what this information is? You say it is for offences that require no further action, but the point about having them on the database was because they were serious allegations, so this could include sex offenders, serious violent criminals and so on. Am I right?

**Matthew Rycroft:** The police national computer holds 13 million people’s records. Anyone who has been convicted, cautioned or arrested in the UK has their details on that computer. It also includes 68 million vehicle records and 61 million driving licence records. There are all sorts of data on that computer. Our legal obligations require us to delete certain types of data regularly within certain limits. That is what was going on when some coding was erroneously put into the computer, with an impact over that weekend.

Q5 **Chair:** You tell us that it is all recoverable. Can you give us an idea of how fast that is going and where we are at this point?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, the team working on this are working flat out. They are seeking to recover all the data as rapidly as possible, but as you would expect, they are taking great care in that process not to compromise either the data itself or the rest of the systems on the computer, so they are taking their time. It will take some weeks, but we will keep Parliament and this Committee updated as we make progress on that.

Q6 **Chair:** Basically, they have to cross-reference it with other systems to make sure that it has not been corrupted in the error.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, exactly. I think it will take some time, but it is better to be safe than sorry, and better to do this in a way that allows full confidence that all the data has been recovered and has not led to any further glitches in the system.

Q7 **Chair:** I think we all appreciate it is important that it is accurate when it is put back on, but what about in between then and now? Is there a likelihood or a possibility that if a criminal with a serious allegation against them, but whose DNA, fingerprints or whatever are no longer available, were detained or arrested for a further offence, that could make a difference to whether they are caught?

**Matthew Rycroft:** As the Policing Minister set out to the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee on 27 January, the risk to the public is minimal, not least as police forces are able to work with other data sources, so they are not relying only on this computer. It is that assurance, which I can give you, that means that we can be confident that we are going in the right direction on this one.

Q8 **Chair:** What you are saying, in mandarin terms, Mr Rycroft, is that there is a risk, but it is a small one, so you are all hoping that it does not



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happen.

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is a minimal risk, and we are working as rapidly as possible to reintroduce the data back into the police national computer as quickly as possible.

**Chair:** We want to ask a few questions about the border issues as a result of covid and Brexit. We touched on this quite a bit last week, so I think Mr Lincoln is now up. Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, if you would like to unmute, please.

Q9 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Good afternoon, Mr Lincoln. Will you give us an update on how well the borders are flowing at the moment?

**Paul Lincoln:** Yes, of course, Sir Geoffrey. There was an extensive session on this about 10 days ago, as you said, Chair. One of the key things was the volume of trucks crossing each way. Ten days or so ago, that was about 80%; now we are reaching close to about 90% of the volume that we had seen the year before, so there is improvement on flows in both directions.

Q10 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Are there any particular recurrent problems that need fixing?

**Paul Lincoln:** The largest issue, which we have just recently resolved, was to do with one of the HMRC systems, where the question of which destination a haulier might go to in France was problematic. That might sound relatively simplistic, but as you know, many hauliers might decide quite late in the day which destination to go to—either using a ferry or the tunnel—and therefore they might go either to Coquelles or to the port of Calais. People were putting in a single code, but might have switched to a different destination, which meant that on arrival in France they were therefore stopped for not having put in the right destination. We have agreed a fix with the French, which we think will reduce by about 50% the overall problems that we have seen with lorries going into France. That was the significant thing that we have done in the past 10 days or so.

Q11 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Thank you, that is very helpful. Last time, we skirted over the whole issue of quarantine and tests. Has that now sorted itself out? Are lorry drivers—coming in and going out—with the right tests in advance?

**Paul Lincoln:** The key issue for hauliers is the one leaving this country and going into France, where they are required to have within 72 hours in advance a negative covid test. That includes the use of lateral flow devices, which we put in place collectively as Government in the run-up to Christmas. That is working well: 36 out of the 45 information and advice sites currently offer free tests to hauliers. Some of the larger companies, in particular supermarkets, are also doing testing at their own sites prior to hauliers leaving, to make sure that they are done outside Kent wherever possible, so there has been significant progress in that respect.

Q12 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** What about normal passengers coming into this country?



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**Paul Lincoln:** For passengers coming in, on 18 January the Government introduced a pre-departure test, which is very similar—72 hours in advance. That was introduced with the potential to fine both individuals and carriers on that date. That has continued. There has been a very high level of compliance with that, with the carriers undertaking the first check. The other thing that has happened, today, is that from today the carriers are also responsible for the first check when it comes to the passenger locator form, so we should see fewer issues associated with that once people arrive in the UK, as well.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** That is really helpful, thank you, Mr Lincoln. Thank you, Chair.

Q13 **Chair:** On the passenger locator forms, are you saying that it is the carrier—your airline, if you are flying to this country—that needs to check that you are where you say you are when you fill out that form?

**Paul Lincoln:** There are two parts to this, Chair. As of today, the carrier will check both the passenger locator form—to make sure that you have completed one—and that you have a negative covid test before you board a plane. There are a number of small exemptions to that, but broadly speaking those are the terms. When people arrive back in the UK, assuming that they have done that, there is still a check that we do—spot-checking—to ensure that they are complete.

Then, as you know, the subsequent processes to that will be that the Department of Health and Social Care's isolation assurance service will refer people on to be further called, emailed or texted and also passed on to the police for further action, if required.

Q14 **Chair:** So practically for your staff it is not much different if a form is being checked by airlines. There will be a spot check, as you would have with other documents, and then once they are through the border they are no longer your responsibility.

**Paul Lincoln:** That is right, Chair. We would expect it to be a slightly reduced burden on our staff, because we would expect to see fewer cases where people do not have a passenger locator form in the first instance.

Q15 **Chair:** Okay. In response to Sir Geoffrey, you talked about the volumes being 90% of what they were this time last year. Can we be clear about which volumes you were talking about? Was that people, vehicles or goods?

**Paul Lincoln:** In response to Sir Geoffrey's question, the volumes of freight are about 90% of what they were in the sense of lorries going backwards and forwards. When it comes to passengers, it is the reverse: it is about 90% down on where we were in previous years.

Q16 **Chair:** I was going to say. In terms of goods, do you know what percentage of those lorries are going backwards and forwards empty now, compared with when we spoke 10 days ago?



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**Paul Lincoln:** It is approximately 50% which are going out empty. Normally 40% or so would have gone out empty in previous given years, and of course some of that is around supermarkets and others who bring in food and then they will go back empty in the other direction.

Q17 **Chair:** Okay. Have you got any update on the GB-Northern Ireland routes? I know they are more HMRC than yourselves, but is there any impact on you? We are still hearing concerning reports about what is happening in Northern Ireland.

**Paul Lincoln:** From our perspective, the way the Northern Ireland protocol works, as in many other scenarios, is that we get requirements from HMRC on a risk or otherwise basis to go and check. We have done very, very few checks associated with the protocol.

Q18 **Chair:** Okay; I am aware that Jim Harra is leading on that. There have been some reports of European nationals who have pre-settled status and are resident in this country being stopped at the border by your officials and asked for proof that they have pre-settled status. Can you comment on the accuracy of those reports—I do not doubt them; it has obviously happened to some people—and whether it is a common occurrence? Could you be very clear about what exactly a European national arriving back to their home country—the UK—is expected to provide and what your officers are able to ask of them?

**Paul Lincoln:** The critical question here is whether or not someone is part of the EU settled status cohort, which means that under the withdrawal agreement they are not required to have additional certification at the border. Of course, routinely we would not stamp passports or intentions-test EEA nationals; the Government has published policy on that, but the Government keeps that under review.

We have not seen any systematic intentions-testing or any systematic processes in place, but we have reminded frontline officers that they should not be doing this when it comes to people in the EU settled status cohort. To be frank, we are more concerned as a Government about what we have seen in other directions where British nationals have been going into overseas countries and been either intentions-tested or had their passports wet-stamped. The FCDO have followed that up through their missions with other Governments overseas.

Q19 **Chair:** But that still raises the question that, if someone has settled status—you say you should not be asking someone at the border to prove they have settled status, and of course you do not need settled status until June of this year—how would you know whether they are part of the settled status scheme or not?

**Paul Lincoln:** We may come to some of this as we go through the Digital Services at the Border questions. As we go forward, one of the things which the programme will do is allow that to be done at the front desk. At the moment, one would have to go from the front desk into the back office to check the systems to do that. What we are doing more of, though—



Q20 **Chair:** Just to be clear, you are checking, but on what grounds—the feelings of the officer on the front level?

**Paul Lincoln:** What we are doing is questioning, more routinely across the board, whether people are coming to the UK for purposes which they think are relevant with the lockdown scenario that we have got. We have seen cases where people have said, “We wanted to go to the new year’s fireworks in London and we booked a hotel along with family and others”, which is clearly against the laws in place in this country at the moment.

**Chair:** So it’s the general conversation you have: “What are you here for? Are you having a holiday” And in that case, if you have a suspicion, you then go back to check. Well, that’s still quite interesting—I have a very high number of EU nationals who are resident and long-term resident in my constituency. Thank you for the information.

Q21 **Mr Holden:** In terms of our having left the European Union, and ahead of some pretty big events that we obviously have coming up in the UK, with the G7 being in Cornwall, have any of the changes from our not being in Europol in the same way impacted on our ability to improve services and assist with stopping criminal movements around the world? What impact has it had?

