



Select Committee on Risk Assessment and Risk Planning

Corrected oral evidence: Risk assessment and risk planning

Wednesday 14 April 2021

10.15 am

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Members present: Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom (The Chair); Lord Browne of Ladyton; Lord Clement-Jones; Lord Mair; Baroness McGregor Smith; Lord Rees of Ludlow; Lord Robertson of Port Ellen; Viscount Thurso; Lord Triesman; Lord Willetts.

Evidence Session No. 17

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 176 - 182

Witnesses

I: John Curry, Senior Lecturer in Creative Computing, Bath Spa University; Deborah Higgins, Head of the Emergency Planning College; Dr Karen Reddin, Senior Lecturer in Disaster Management, Bournemouth University.

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Examination of witnesses

John Curry, Deborah Higgins and Dr Karen Reddin.

Q176 **The Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this evidence session of the House of Lords Select Committee on Risk Assessment and Risk Planning. This morning we will be looking at the issue of exercises and at the military component of risk planning and risk assessment. We have two panels. On our first panel is John Curry, senior lecturer of creative computing at Bath Spa University, Deborah Higgins, the head of the Emergency Planning College, and Dr Karen Reddin, senior lecturer in disaster management at Bournemouth University. Welcome to all of you. We intend to finish this first panel at about 11.15 am, so I would be grateful if you could help with that, please. You do not all need to answer every question. Some of them may be directed to others of the panel. I would be grateful for snappy questions and answers so that we can keep to time.

I would like to begin by asking you what best practice in war-gaming and exercising looks like. What are the most critical elements of a successful exercise?

Dr Karen Reddin: There are quite a number of frameworks and guidance on exercise planning and delivery. In the UK, JESIP has a very good framework. The WHO has a framework. It has one for pandemic preparedness. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control also has published best practice on exercise design and delivery.

A number of important factors and considerations need to be taken into account in best practice. It is having a clear purpose for the exercise, knowing your target audience and knowing about the maturity of the plans that you are trying to test. If you have a well-embedded plan, you may want to stretch the exercise a bit further and make it more challenging. If they are less mature plans, you might want to start with a workshop or a discussion-based exercise. Using experienced planners and people who are experienced in delivering exercises is also very important. I work with a very good team of exercise planners in Public Health England. Staff training is important, so making sure staff are prepared before they take part in the exercise, so they know what the plans and protocol contain and what their role is.

One of the most important elements of exercising is being able to do a proper evaluation. Part of that is looking not just at the process of the exercise, what went well and what did not go well in the exercise itself, but at what was learned and taking that learning forwards from the exercise, so trying to make sure there is a proper process in place for taking forward the learning and embedding that learning. That is one element that could be strengthened across the board.

John Curry: I break it down into two things: exercises and war-games. They are two different things: exercises are what the staff should do; war-games are what the leaders should do. Exercises are often very big, procedural and scripted. They are invaluable for the staff getting to know

each other, learning the resources available and practising their skills and interagency communication. But for plans to work the leaders need to have practised them, and they need to play war-games. War-games are about the decision-making of the senior managers in that situation. They are a lot more tightly framed, with one and a half or two hours. They are full of decisions. They have agency, so they direct the way the game goes and the game consequences are dependent on their decisions.

Deborah Higgins: I agree with my colleagues, but I would add that one of the most important parts of an exercise is that there is a safe place and it is a credible scenario. By "a safe place", I mean that there has to be a culture of honesty and transparency in the organisation and among the team to allow for mistakes to be made. There must not be a fear of failure. That safe learning space is incredibly important to a successful exercise because that is the best way that lessons can be identified.

On best practice, exercising cannot be done on its own for exercising's sake. It has to be part of a much wider capability-building programme and done frequently, so that people feel prepared and confident in their roles in incident response and management.

The Chair: We will come back to "done frequently". They were very helpfully snappy answers.

Q177 **Lord Browne of Ladyton:** I apologise in advance that this question, which is about a very specific kind of exercise, requires a bit of a preamble; it is not as snappy as others might like it. To introduce it, page 97 of the UK integrated review, which was published on 16 March, sets out what are headed "Reform priorities". Included among them is the following proposal or requirement. It says that we will need to "foster a culture that encourages more and different kinds of challenge, further developing capabilities such as red-teaming to mitigate the cognitive biases that affect decision-making". My question is: to what extent do we, as a country, in our government structures, have a red-teaming capability? Secondly, would normalising it in this way not mean setting up a dedicated capability to conduct frequent exercises?

Deborah Higgins: From the college's perspective, exercising and war-gaming are quite different. War-gaming is a type of exercising where there is an assumed adversary. We would call that scenario planning. Military exercising is quite different from civil exercising. In civil protection, we would typically have three purposes. On the audience and participants that you select, you are absolutely right about the red-teaming element. You talked about that culture, and not being afraid to challenge and to avoid the typical responses you might get if you are looking internally in an organisation.

The important thing is to really test those arrangements and stress-test them, focusing on building that confidence in the team. You can ask those "What if?" questions. You are in a space where you can actually explore, "What if this is five or 10 times worse?" and be open to scrutiny

from external and independent participants, as well as your usual incident management team or management teams in your organisation.