**Matthew Rycroft:** If I may, I will begin the answer to that question, Mr Holden, and then hand over to Mr Lincoln. The short answer to your question is there has been no impact. The checks that, before the end of the transition period, were done through SIS II, Schengen Information System II, are now being replaced, like for like, by checks through Interpol. That is exactly the system that the UK used before 2015 with EU member states and it’s the system that we have carried on using even since then with other countries. So those methods are tried and tested and, as you would expect, there is no detriment to the security of the country.

**Mr Holden:** Mr Lincoln, do you have anything to add to that?

**Paul Lincoln:** The Committee took some evidence from me on this the last time we had a discussion. As the Chair knows intimately well, the deal that was done by the Government with the EU maintained significant amounts of law enforcement co-operation—critically, including systems such as PNR—as part of that process, and the permanent secretary has just described the situation in accordance with SIS II.

Q22 **Mr Holden:** There is, though, a concern—this has been reported widely—that it does take time for information to be uploaded to these systems. Is that something that you are concerned about, especially with such a major international event happening in the UK?

**Paul Lincoln:** The National Crime Agency made improvements to their ability to upload data from Interpol systems back in 2019. As I said to the Committee last time, the NCA are the lead for this, but they have an automated process, which means that it’s not a significant amount of time before these alerts from Interpol make it on to border systems.



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**Q23 Mr Holden:** What I was meaning was more the uploading from local officers on the ground. Doesn't it take days for local officers to get information on to the Interpol system? And then, obviously, that has to be uploaded and communicated through to the UK, so are there not concerns around that? We are looking, potentially, at days of delay here, aren't we?

**Paul Lincoln:** I am not in a position to comment about what individual member states or other countries do in terms of their own uploads on to Interpol systems, but as I said to the Committee a week or so ago, once it is on to an Interpol system, it is quick to respond—to come on to a UK borders system.

**Mr Holden:** All right. Chair, back to you.

**Q24 Chair:** I want us to be clear, though, Mr Lincoln. Last week, or the week before, when we saw you, you were clear: you said you didn't think there was a risk to the UK, because the information on SIS II would be available through other routes. But you have just acknowledged there, with Mr Holden, that there can be delays with other countries uploading that information, so there can be a time lag with that information that wouldn't have been there with SIS II. When we were a member of SIS II, it was instantaneously that we could access that information, because it was all uploaded to all countries at the same time.

**Paul Lincoln:** The difference there is that it could be a matter of hours or whatever for any country to upload on to whichever system it happens to be—whether that is SIS II or whether it is Interpol—and that is not something that we have control over. Once it is on to those systems, it is a short period of time before it is on to a borders system back in the UK.

**Q25 Chair:** Can we just be clear? Is there any time difference between SIS II uploads or pick-up from the UK borders system, and the interface with Interpol?

**Paul Lincoln:** Obviously, we don't have a SIS II upload anymore. In fact, there are no SIS II records on UK systems anymore.

**Q26 Chair:** Yes, but I'm comparing what was extant on 31 December and what is the situation now, when using Interpol only.

**Paul Lincoln:** I think the difference between the two, to get on to the frontline, is little, if any, but if it would be helpful, I can write to the Committee, setting out what that would be.

**Chair:** That would be very helpful, because there has been a lot of discussion about this. It would be very helpful to have your clear perspective and clarity in a letter, so thank you very much for that. We are now moving into the main session, and I am handing over to Mr Peter Grant MP.

**Q27 Peter Grant:** Mr Rycroft, could you explain to us what the objectives of the Digital Services at the Border programme are? What difference will it make to border control staff and to passengers crossing the border?



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**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes. The Digital Service at the Border programme will make the UK safer and it will improve the flow of legitimate people and goods over the border.

Q28 **Peter Grant:** Thank you. Given that it hasn't been implemented yet and it is seriously behind schedule, does that mean that we are less safe than we should have been?

**Matthew Rycroft:** No, because we have continued to invest in the existing systems, and we will carry on doing that until the full benefits of the DSAB programme can be realised.

Q29 **Peter Grant:** What lessons have you learned from the previous attempts to implement either this or similar systems? There have been a number of false starts over almost 20 years now. What have you done differently this time to make sure that those mistakes aren't repeated?

**Matthew Rycroft:** That is a question that we ask ourselves regularly, Mr Grant. I would boil it down into scope, governance and deliverability. On scope, the big issue that was brewing up between 2014 and 2019 was an expanding scope, for reasons that we can come on to. In 2019, Mr Lincoln quite rightly decided to reset programme and to reduce the scope.

At the same time, the Department strengthened, according to the National Audit Office, our governance of the programme, bringing in greater technical expertise and dealing with risk in a stronger way. All of that has led to a higher level of confidence, again expressed by the National Audit Office, in our ability to deliver the programme. There are all sorts of lessons that we seek to learn the whole time, but those are three big ones from the need to reset this programme back in 2019.

Q30 **Peter Grant:** What impact has the failure to deliver on time had on national security?

**Matthew Rycroft:** It has not had an impact on national security, although, as the National Audit Office said, it has had an impact on our budget.

Q31 **Peter Grant:** Thank you. We may come on to the cost implications later on. Mr Lincoln, what impact has there been on your staff and the fact that they are still using systems that, in some cases, are over 20 years old, compared with the new system?

**Paul Lincoln:** I refer, in some ways, back to what Mr Rycroft said, in that, effectively, the staff in Border Force are continuing to use the same systems that they had in place, so they have seen little effect. It is no less safe for this country as a result of where we are with the systems being in place.

We would have liked to have had some of these other systems in place more quickly, because from a frontline user perspective there is a better experience, and to have included some slightly easier things to do. For example, when a response to somebody comes up, it would show you not only their date of birth—this sounds like quite a simplistic thing—but their



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age, which means that if you are operating at speed or under pressure, you can think about those things a little more clearly.

- Q32 **Peter Grant:** Has there been any impact on the travelling public? Has it caused any unnecessary delays for people, with people being stopped who shouldn't have been, for example?

**Paul Lincoln:** I would not classify it in those terms, Mr Grant, although one of the benefits of the programme is that there will be fewer false positives in the future—in terms of the potential number of people who could be thrown up by a search result—as the algorithms will be better, to try and follow that through. But there are no greater numbers than currently of people who would be stopped unnecessarily.

- Q33 **Peter Grant:** I am not quite following that. You are telling me that the new system will throw up fewer false positives, but you seem to be implying that it will lead to fewer people being stopped who shouldn't have been stopped. What are you doing with the false positives just now? Do you not have to stop somebody and check before you realise they are false positive?

**Paul Lincoln:** Somebody may be stopped and questioned, but you would rapidly understand, through that process, whether or not that somebody ought to be let through or not. From a security perspective, we would much rather be in that perspective than the alternative.

- Q34 **Peter Grant:** To be clear, do you expect to see a reduction in the number of people who are stopped and questioned, even very briefly, before being allowed to carry on with their journey?

**Paul Lincoln:** There may be a small reduction in the number of people. This isn't a major problem, I should say, but you would expect there to be a very small reduction in that sense.

- Q35 **Peter Grant:** Thank you. Mr Gillan, can you tell us whether the programme had delivered any practical benefits by the time of its intended implementation in March 2019?

**John Gillan:** The border crossing capability, which will ultimately replace the warnings index was in its [*Inaudible*]. We had that number of pilot sites. We also delivered certain capability in the inter. Although we have not continued with that, because it no longer fitted in [*Inaudible*]*—*the model that we were looking for, in terms of our targeting, intelligence and other programmes within the Home Office.

**Chair:** Mr Gillan, we are having problems with your sound. You are intermittent and we can't hear you. Mr Grant, may I suggest that you carry on with questions to another witness? Mr Gillan might have to cut out and rejoin us, to sort out his sound. Mr Grant, I will throw back to you, and Mr Gillan, we will bring you back in after you log out and back in again.

- Q36 **Peter Grant:** Thanks, Chair. I think it may be a syncing problem. I was able to hear Mr Gillan, even when he was not speaking, and then he



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carried on speaking. It may just be about synchronising the picture and the sound.

I will move on to Mr Rycroft for now. Mr Rycroft, why did the Department fail to deliver any of the three planned systems by the intended delivery date of March 2019?

**Matthew Rycroft:** As Mr Gillan was attempting to say, there was some delivery before the reset in 2019, so it is not as if the money spent before that time was wasted, although we accept that there is much more to do to ensure full delivery now. The roll-out of Border Crossing now, for instance, is because of the work that was done before 2019. Some of the capabilities that were in the existing programme, which we took out of scope as part of that reset, are being delivered through other programmes. Those programmes have had, if you like, a head start as a result of that work. I am referring in particular to the Advanced Freight Targeting Capability and Advanced Border Control, both of which are being built on by a programme called Cerberus, which has had some benefit from the initial work of the Digital Services at the Border programme.

Q37 **Peter Grant:** There does seem to be a common theme, which I think the Chair referred to at the start of the session, with the Home Office and big technology projects not being delivered on time, to scale or, very often, to budget. What is the problem with the Home Office and technology projects?

**Matthew Rycroft:** As I said, I think the three big things are about scope, governance and deliverability. The really big one, I would suggest, is scope. The huge lesson that we are learning from this programme, and which the programme itself learned through its reset, is to ensure that you do not have scope creep, so that the scope continues to be doable and achievable even when circumstances change. Circumstances did change in relation to this programme in a very big way: the UK voted to leave the European Union; the Government changed the way in which data is classified, in terms of different security levels; and the Home Office changed our approach to intelligence and targeting, including in relation to the border. It was seeking to deal with all sorts of changes to scope. My predecessors were quite right in 2019 to reset, to narrow the scope back to something deliverable. I am pleased to say that, as the National Audit Office found, confidence on deliverability is now significantly higher.

**Peter Grant:** I think we have Mr Gillan back. Can you hear us now Mr Gillan?

**John Gillan:** I can hear you. Can you hear me?

Q38 **Peter Grant:** Yes; thank you for that. Mr Gillan, in May 2016 the Department wrote in a Treasury minute that Advanced Freight Targeting Capability would be delivered in 2017 and that Border Crossing would be rolled out nationally by 2017. Just a year later, it was supposed to be done, but it has not happened. Why were assurances given in 2016, which failed to be delivered so soon afterwards?



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**John Gillan:** Thank you, Mr Grant. There were a number of factors that affected the delivery. The major ones included the decision to leave the European Union, which changed some of the requirements for border crossing. We knew that was going to come about, but it took some time before we finalised what those requirements were going to be.

In respect of the Advanced Freight Targeting Capability, there was also a strategic step change in the way in which we were going about utilising our intelligence and targeting data. AFTC was designed to focus solely on freight, but to provide a much richer picture with regard to our intelligence and our targeting capability it was decided that we needed a system that would link both the people's side of our data and our freight data. The AFTC became something that wasn't going to do that, because it was a siloed system specifically designed for freight only. The capability itself did go live with certain carriers and, as I mentioned earlier, that capability is being utilised as part of the way forward in bringing together the freight and people data into the one space.

Q39 **Peter Grant:** Clearly, at the time that the Treasury minute was issued in May 2016, nobody knew what the result of the referendum the following month was going to be. Had you made contingency plans at that point as to what changes you would need to make if there was a vote to leave in the referendum?

**John Gillan:** In the planning that we had made about what our border crossing was going to be, we knew that we wanted an integrated system, but there are interfaces that now operate within that system that are very specific to the requirements since we left the EU. This links in to the emergence of the Future Border and Immigration Scheme, which is the new system that developed the six interlocutors that we are having to put into place—those new interfaces. They were not actually finalised until December 2018, but we were trying to work out what they would be as we approached that time. We knew they would be different, but we needed to wait for them to be finalised before we could implement them, in terms of the technology that we required to be put in place for border crossings.

Q40 **Peter Grant:** I do not know whether you heard one of the comments that the permanent secretary made as you were reconnecting, but he referred to the problems that had been caused by a Government-wide decision to change the way to classify information, and I think the confidential classification was removed all together. The Government had decided to do that before this programme started in April 2014, so why didn't you make plans from the beginning for information to be classified according to the new system rather than according to the previous system?

**John Gillan:** One of the things that we were taking into account at the time was how we would best do that. It wasn't clear at that point that we were going to have to move from treating all the data as either official or confidential to a position where we would have to treat a significant amount of data as secret. We knew that the implications of that were going to be expensive, in terms of having to create the systems that would safeguard secret data. So, we engaged in a process of discussion with the



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data owners, to see whether there were other methods for doing that and whether we could keep the data below secret level. We came to the conclusion in discussions with them that that was not possible.

We then looked at whether, in storing that secret data, there would be provision with other Government Departments, rather than going down the more expensive route of having to build our own data centre in which to house it. We did that: we explored with Departments like MOD and GCHQ. They were reluctant to mix different datasets at that level, because they thought that would complicate processes. Therefore, by the end of 2015, the programme had taken the decision that it would be necessary for the Home Office to build its own data centre to manage that secret data. It was right for us to take the time to ensure that we did not immediately look to implement what was, in the end, an expensive option, and explored options that might not cost as much as creating our own data centre.

- Q41 **Peter Grant:** Why did those implications and discussions between Departments and so on not happen before the Government announced their decision? Did the Home Office or the MOD, as far as you know, make representations about the potential difficulty that that decision might cost them before it was announced?

**John Gillan:** The policy decision to change the way data was classified was made in 2012. The implementation of that was in 2014; the programme—DSAB—was only set up in 2014. Once the programme was set up and was looking at its objectives, we got into the real consideration of what the implications would be for us and what the solutions might be.

- Q42 **Peter Grant:** I have one further question and then I will hand back to the Chair. Do you anticipate a requirement for significant additional capacity in the systems as a result of our exit from the European Union?

**John Gillan:** I do not know if I would anticipate it being a result of our exit from the European Union, but pre-covid, the growth in the volume of passenger traffic certainly indicated that we needed to make provision for that going forward. We have built in provision for that within border crossing and the new watchlisting capability that we are developing, yes.

- Q43 **Chair:** I want to come on to the sad litany of failures in your Department, Mr Rycroft. We have seen problems with the emergency service network and e-Borders. Those big, technical projects done at scale seem to be a problem for your Department. I mentioned the emergency services network; perhaps we can use this opportunity to get an update on that programme. Can you tell us how things are going with that one?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, Chair, but first of all, on the wider Home Office portfolio, it is absolutely right to acknowledge that there are some very big, very risky programmes within that portfolio, but it is also right to highlight some of our successes.

- Q44 **Chair:** Okay. Try us and see if we agree.



**Matthew Rycroft:** The EU settlement scheme, which we were talking about earlier, was a fantastic Home Office success in digitising what is now possibly more than 5 million EU nationals securing that status. The Future Border and Immigration System—the new points-based system—has come in seamlessly in recent weeks, with different routes being opened. Just yesterday, we opened the route for British nationals overseas in Hong Kong to be able to come to the UK. All those things have happened extremely effectively, and I pay tribute to the people working on them.

Just on one other Home Office programme, if I may, the Police Uplift programme is ahead of schedule to recruit the extra 20,000 police officers over—

Q45 **Chair:** A good try, Mr Rycroft, and I do not blame you for wanting to trumpet success in your Department, but they are on rather a different scale. People known to the system through the EU system or the Hong Kong resettlement programme are all important, but in terms of the big tech stuff, these are both challenges.

You have just trumpeted successes, but a delay on the emergency services network for every year after 2022 is set to cost the taxpayer, through the Home Office, £650 million a year. Can you reassure us that it will be delivered by 2022, and can you give us an update?

**Matthew Rycroft:** First of all, the Future Border and Immigration System is not a minor programme in any sense, and it is a huge tech success to get that points-based system up and running absolutely on schedule.

**Chair:** I did not say it was minor; I said it was on a different scale.

**Matthew Rycroft:** It is a big-scale programme. On the emergency services network, as previously discussed, the programme has had delays and a reset, in similar ways to the DSAB programme that we are talking about today. As a latest date for the full cut-over and the ending of the current system, Airwave, we continue to aim for summer 2025. We are seeking to do it earlier than that, if we can. We will ensure that we do not have a day longer than necessary paying for both the present and the future systems, but we have to make sure that when we do cut over, the users—in other words, the emergency services—are confident in the future service that they are providing. We know that this service will be better. It will cover more kilometres of road. It will be in the London underground and above the earth, so it is a better service, and crucially—

Q46 **Chair:** Sorry, Mr Rycroft, we know that the aim was to have a better service, but we also know what you have just told us now: there is a £650 million a year cost after 2022 to keep Airwave going. The crippling cost of keeping the whole system going will cost the taxpayer nearly £2 billion—it is £1.95 billion.

**Matthew Rycroft:** But the majority of that cost is the ongoing costs of the existing system. Secondly, even if it were not to be ready in '25, and even if there were to be further delays of some years, which we are not anticipating—we are doing everything we can to avoid that—it would still



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be beneficial from a cost perspective to go ahead with this programme. We are absolutely determined—

- Q47 **Chair:** Sorry, I think we are talking slightly at cross-purposes here. No one doubts that the old system needed replacing, but the fact that we are tied into the old system in the way we are, with the costs as high as they are, means every delay in introducing the new system is costing—let me repeat—around £650 million a year to the taxpayer. You have not denied that figure, so I'm in the ballpark for that figure.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I agree with you on that figure, and that is one of the many things that is driving us on to complete the cut-off of the existing system and the full handover to the new system as quickly as we can.

- Q48 **Chair:** But this Committee has been privy to some of the background private papers around the emergency services network, so we understand what a reset can mean. It is not always as grand as it may seem to the world that does not see the secret paperwork behind it. You have had the same problems with e-Borders. I was in the Home Office between 2007 and 2010, when the scope was pretty clear about what e-Borders was. It was then junked in 2011 and reset again in 2014 and 2019. We are seeing a similar pattern. You have talked about the successes, as you see them—some of it we would agree with—on other projects. Why are we seeing, repeatedly, problems with the technical aspects of these programmes? What is the challenge in the Home Office? Having come in as a new permanent secretary just under a year ago, what do you think is the problem in the Home Office, and what are you doing to fix it?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There are a number of things to say there, and I won't repeat what I was saying earlier about scope, governance and so on. The other factor to bring in, which is related to the emergency services network, is that, in retrospect, the Government should probably not have sought to be at the cutting edge of new technology, which it did seek in the early days of the ESN programme. It is probably better in general to be fast followers—to allow the innovation to be done in the private sector, and then for Government to buy more off-the-shelf IT systems and other systems once those systems are proven. As a general rule, that is something that we are seeking to bring into Home Office programmes, as well as the improvements in governance, technical expertise, getting the right people on to the right programmes, prioritising between the different programmes within the portfolios that we now seek to do, and so on.