What the independent review is saying is very much about preparing people. That is the real key message here. It is about making sure that people are scrutinised, prepared and not afraid to make mistakes in that safe exercising environment, where it is not happening for real. You are stress-testing your people, arrangements and plans.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: For the other two witnesses, I am particularly interested to know to what extent that capability exists and is deployed in decision-making, and how it is. Does this recommendation require us to build on a capacity that exists or build one from scratch?

John Curry: When I was in Washington a couple of years ago, the NATO representative walked up to me and said, "Do you think war-gaming should be a NATO capability?" She said, "The problem at the moment with the war-gaming capability across NATO is that it is a cult following. You have to know who the right people to ask are". The American National Guard walked up to me, because they knew who I was, and said, "We want to do some disaster management exercises. Who should we talk to in the United States?" My first point is that somewhere there needs to be a list of capabilities of who can do what and who is available. That is low-hanging fruit and can be done very quickly.

The second point is about diversity in games. A few years ago, I went to Porton Down as part of a game. I walked into the room and it was full of white middle-class men. It was only a game, so we were kicking around and playing with ideas, but I expressed my concern at the end that we needed a wider range of people if we were truly trying to see what other people were going to input into the situation. I am being very careful about my words. Get those left-wing academics. Get a right-wing academic. Get a trade unionist in the room. Get a wider variety of people.

One of the big failures of gaming in America is the failure to game public opinion, media and social pressure. People make decisions and are then surprised. If you are making decisions and you have only a narrow range of inputs—I am sure they are very clever, intellectual and have read a lot—that is not as good as actually having a wider range of inputs.

Dr Karen Reddin: My background is in public health. From my experience in health, it is important to build a capability that can cut across different sectors and make sure that individual sectors, as Deborah said, are not looking too internally and becoming too internalised. In my experience in health, it is difficult to separate the environment, animal health and human health. It is quite challenging to exercise those capabilities effectively.

We have seen in the recent pandemic and other epidemics like Ebola how quickly a novel virus can cut across from an animal host into a human host and then go on to have human-to-human transmission. To try to really assess the risk, plan for that risk effectively and build a capability,

it is important to bring those sectors together. The environment is important in that as well. What we do to the environment can also make us more susceptible to diseases. We have to consider that when thinking about what kind of capability we want to build, building on any existing capabilities we have, how we look at lots of sectors and how we get those sectors to come together in exercising and war-gaming.

Deborah Higgins: On Lord Browne's specific question about whether that capability exists, from the college's perspective and our partners in the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, there is a capability that exists. Exercising is done, to varying degrees, across all government departments, nationally, locally and in the private sector and the community already. Currently, there is good capability and evidence that lessons are being identified and captured. Cross-government and interdepartmental exercising on a multiagency basis is going on regularly.

Q178 **Lord Clement-Jones:** I have a question for Deborah Higgins. I have read your very graphic brochure on exercises, with the rather splendid strapline "Assurance against adversity". Could you describe for the committee the work of the Emergency Planning College, particularly in organising and running exercises? I also do not quite understand the outsourcing aspect and the relationship with Serco. Who do you provide services to and actually work with? In particular, does the EPC organise any ministerial-level exercises?

Deborah Higgins: To give you that context about the Emergency Planning College, it is operated by Serco for and on behalf of the Cabinet Office. We provide training, exercising and advisory services to around 10,000 customers every year in the UK and overseas. We do this primarily for the public sector in the area of civil protection. That can be local and central government, devolved Administrations and private sector organisations. It is essentially based on all the government policy doctrine and guidance. We have a curriculum of courses and bespoke courses that we would work with organisations in government on to prepare their teams and individuals to exercise and be ready to respond.

Lord Clement-Jones: Following up on that as to a question of level, do you work with the Permanent Secretaries, Ministers, Secretaries of State and so on? We have already seen this distinction, in a sense, between war-gaming and exercises, although I take what you say about the war-games being a type of exercise. What sort of level are you doing that at?

Deborah Higgins: It is at all levels. We would start out by providing training and exercising for those starting out in civil protection, in local government perhaps, but it goes right up to CEOs and leaders. We would work very closely with our colleagues in the Civil Contingencies Secretariat to support ministerial-level exercises. We would not provide them directly to Ministers, but we would support those exercises at that level with our Civil Contingencies Secretariat colleagues.

Lord Clement-Jones: They are identifying what they want from you, basically.

Deborah Higgins: Yes, exactly.

Lord Clement-Jones: Taking this a step further, once you have carried out some of these services, the training, the exercises and so on, how do you identify success as a result? Earlier you talked about evidence that lessons have been identified and so on. How do you document that? How do you follow that up? How do you re-insert that into your training?

Deborah Higgins: That is a really good question, because that is the most critical part of exercising. There is no point doing it if you are not going to then identify and follow up on the lessons. Because of the fact that we are the college and we would collaborate and work with the organisation and their team, we are very much trying to help them meet their own objectives. Whatever those objectives are, we would regard an exercise as being successful if it has met those objectives and the purpose for which that organisation was exercising.