- Q49 **Chair:** I am still a bit perplexed, because I noted down that you said scope, governance and deliverability are issues. I would say they are not particularly news, and they were issues that were of concern over a decade ago, when the e-Borders system was in its early stages. Surely this is the basis of what Government should be getting right, whichever the Department and whatever the subject—working out what it wants to do, making sure the governance is well managed, and then delivering it and making sure it is a deliverable programme. Why is it that the Home Office, on these two long-term, big projects, has failed so badly on this?



**Matthew Rycroft:** That is exactly what the Home Office today is doing. We have in place a project delivery improvement programme, and we are using that across our portfolio, focused most specifically on the reddest risks, if I can put it that way, which include this programme and ESN. We are relentlessly focusing on that until we deliver, because we know that is the right thing to do and is the value-for-money approach. That is exactly what we are doing.

**Chair:** Well, it does not seem very good value for money, at £650 million—that is the ESN one, of course—for every year of delay. Let's turn to Richard Holden on the issue of scope. Mr Holden, over to you.

Q50 **Mr Holden:** Thank you very much, Chair. On this issue of scope, I want to look slightly more broadly at what systems you have been working on and looking at with European partners, perhaps in the run-up to this moment of departure from the EU, and now our own facility. Did the EU themselves have a digital border system that they were working on, and were you working on it with them, Mr Rycroft?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Can I suggest that Mr Lincoln answers that question?

**Paul Lincoln:** The programme that we have is not linked to any EU programmes. In the hindsight of where we are, that is a good position to be in in terms of the delivery of this programme. Yes, it has had some problems, but those are ones that we are determined to fix.

Q51 **Mr Holden:** But the EU did have their own Union customs code in 2016 and EU customs declaration systems on the customs side, and other programmes as well, such as the smart border policy paper. They had these digital programmes that they were pursuing.

**Paul Lincoln:** While the UK was in the Union customs code, HMRC had—and still has—a number of systems that were interoperable with EU systems, but as we have left the EU and are at the end of the transition period, HMRC has changed those systems. We should put this into the perspective where the Digital Services at the Border programme has the different component parts, which it had not originally as its scope, which were not about customs per se; these were about people and security risks, rather than fiscal customs. So fiscal customs were under the Union customs code, and HMRC would give us targets as Border Force to go and intercept. But from a security perspective, no, this is a UK standalone capability.

Q52 **Mr Holden:** I understand. Has the European Union successfully digitised its borders?

**Paul Lincoln:** The EU is actually looking to do further digitisation going forward. They are looking to introduce a thing called an ETIAS, which is similar to an ETA. In a few years' time, they are also looking, as part of a wider common transit convention, to reduce the amount of paperwork associated with transit. I think they are looking to do that in about 2024, 2025. So it isn't as though the EU has got in place a series of digital systems that we should just copy.



**Mr Holden:** Thank you, Chairman.

Q53 **Chair:** Thank you, Mr Holden. Mr Rycroft, in an earlier answer to Mr Grant, you were positive about these issues—this is when I was scribbling down the scope, governance and deliverability. You were being very positive, but the NAO Report—part three, page 47, paragraph 3.18—says your Department rated the programme’s scope risk as red in August last year, and highlighted an increased likelihood of scope change. On the one hand you are telling me that it has got a lot better, but on the other hand there are still big aspects of concern. Why was it red then, and what is the situation now?

**Matthew Rycroft:** On DSAB, the reset was the most important moment in terms of settling the scope. Since then, there was an IPA review that judged it red, followed by one that judged it amber, which means we are in the right direction, but still with some concerns. It is those concerns that we are working through. We are basically into delivery mode now with this programme. The scope concerns are largely behind us. What we are really focusing on now is roll-out and delivery, and so far we are on schedule. In general, scope concerns tend to happen in the early days, months or years in a programme, and then once you get into delivery—

**Chair:** We are talking about August last year.

**Matthew Rycroft:** Since then, as I say, we have cracked on with the programme and we are now firmly in delivery mode.

Q54 **Chair:** Okay, so where is it now? It is not red, so what is the scope concern now?

**Matthew Rycroft:** The broader aspect of this programme is happening now. We have already rolled out to the first seven sites, and we are on track to roll out to all the remaining ports and airports in this country in the coming months. We are on schedule on that bit. Mr Lincoln can pick up on that more broadly.

**Paul Lincoln:** The last IPA review, which took place in June last year, was rated at amber, which followed on from the reset, which was previously at amber-red. The reason it moved to amber was that we had taken account of the recommendations that they had put in place and those of the independent review that we did, including strengthening the governance and leadership of the programme going forward. As the permanent secretary said, it is now in delivery for Border Crossing.

Q55 **Chair:** Okay, so it is in delivery, but as late as summer last year, “Of the eight risks” that the Department reported on, “it rated one as Red—scope risk—and seven others, such as insufficient resource and capabilities to deliver the programme, as Amber”, and yet you have gone ahead on the basis of amber. Where are you now? Where would you rate those now, Mr Lincoln or Mr Gillan?

**Paul Lincoln:** I will ask Mr Gillan to come in in a moment. The critical thing from the perspective of delivery is, as the permanent secretary said, that this is now in live use in seven of the sites that we are rolling it out



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across, including our largest, at Heathrow. That in itself is a significant measure of success. But Mr Gillan might—

**Q56 Chair:** It is a measure of success, but let us be clear that Heathrow, as you highlight, is normally one of the busiest airports in the world but has not been very busy since the roll-out. Has the roll-out been helped by the fact that we have very few passengers going through our major ports and airports?

**Paul Lincoln:** The roll-out is slightly easier from the perspective of training, but is no more or less difficult from the perspective of technical delivery. The fact that there are not more passengers is not the biggest consideration in that. The scope and the complexity were tested at a much higher scale than we would expect to see even at Heathrow even on a busy day. As Mr Gillan said earlier, there is also contingency built in—6% annual growth on top of that.

**John Gillan:** On your point about the risk, that risk rating was the risk rating that we in the programme gave ourselves. Since reset, we have a very vigilant approach to the way that we manage the scope and, in particular, the risk. That particular risk was in recognition of one aspect of the programme delivery, which had slipped on the timeline; it is now back to amber, in fact, because we have made up the ground. Our approaches to risk and to making sure that we maintain the scope are very rigorous. As the director general and the permanent secretary indicated, we are now in delivery mode. We are on schedule to deliver Border Crossing to every primary control point by 30 June this year.

**Q57 Chair:** Figure 12 in the Report sets this out clearly. That is 56 ports upgraded. Is that right, Mr Gillan?

**John Gillan:** That is correct.

**Q58 Chair:** What is the number now, as we sit here?

**John Gillan:** We have now rolled out to seven locations.

**Q59 Chair:** Seven—so some way to go still in five months.

**John Gillan:** There is some way to go, but, of course, we are building on the learning from the roll-out of the Border Crossing pilot 0.3 and 0.4, and we spent the time between March and November addressing a number of the scalability issues that we had. In the Report, the NAO made comment in respect of 0.4 on the percentage of time that the system was not available—I think it was 54% of the time. Since the roll-out, however, which we started at the beginning of December with our early adopter sites, we have spent a month making sure that we addressed any of the teething problems that we always get when rolling out new technology. We have rolled out to a number of other locations, and Border Crossing has been available 98% of the time at those rolled-out locations.

**Q60 Chair:** To be clear, in terms of your user target, you are aiming to have 7,000 users by June 2021. Does that mean frontline staff, or is that the number of terminals to access the system?



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**John Gillan:** No, that is frontline staff who will be on the system.

Q61 **Chair:** So how many at the moment? Where are we at, as we sit here today?

**John Gillan:** I haven't got the exact number for that, Chair. I can write to the Committee with it, but as it is only seven sites, it will be well short of the 7,000 at the present time.

Q62 **Chair:** We are talking about our major ports and airports, here. I am not sure if, Mr Gillan, it is you or Mr Lincoln that can answer this, but what about all the smaller private airports and airstrips—other ports where leisure craft have typically gone in? We never had a 100% check at the border. Will this facility ever be available to those other users, particularly if they haven't got Border Force staff in place there?

**John Gillan:** Part of what we are looking at is what our mobile capability will be to deliver the same capability as we have at those major locations—that is part of the programme work, to put in that mobile capability.

Q63 **Chair:** Okay, so that is the equivalent of having the immigration officer on a cross-channel ferry, as used to happen in the past. Is that what you mean—someone coming when a flight is expected to land at a private airstrip?

**John Gillan:** That would be our expectation in respect of that—that we would have some sort of mobile capability available to Border Force staff to use in that situation.

Q64 **Chair:** Mr Lincoln, would you expect there would be a premium price to pay if someone is flying in on their private jet, to have a personal immigration officer there to greet them and therefore not delay their onward journey? Would you be charging a premium price to them for that?

**Paul Lincoln:** It is clearly a consideration for Ministers whether or not they wish to charge for services that we deliver. You will be aware from your previous time in the Home Office, Chair, that, of course, at the moment, we will meet flights on a risk basis. I won't go into the details of what that risk consideration is, but that is the approach which we take.

Q65 **Chair:** I just thought it was worth asking. I want to move on to the issue about leadership of this programme over time, which is why I asked you at the beginning, Mr Gillan, how long you had been SRO. We have seen a string of people in charge of this programme. How are you, Mr Lincoln, trying to make sure you prevent continued high turnover? What are you doing to entice Mr Gillan to stay with it? He has been here two and a half years, now, nearly. How are you going to make sure we don't have churn?

**Paul Lincoln:** Mr Gillan is, yes, the longest serving of the SROs—

**Chair:** Which is great, Mr Gillan, but not very long, is it, really?



**Paul Lincoln:** Just over two years. He was appointed on the basis that he would stay in post until the end of the delivery of the programme, which is the way in which that has been approached. In addition, though, Chair, as you will see from the Report, we have also put in place other changes of leadership which strengthen the programme overall. But also, in the unfortunate event that Mr Gillan were to go under a bus—I am sure that is not going to be the case—we then have, of course, resilience by having additional leadership in place. So we have put in place an additional technical director as well as a programme director who has got excellent delivery success on some of the other Home Office programmes which have delivered successfully.

Q66 **Chair:** I do not doubt that there have been good people involved over the years, but it has been over many years. It is 2003 to 2021, so we are knocking on for nearly 20 years now by the time it is actually fully operational and delivering smoothly—that is a ridiculously long period of time. What are you going to do to make sure that you maintain that technical skill and leadership? We have looked at skills in the civil service many times on this Committee. Do you think that there are any barriers to getting people with the right technical skills, to make sure that some of the pitfalls we have seen over the last 18, 19 years are not repeated?

**Paul Lincoln:** One of the issues which all Government Departments have seen over the past number of years is that the number of skills in technical areas have been almost in competition—they are scarce in the country as a whole. But what we have done for this programme is put in place framework contracts with outside suppliers. It is their responsibility to provide the right number of people and the right skills to support the senior civil service leadership of the programme as we go forward. That significantly reduces the risk of there being problems in technical capability and capacity of this programme over the next few years.

**Chair:** Okay. It concerns me, though, that we are still going round this circle. On this issue I am going to bring in, first of all, Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and then Mr Richard Holden MP.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Mr Rycroft, I would like to get a little bit of assurance from you out of this hearing that these continual delays and overruns of cost, in any future projects, are likely to be under control, because the inception of this particular project, as the Chair has just said, was in 2003. Here we are in 2021 and it is still not properly implemented. Four SROs have come and gone, and various permanent secretaries have come and gone. When you took over in March 2020, you presumably looked at all the major risk problems in the Home Office. Hopefully, you identified ESN and this as two of the bigger ones. Can you tell the Committee what you did, when you had identified those problems, to implement different systems to ensure that it would not happen again?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, I did. One of the first things that I did was look at our portfolio. At that time, it was rated red, which I was extremely surprised by. I had never been in a Department that had a red portfolio—red means that it is impossible for every programme to be delivered on



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time and on budget—and that was a real wake-up call. We absolutely had to act differently to ensure in particular that high-cost, high-risk and high-duration programmes come in to land effectively, on time and on budget, with any further delays or overruns minimised.

We have a portfolio-wide approach. We are seeking to learn the best practice from across Government and from the private sector. We are trying to get the right balance of people coming in as consultants, but also skilling up civil servants for the long term. We are seeking to ensure—exactly as the Chair was pushing us to do—that we reduce the churn among the SROs, and that when someone is appointed SRO for a major programme, that is the one and only thing that they are doing. I am afraid that we have had some examples of an SRO covering multiple programmes, or doing that role alongside other important responsibilities. From my perspective, if you are the SRO of a programme of this size, that is a very full-time job that will keep you fully occupied for many years. Having that continuity is essential.

There are lots of other things that we can do in terms of improving our contractual arrangements and ensuring that we have the commercial savvy, if I can put it that way, to operate with our private sector contractors and suppliers in the best possible way. We are doing all sorts of things. One final thing to mention—apologies for the length of this answer—is that we are seeking to prioritise between our programmes. In other words, if there is a bit of a zero-sum game in terms of the total resource, whether people or money, we will ensure that the most important programmes, and the highest-risk programmes, are where we go first. We cannot cut corners on those, because if we do, we will end up with the same sorts of problem in the future that the NAO and your Committee have identified in the past.

**Q67 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I take your point that you have never seen a whole Department's programme in red, but of course, you must have seen individual projects going wrong at the Foreign Office. It strikes me that, here, not only was the level of skill a problem, but the real problem was governance. You and your predecessors did not really know what was going on, because your people at the coalface had, as the NAO Report makes clear, a culture of secrecy and cover-ups. If the governance mechanisms had been correct, you would immediately have known at certain stages that things were going wrong. Can you give the Committee any confidence that the governance now in place will inform you, in sufficiently good time for you to do something about it, when things start to go wrong?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, absolutely, Sir Geoffrey. Perhaps I can answer in two different ways. First, in relation to this particular programme, I am glad to say that the National Audit Office itself saw improvements in the governance since the reset, and that has led it to have additional confidence in delivery. Secondly, and more broadly, your question goes absolutely to the heart of the culture of this Department—or indeed any Government Department—in really making sure that we have a culture of continual learning, of bringing in best practice, and, in particular, of having



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a sort of openness that allows people at the coalface, if I can put it that way, to be able to raise concerns as soon as they feel those concerns.

The Windrush scandal, which obviously has nothing at all to do with this programme but did happen in the same Department, has been our driver of that cultural shift, which is absolutely essential, in my view, to allow every single member of staff in the Department to raise their voice if they feel as though they have a concern. That is a big piece of cultural transformation, and we are well under way.

I am hopeful that it will also have benefits in this part of the Department, in terms of the ability of anyone who has any concerns about anything being off track to be able to raise those concerns. It is absolutely wrong to seek to either cover it up or just to manage, in the sense of the scope increasing or the budgets being missed. It is important that we have not just governance, but a culture that incentivises people to raise their concerns as early as possible.

**Q68 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** What are the governance arrangements for this particular project? Is there a project board? Who sits on that board who is reporting directly to you?

**Matthew Rycroft:** For this particular project, Mr Gillan is the SRO and there is a board that reports to Paul Lincoln, as the director general and head of Border Force. My role on this programme is looking at the portfolio as a whole and ensuring that Ministers, as well as myself and my executive committee colleagues, have an oversight over the whole portfolio and are doing the prioritisation in practice that I was talking about in theory a moment ago.

**Q69 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** That doesn't quite answer my question. My question, and it is an important one, is, do you see the minutes? Do you have an individual report every time that project board meets on this particular project?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I provide oversight for this particular project through Mr Lincoln, as the head of Border Force and the person who reports directly to me, and to whom Mr Gillan directly reports.

**Q70 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** How frequently do they report to you?

**Paul Lincoln:** Would you like me to pick up on that, Sir Geoffrey?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Yes, please.

**Paul Lincoln:** I chair my own board, which is the Border Force board that meets monthly. Mr Gillan reports to me on the progress that DSAB is making as part of that, on a monthly basis. It is worth saying that in addition to that reporting mechanism, during the reset and post-reset myself and the head of the Department's digital and data programme, Joanna Davinson, who has now gone off to become the Government's chief digital officer, did additional sets of oversight, to make sure that we were satisfied that this was driving in the right direction, as we went through the reset process.



**Q71 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Do you have a timeline document to say you should have reached certain milestones by a certain point, so that you know quite quickly if something is going off track?

**Paul Lincoln:** The key milestones for the programme are also in Mr Gillan's personal objectives. I meet with Mr Gillan every other week, to go through how he is getting on with programmes. Of course, we review the progress both formally and informally.

**Q72 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Final question. It strikes me that some of what has gone wrong with this project is where you have had excellent IT people and experts at border control, but they don't necessarily talk to each other to discover what is required from each other. Have you now got absolute confidence that all the different people involved are talking to each other, so they can produce the right result?

**Paul Lincoln:** I do, Sir Geoffrey. Mr Gillan chairs his programme board, which has all the relevant stakeholders on it, not only from the technology world, but from our key stakeholders in agencies, law enforcement and beyond. Critically, he has one of the regional directors from Border Force—the frontline, in this respect—who is the regional director for Heathrow. A significant amount of the programme is to do with passengers, and therefore the area that has the most passenger progress—25% of all passengers flown into the country each year routinely—is on the board as well. We make sure that we link that up from end to end.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Thank you very much, Chair.

**Chair:** I want to go back to what Mr Gillan or Mr Lincoln—I forget who; forgive me—said earlier about the small ports and airports point I raised. Could you give us some more detail in writing about how that mobile set up will work? I think you are exploring it. It would be helpful to have more information. I turn to Richard Holden MP.

**Q73 Mr Holden:** Thank you very much, Chair. To pick up on some of Sir Geoffrey's questions, Mr Rycroft you mentioned the issue with the culture of secrecy in your Department. When you arrived, you saw a red portfolio of programmes. How are you addressing that exactly?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Without repeating what I said earlier, the portfolio as a whole was rated red when I joined. We have got it up one level, so it is now at amber-red. We are seeking to get it to amber next year and then, obviously, to green. That is a huge amount of work behind the scenes in order to look at the portfolio as a whole, because the particular programme before us today is only one of 11 major programmes, and there are lots of other programmes as well within that portfolio.

So, we are prioritising, we are bringing in professional capacity and we are building up our capability at other levels as well. We are constantly seeking to improve our governance. The description that Mr Lincoln gave of the programme here is a very good example, from my perspective, and we are ensuring that other programmes have the same sort of governance. We are seeking to improve the way we work with people



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outside the Department who are essential—for instance, the police on the ESN. More broadly, our external engagement needs to improve as well.

- Q74 **Mr Holden:** Are you saying that, as Sir Geoffrey hinted, this is not a question of not having enough technocrats but, actually, of the bureaucrats overriding them and pushing them into boxes?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I would not quite put it like that, but I would accept that we need to get the right blend between people with technical expertise and people who understand the requirements. So, in the case of DSAB—the programme under the microscope today—that has ensured very close working between the IT part of the Department and Mr Lincoln’s part of the Department on the border.

- Q75 **Mr Holden:** So you are saying it is not a question of management but a question of resources. Are you essentially saying it is a question of too many bureaucrats and not enough technocrats, or is it back to culture, as you said previously?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Well, I think it is a combination of things. Culture is probably the most important, but it is also the hardest to fix. In terms of the people, I am glad that we use consultants when we do, because they bring expertise that we do not have in the civil service, but we should not be over-reliant on consultants in any Department or any programme. Overall, it is good to keep those things in balance to ensure that there are enough civil servants working on any programme in order to provide the—  
[Inaudible.]

- Q76 **Mr Holden:** Sure. You say that culture is harder to fix. How much of that should be at your predecessor’s door from leading the Department?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think I have taken over a Department where there has been a cultural evolution for—well, indefinitely, and—

- Q77 **Mr Holden:** It sounds like it might require a cultural revolution, given that this was rated red and you are saying this is the major issue. How dire was the situation with this and other programmes when you arrived?

**Matthew Rycroft:** There was a huge amount of delivery in previous phases of the Department’s existence and what I am concentrating on is ensuring the delivery of the programmes in flight now. This one, in particular, as we have discussed, is just coming into that delivery phase. That is a very exciting part of the programme, and we are building on the successes laid by our predecessors.

- Q78 **Mr Holden:** I am really interested in how the culture of your Department needs to be changed. What are the main things you are driving to make those changes? What were the major issues when you arrived? What is it about the culture?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I started on the Monday after Wendy Williams had published her “Windrush Lessons Learned Review”. I hope you understand that for me that was the real driver of cultural change, and she was very specific in her 30 recommendations about the cultural transformation that



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is required in this Department. Some of that goes to training and some of it goes to really understanding our country's history and how that has an impact on the communities in this country—obviously, that was the origins of the Windrush scandal.

More broadly, when you think about the culture in relation to programmes, I am determined to make sure that we do not have overruns, that we do not have budgets that are not met and that the professionalisation of all our work in this area continues as fast as possible. We have a large and risky portfolio, which I think is the third largest in the whole of the Government—

Q79 **Mr Holden:** I understand. Just coming to that on the risk of the portfolios—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, I am getting a bit of feedback on my headset. Now that you are looking at the milestones that Mr Lincoln mentioned in terms of the governance aspect, aside from the cultural shift, do you, as permanent secretary, hold his feet to the fire on this?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I hold the feet of Mr Lincoln and the feet of other directors general in this Department to the fire, yes. Through them, he holds Mr Gillan's feet and others' feet—

Q80 **Mr Holden:** And we can hold your feet to the fire, therefore, on the delivery of this programme and the key milestones down the line?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Absolutely.

**Mr Holden:** Very good. Thank you, Chair.

Q81 **Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr Rycroft, because—as you know—we like milestones. On the culture of the Home Office, I have to say that I think that it is a long job to change things over many, many different bits of the leadership in that Department—your Department.

Can I turn to the issue of this openness in flagging problems to you? Mr Holden has said that you will have reports on milestones and so on, which we welcome. In the past, however, one of the big problems was that the Department failed to respond to issues that the board was flagging. So, for that particular period between 2014 and 2019, can you explain, Mr Lincoln, why communications about the programmes' progress were not clearly fed up the line, or is that a mischaracterisation?

**Paul Lincoln:** I think that might be a slight mischaracterisation. Obviously, the NAO produced a number of Reports on this, as did the IPA. The first few of those were amber-red and they also included the issue that we have just talked about regarding technical skills and whether or not there were enough in the programme. That is certainly something that we have taken into account as we have gone forward. As I say, we have let some contracts to make sure that we have the technical skills in there, and of course we report the progress of the programme to the executive committee in the Home Office when they are looking at the overall set of the portfolio.



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I think the specific question, or the comment that the Committee has been mentioning, actually came from an internal report that we did on the review, which said that some of the information might not have been passed in quite the same way. I think part of that was in the 2017-ish or 2018-ish timeframe, when the programme itself had struggled a bit, as the Committee has recognised, on the change in scope that was coming in. If we are honest, SROs, of course, wanted to be positive in direction, and I think there was a bit of struggle in this, and part of the reset has seen that we have changed that going forward.

Also, the person who did that review—the NED for the programme—is the same person who has written back to the NAO subsequently to say that they have seen substantial improvement in the transparency, governance and leadership of the programme since then.

**Q82 Chair:** Mr Rycroft, really this brings us to the issue of whether part of the cultural problem that you touched on is that this is a Department where it is difficult to pass up bad news. Is that something that you are concerned about? And how are you going to tackle it?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think that is part of the issue that we were talking about earlier, Chair, in terms of the culture of openness and of empowering every single person in this Department to speak up if they have any concerns. That is the transformation of the culture that the Home Secretary and I are seeking to create through our transformation programme.

**Q83 Chair:** You could also perhaps look at it the other way round—"Here it comes again. There is another project that will be problematic. I won't be here when it is finished"—whoever "I" am—"because everyone has moved on." Failure is an orphan and along the way it passes through many hands, but no one is ultimately responsible. I mean, is there a single person in this programme who has been on it since 2010 or 2014? I doubt that there is anyone who has been on it since 2003.

**Matthew Rycroft:** I am sure that Mr Gillan can—

**Q84 Chair:** Again, I am asking rather rhetorically, because I guess that the answer is probably no.

**Matthew Rycroft:** From my perspective, it is important that we extend the duration of people in crucial roles and that we make sure that senior responsible officers really own their programmes through a number of years. As Mr Lincoln said, when Mr Gillan was appointed, he was appointed through to the end of delivery, and I am absolutely delighted to say that he is on track with that and we are already in that delivery phase, and on track to complete the delivery through this year and next.

**Q85 Chair:** You have been very positive about it along the way. Just to be clear, the NAO Report doesn't give you a whitewash on an improvement, but the fact that something is being delivered now doesn't make up for 18 years of lack of delivery.

However, I want to touch on something else, Mr Gillan. Earlier, we talked



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about ramping up the system and I have referred to the very useful figure 12 in the Report—your deadlines and your targets for June this year, which is only five months away. You were obviously resetting and testing in the middle of the covid-19 pandemic. Can you tell me whether that was positive, in that it gave you breathing space because you were not dealing in live time with many passengers and people, or whether it has caused problems in delaying aspects of the roll-out?

**John Gillan:** Could I refer back to the question you asked about the number of users of the new system today? I can confirm that figure is now 300 users, so we are still some way short of the 7,000 that we are aiming for, but I thought I would bring you up to date.

Q86 **Chair:** Thank you for offering up that number. That is a big target. Thank you for your candour, which we like on the Committee. On Covid-19, what has the impact been?

**John Gillan:** It has been a bit of both, Chair. There have been issues in relation to getting access to some of the rooms where the technology place. Those rooms are relatively small, and we have had to take into account the social distancing measures that we need. There have been some issues in respect of that.

Q87 **Chair:** You say there have been issues. Presumably you have still been able to access them. Is it a material delay, or are things just slightly slower?

**John Gillan:** It has just been slightly slower. We have had to work around it. We have our milestones on the programme; in delivering some of that, we have had to make allowances. There has been some slippage, but not significant enough to derail our delivery time.

Q88 **Chair:** Are you talking about days, weeks or months of slippage?

**John Gillan:** We are talking about days. We have recognised the issues, and we resolved them within a matter of days.

When we started the roll-out of Border Crossing, the passenger numbers were so low that they did not really test us on scalability to the extent that we expected to have done by now, but that has its upside. It has given us more time. When you are rolling out technology, there are always teething problems, and it has given us more time to address those. I am pleased to say that on this roll-out, we have seen very few of those so far. Having rolled out Border Crossing to all 56 locations by the end of June, I can say that there has been a positive effect in dealing with the sort of scalability issues that we had when we were rolling out Border Crossing 0.4. It has given us the time to do that in a graduated way. There are pluses and negatives from the impact of Covid-19.

Q89 **Chair:** Are you confident that the stability and availability problems have been tested enough for when that scale-up has to take place, or will that volume have to go through to really test the system?



**John Gillan:** When we were rolling out Border Crossing 0.4, our aim had been to roll it out in an agile way—continuing to roll it out, but addressing any scalability issues as we went. When we had to postpone that roll-out in March, it was because we recognised that there were some fundamental issues that needed to be addressed in scalability. Between March and November this year, we have been working and testing to ensure that we have resolved those major problems. I now have far more confidence about the roll-out of that capability and, given where we have got to, the work that we have been able to do in testing over that period.

Q90 **Chair:** Mr Rycroft, one of the big problems—I have touched on this with ESN, which involves huge figures of money—for this programme is around funding. Keeping the legacy systems running for an additional three years costs £145 million. That is not really a good use of taxpayers' money. Have you got anything to say about that?

**Matthew Rycroft:** The National Audit Office is absolutely right to highlight that the full value for money of the originally designated programme was not met in those early years, but we are cracking on, as was said, with getting to the delivery phase in order to prevent any further overruns. The total additional cost to this programme as a result of the delays, the reset and so on is £173 million. That is a very large amount of money, and we are doing everything we can to avoid that number going up any further.

Q91 **Chair:** Can you break that number down for us—the £173 million—in broad terms?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Perhaps I will pass on to Mr Gillan at this point.

**Paul Lincoln:** Maybe I should start, Chair. The £173 million takes account of the three areas that the permanent secretary set out at the beginning: the additional requirements as a result of leaving the EU, the change in the official secrets split, and responding to the approach that we have taken to targeting. The biggest chunk of that is just over £50 million associated with the changes that we needed for Border Crossing—changes associated with the approach to having to put in secret data centres, and a federated watchlist. There is another £20 million or so associated with the future border and immigration system, and then there are some additional costs around cyber-security and various other parts of the programme. In broad terms, they respond to the major changes that Mr Rycroft set out at the beginning of this session.

Q92 **Chair:** So the extra £20 million for border and immigration system changes has been laid on to this project specifically. Was it not able to cope with those sorts of changes anyway? Is it not just that you have an extra check to do? Can you walk us through why that change will cost £20 million? In simple terms, what technology or new software is there? We want to get an idea of how that is broken down.

**Paul Lincoln:** I will ask Mr Gillan to come in on that.



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**John Gillan:** The new requirements included the ability to check individuals' status at the gate. We also wanted to make sure that we were connected to the Interpol system for lost and stolen documents. Of course, one of the big costs for us is the integration of the e-passport gates into the new Border Crossing system. That required not only an uplift in the operating system and the software, but the actual integration of the gates into border crossings. The Border Crossing system is an integrated system, connected to other systems; the security aspects around that are fundamental, and we need to attend to those also. Those are the additional costs that fall into that £20 million area.

Q93 **Chair:** It would be helpful if you could write to us with a full breakdown of that—and, indeed, with what the extra £50 million is for. Obviously, we may have to do some of the secret stuff differently, but you could write to us on the changes as a result of leaving the EU. Some of these checks would have been taking place anyway, so we are keen to see what the difference is. Can you commit to there being no further cost increases now that the scope is settled and the roll-out is beginning?

**Paul Lincoln:** As you say, Chair, the scope is settled and we are in delivery. We do not expect there to be any further cost increases, but should there be anything untoward, we are of course more than happy to write back to the Committee, setting out any issues.

Q94 **Chair:** It would be very helpful if we could agree with your Department a regular report back to this Committee. I will not say that it would save your appearing in front of us, but it might mean that we target our time in hearings with you more effectively. Can we get that commitment from you?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I am very happy to do that, of course.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr Rycroft. Let's turn to Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Q95 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Mr Rycroft, we can see from that last exchange how a simple change in scope—namely, the classification of data, some of which was secret—not only increased the costs of this project but led to considerable delays. Could we have an undertaking from you that if, on any of your major projects, either your Department or another Government Department tries to introduce a decision that changes the scope, it will be properly considered—the impact on an individual project like this?

**Matthew Rycroft:** Yes, absolutely.

Q96 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Going back to my question on skills, it seems that you have lots of very good technical people, whether it be IT people, experts in the law or experts in dealing with criminals at the border, but on a project like this, there does not seem to be the proper leadership skills, whether from project managers or whoever, to bring all those individual talents together and say, "This is how we need to deliver the entire project." I am sure that if that had happened much quicker,



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the project would have been delivered by now.

**Matthew Rycroft:** What you are describing, essentially, is the role of the SRO, the person who brings together—

Q97 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Yes, but the problem is that the SRO has been largely—I don't want to minimise this—plucked out from doing something else, instead of being someone with the right skills to deliver a particular project.

**Matthew Rycroft:** One of the things that we are doing across the portfolio is ensuring that all our SROs and others have the appropriate training through the Major Projects Leadership Academy, which the Cabinet Office runs. It is now increasingly a requirement for our SROs on our major programmes to have that sort of background, so that they do not just know how to do generic civil service leadership, if you like, but have the very particular requirements to which you are alluding, and can bring together all the different elements of a major programme like this one.

Q98 **Chair:** Sir Geoffrey, I feel that I should bring in Mr Gillan here, because you might have inadvertently maligned him. What I think you were saying, Sir Geoffrey, was that over time we have seen many SROs before this Committee on some of these projects who were not skilled in an area, and yet had become SROs. Mr Gillan, would you like to say anything about your skills before I go back to Sir Geoffrey?

**John Gillan:** Thank you, Chair. My leadership skills have been honed across a number of delivery programmes, going right back to leading one of the security projects for the Olympics, leading up to London 2012.

On the points that Sir Geoffrey was making about co-ordinating the technology with the leadership, that is one of the areas since reset that we have focused on very strongly. We have a wide number of technically skilled people. We have the leadership to a certain level within the programme, but then at technical delivery level, at programme delivery level and at my level as the SRO, we pull together that decision-making process.

More than that, we have robust governance, with a number of groups looking to make sure that all those work, and that the different areas of the programme are pulled together. In fact, the non-executive director, Chris Pearson, who carried out the review, commented when he wrote to the National Audit Office in October last year on the fact that there was now a good opportunity in the programme. With technical issues, where they are taken and reported on, there is an opportunity to raise questions and concerns and to challenge the team. It is one of the areas that we have really focused on, and it is actually one of the areas that gives me most confidence in the roll-out—in the capability, and in the deliverability of it.

Q99 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Mr Gillan, I should make it quite clear that I was not impugning your particular skills; we don't yet know whether



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you have the right skills—the jury is still out. The proof is in the pudding as to whether you deliver this project on time and on budget.

**John Gillan:** Absolutely, Sir Geoffrey.

**Chair:** And we will have you back, Mr Gillan, whatever happens.

Q100 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** May I ask Mr Lincoln something? I know that you have given us lots of assurances that this project will be delivered on time, and we all sincerely hope that it is, but if it is not, what are the contingencies?

**Paul Lincoln:** That is a very good question, Sir Geoffrey. There are already some contingencies in the programme, as you would expect, for individual component lines within the critical path, as part of the default. On top of that, while we would not want or expect to, we could extend further the contracts associated with the Warnings Index and Semaphore, but I am very conscious of the Chair's comments about running on legacy systems in that regard. So, while contingencies are in place to deal with that, we do not expect, nor want, to use them.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Thank you.

Q101 **Peter Grant:** Mr Lincoln, may I follow up on your last answer, please? Do you have absolutely cast-iron guarantees in writing from the providers of your legacy systems that they will allow you to extend the contracts, if necessary, after I think March or April 2022, when most are due to be switched off?

**Paul Lincoln:** I will come to Mr Gillan on the specifics of what we have in contractual arrangements, but certainly I have had assurances from the team that we are capable of extending those, if required. Mr Gillan, do you want to offer any further comment?

**John Gillan:** Yes. We expect to give notice to one of our major contracts in October; we will look to end the contract on the Warnings Index. If we need it, we have an extension clause built into that contract, which can take us further, into 2022s, but I am confident that that will not be the case, given our position in terms of the Border Crossing roll-out and the way we have prioritised the delivery of our watchlist management capability. Rather than doing that all in one go, we have phased it in, so that we know that if there are certain elements that we don't have in place by April 2022, we will still be able to get off that contract and end our reliance on the Warnings Index.

Q102 **Peter Grant:** What are the cost implications if you do have to extend any of these contracts?

**Paul Lincoln:** [*Inaudible*—Mr Gillan go down the short route. One of the things we said, and that I think the NAO say in their Report, is that we would not want to be in a position to run these on. If we were to run them on instead of, for example, continuing with this programme, it would cost an additional £130 million over the 10 years of the programme, so it is critical that we move away from this. In some ways, it may be a bit of a



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moot point; in 10 years' time the Warnings Index will be 36 years old and, as the NAO point out, it would be very difficult to sustain then.

**Q103 Peter Grant:** The NAO said in their Report that some of the capability that was originally going to be delivered by the border systems will now be picked up by other systems being developed by the Home Office—for example, the Data Futures programme. How concerned are you that the success of the entire electronic Digital Services at the Border programme is so dependent on a completely different programme in the Home Office?

**Paul Lincoln:** I will put this into a couple of parts. This Digital Services at the Border programme is continuing its delivery. The new programme, Cerberus, is not just the additional capability scope from DSAB that was being moved out; it will provide greater benefits than that. The separate, additional scope is doing very well, in terms of technical design and delivery against its milestones. A business case has been signed off.

**Q104 Peter Grant:** How much of the work that was done on the systems that were not taken forward have you been able to take into, for example, the new Cerberus system, and how much of that work was just lost and had to be written off as wasted money?

**Paul Lincoln:** It is a very good question, Mr Grant, and I am glad to say that the Department did not write off any costs associated with these programmes. All the work that we have done is being taken forward in one way, shape, form or another, into other parts of the programme. That was a key element of where we took this programme forward.

**Q105 Peter Grant:** When do you expect the Data Futures programme to be operational? Are you still looking at 2023-24 on that one?

**Paul Lincoln:** There are different elements of that coming in. We expect the key part associated with the scope in Digital Services at the Border to come in in '22-23.

**Q106 Peter Grant:** You mentioned contingency plans; does that also apply to any failure to have Data Futures operational in time?

**Paul Lincoln:** The key part of the other work that we have done in relation to Digital Services at the Border is the re-platforming of Semaphore, which will allow that to continue for some considerable time if it needs to, whereas with Cerberus we are trying to provide a more advanced capability, so there is still some contingency allowable in that process.

**Peter Grant:** The NAO Report has said that if Border Crossing was, for any reason, "not available there would be a risk of disruption at the border." I know that you have started to implement Border Crossing—I think the Chair referred to it—but it is obviously dealing with a very, very low number of passengers just now. What evidence can you point to that gives us assurance that when passenger numbers start to return to normal, the Border Crossing system will be able to cope?



**Paul Lincoln:** Again, thank you for your question, Mr Grant. In normal times—a couple of years ago—we were seeing 140 million or 145 million passengers coming through a year. The scaling in figure 12 of the NAO Report, which talks about 1,050 searches required per minute, is already at a scale that would exceed that which we would have seen on the busiest day at Heathrow. On the capability itself—and it seems somewhat unlikely that we would need that level—it would not fail; it would just slow down slightly in terms of the processing time. Also, as I explained to the Committee, we have built in a 6% annual increase, as required in terms of total passenger numbers, from that 140 million-ish baseline.

Q107 **Peter Grant:** What kind of disruption would we be looking at at the border if for any reason the system failed or slowed down too much?

**Paul Lincoln:** Sorry, Mr Grant. Could you repeat the question?

**Peter Grant:** I am referring to the fact that the NAO Report says: “If Border Crossing were not available there would be a risk of disruption at the border.” What exactly does that mean?

**Paul Lincoln:** We currently have a system, as you know—a Warnings Index—and if that is not available we revert to other fallbacks, which the Chair referred to. We still have the capability at the moment to go back to alternative methods, and we are building into the new Border Crossing a disaster recovery capability as part of that as well.

Q108 **Peter Grant:** Mr Rycroft, how can we be confident that the entire system will cope with, for example, changes that have happened as a result of Brexit? How can we be sure that it will deliver on the Government’s objectives as a result of having left the European Union?

**Matthew Rycroft:** We have been working hard on the design ever since the referendum, and, as Mr Gillan said earlier, since we knew what sort of impact on the border the particular type of exit was going to have. That is all now part of the design of the programme that is now entering the delivery phase. We have designed it in order to answer your question affirmatively.

**Paul Lincoln:** It is also designed to be future-proofed. It basically does a federated check against individual watchlists rather than a single pool, which allows for us to take into account any form of immigration system that any Government might want to have in the future. Clearly, we are using this one for the ending of free movement and for the Australian points-based system that the Government has implemented.

Q109 **Peter Grant:** A very common problem that we have on the Public Accounts Committee is that we bring in people such as yourself to give us assurances, and all too often we find out later that those assurances are not delivered. So we bring them or their successors back in, and the successors say, “That is why those assurances were not delivered, but I can now assure you that my assurances will be delivered.”

I mentioned earlier that in 2016 we were given very firm assurances that a couple of significant parts of this system would be operational in a year.



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Almost five years later, they have not been delivered, and to some extent have not been delivered at all. What is different about the assurances that you are giving us now that makes them more credible and more reliable than the assurances that your predecessors gave the Committee in 2016?

**Paul Lincoln:** The biggest change in this was the decision to leave the EU. That is a significant change in comparison with the assurances that any predecessor would have given, in terms of a difference of 47 years of approach. I think that is the most significant factor, and, as Mr Gillan said, it took some time for the full requirements and impacts of that decision to be worked through into the programme.

**Matthew Rycroft:** If I could add one thing to Mr Lincoln's answer, we have acted on all five recommendations from the National Audit Office Report in front of the Committee today, and we have acted on the IPA review, and will continue to act on all of the lessons that we can learn from this programme.

Q110 **Peter Grant:** With hindsight, should the assurances we were given in May 2016 have come with a health warning that said, "None of this can be relied on if the United Kingdom wants to leave the European Union"? Effectively, that is what you are telling us, isn't it, Mr Rycroft—that the assurances would have been delivered if we had still been in the European Union? But despite the fact that that document was given to the Committee a month before the EU referendum, it made no mention of whether any of the assurances relied on the result of that referendum. With hindsight, would it have been fairer or more accurate to have made that provision in the Treasury minute?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think, Mr Grant, with the benefit of hindsight it is absolutely fair to say that the UK's departure from the EU was one of the things which required the reset—which required this programme to look again at its scope and its delivery, and I am very glad that in 2019 we did do that.

Q111 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Can I just come in and follow Mr Grant's question to you, Mr Rycroft? The final sentence of paragraph 25 on page 13 of the Report says: "And there are wider risks to value for money if it cannot successfully integrate Border Crossing, Semaphore changes and other interdependent programmes in order to deliver its ambitions". What circumstances would that apply to?

**Matthew Rycroft:** I think what the National Audit Office were getting at was that, in addition to the £173 million that we were talking about, there is also the requirement to follow up through other programmes some of the capability which the original DSAB programme sought to deliver but which was taken out of scope. I think the NAO will quite rightly say that we need to make sure that we do deliver those additional capabilities through other programmes and, as Mr Lincoln has just said, we are taking those forward through, for instance, the Cerberus programme. But if, for some reason, we fail to do that, I think the NAO would be quite right to say that we had failed to deliver value for money.



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**Q112 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Looking into what this programme and other programmes could deliver, when they are all up and running and working properly what proportion of passengers coming into the UK do you envisage will be checked electronically, as opposed to manually, by your border control staff?

**Paul Lincoln:** Maybe I will take that question, Sir Geoffrey. We design the process such that actually, of course, 100% of passengers are already processed electronically in one way, shape, form or another, but of course we do maximise flow by using e-gates. It is a matter for Ministers what overall level of risk they are prepared to take in any given system. On where we are currently, I will go back to my roughly 140 million people who want to use the border: if you split that up in previous terms, roughly 80 million will be Brits, roughly 40 million would be EEA and roughly 20 million would be non-EEA. When the Government expanded the use of e-gates to the so-called B5JSSK cohort—the borders five, South Korea, Singapore and Japan—

**Q113 Chair:** Mr Lincoln, not everyone will know what the borders five is: could you just explain which countries they are?

**Paul Lincoln:** Yes, sorry, Chair: the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and ourselves. When that was expanded, in theory 130 million of 140 million were in scope, minus families and children under 12, who are not allowed to use e-gates. That was a significant extension to the level of people that can be done.

The other thing that the Government is introducing in due course, as part of further digitising of the border, is the electronic travel authorisation, which will also allow further risk to be processed and targeted. Therefore, you may in due course see a higher number of people being digitised through rather than necessarily speaking to a frontline officer in the first instance.

**Q114 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** In order that we can judge whether the system is working properly in the future: if this system is brought in and works properly in 2022, of those 140 million passengers coming in each year—I take the point that background checks are obviously electronic; of course that's true—my eyes would tell me when I came into Heathrow, pre-covid of course, that perhaps only a quarter go through the electronic gates and three quarters are checked manually by one of your officers. How could we expect that to change and how long will it take for these systems to come into operation properly?

**Paul Lincoln:** Actually, the numbers are quite the reverse. The vast majority of people will use e-gates, in terms of the proportion who are able to. I do not have the exact figure in front of me, but my recollection is that about 80 million used an e-gate in whichever year it was, so it is not the case that three quarters are seen by a Border Force officer. Increasingly, we have been pushing e-gates as the way forward.

The other relevant factor is that EEA nationals, who have been able to use an ID card up until now—about 30% of EEA nationals use an ID card—

could not use an e-gate as a result. When the Government changes and phases out the use of ID cards in October 2021, European Union nationals will be required to use a passport, which means that they will be able to use an e-gate.

The Chair will recall that there is an exception to that, which is the EU settlement scheme cohort, who are able to use their ID cards until 2025, but they will need to see a frontline officer in order to be able to do that.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Thank you, Mr Lincoln. Very helpful.

**Chair:** Thank you, Sir Geoffrey, and thank you to our witnesses. This is obviously an issue of huge concern. We are all hopeful and wish you success in meeting the new deadline, because that will be only 20 years after the programme originally started. The longer it goes on, the worse it is for taxpayers and passengers, and the more often you will be in front of this Committee talking about it. There's an incentive, if ever there was one.

We wish you the best in getting this done. We recognise the challenges ahead, but also the challenge, because of covid, in not being able to test it against real, live, large volumes of passengers in real time. The proof, as Sir Geoffrey has highlighted, will be in whether ultimately it works as it is expected to. Thank you for your time.