For example, it might have been to raise awareness among the leadership team. It might have been that they wanted to test out some communications protocols, use of language or terminology, or it could have been a simple sit-down: "What are we going to do if somebody bursts in and starts shooting?" It can be such a wide spectrum of that type of exercising.

To answer your question about those lessons, the easy part is identifying them. That is where we would work with organisations to help them identify gaps and issues. We would make recommendations in our post-exercise reports to help those organisations address them. We would not then be able to know what that organisation takes away from the exercise and whether it acts on or changes any of its practices based on the findings.

Lord Clement-Jones: The responsibility is very much with the organisation and the corporate memory of the exercise. That rests with the organisation, not with you.

Deborah Higgins: It does. We would strongly advise any of our customers, once they have done an exercise with us, that it should not stop there. They are very often working with us on a longer programme of activity, so it is not just one. It is actually a rolling exercise programme, where you are looking for that continual improvement and learning. We will very often be party to what organisations are trying to solve and what issues they have identified.

John Curry: I support what Deborah says. Academically, there is a lack of evidence to support the tenure that civil emergency planning exercises and war-games work in this space. There is for the military, but it was very clear, when I looked at it in 2020, that there is not the academic evidence to support the fact that war-games work in this area. That is one of the reasons why senior leaders do not invest heavily in their time, because there is a lack of evidence they actually work.

I will give you one brief example. Hurricane Pam is a hurricane you have never heard of in America. It was an exercise just before Hurricane Katrina. The emergency planners were really well prepared for a hurricane. They knew all the right things to do in New Orleans. The problem is, because the senior leadership was not represented at the exercise, when it actually came to the emergency and the hurricane came, the senior leadership was superimposed on top of all the planners who actually knew what to do.

Lord Clement-Jones: Can Deborah counter that with more positive evidence from her point of view?

Deborah Higgins: It is certainly true that there is always room for improvement when you are talking about exercising and acting on lessons. There is a recognition among all our organisations and customers that we can get better at this and we will never be able to prepare fully for all scenarios. I can say that there is evidence that lessons are being addressed and learned by the fact that the Government have a platform called Resilience Direct. This is supported by the joint emergency services interoperability principles—JESIP—which are more and more seen in multiagency response. There is also a joint organisational learning in England, with a lessons digest.

There is evidence that there is more and more activity and that lessons are being shared openly and with each other. That is absolutely key to organisations not making those same mistakes again, learning from each other and proactively seeking out where they can improve their plans and procedures.

Lord Clement-Jones: Chair, clearly this is something we need to follow up, perhaps in correspondence if we are going to run out of time.

The Chair: I think so, yes.

Q179 **Lord Willetts:** I should begin by declaring an interest, having just joined the board of Darktrace, a cybersecurity company. This question is about lessons that can be learned for government from successful exercising and war-gaming in other sectors, such as the business sector, and lessons that can be learned by civil parts of government from what the military does. Also, particularly, to what extent are digital twins relevant here? They are a very hot topic of interest at the moment. Can they enhance war-gaming and exercising? Who uses them best?

John Curry: If you want to know about the military experience of war-gaming, the person to get hold of is Major Tom Mouat MBE, at the Defence Academy. He is known internationally and has supported war-games in NATO and other allied nations. He is the person to talk to on this.

From my perspective, having said I am not the expert in the UK on this subject, the first lesson from the military is that war-games are serious. That is where they say the civilian sector just does not treat them seriously.

The second thing is that war-games are only part of it. You have to imagine a cycle of research. You do your operational analysis. You do your war-games, where I say focus on the decisions you need to make. You do your exercises. This should be going in a circle continually, one informing the other. In Japan, for example—I know them very well—they do this continually. Government make a policy. It is then war-gamed. They run an exercise that then informs the policy, going round this cycle absolutely continuously. There are two lessons from the military: treat them seriously and embed them in a cycle of research continually.

Lord Willetts: Can I press you? Is ever more sophisticated, data-driven computer modelling, reaching the stage of digital twins, relevant to the war-gaming and exercising we are talking about?

John Curry: Absolutely. When you play a war-game or do an exercise, you normally have only one data model and it is normally simplified for the purposes of the game, for it to progress. It is no fun playing a pandemic game if you spend eight hours with the epidemiologist on one line of an Excel spreadsheet. They normally simplify the model. It is a critical part, because that modelling then informs the situation.

I am more familiar with the American work in this space, because I have just done a book on it. I am doing another one about homeland security games at the moment. The key failure from all their pandemic games and exercises is they identified that what they needed to do at the start was have a test as rapidly as possible to get the number of infections, because every decision you need to make in government needs to be based on the number of infections. That should have been the national priority. This was identified over and over again, but when it came to this pandemic perhaps it was not a national priority. The lessons had not carried across from those exercises and war-games.

Lord Willetts: I wonder if Dr Reddin wants to comment on that. If there is a book you wish to plug, feel free.

Dr Karen Reddin: Modelling is definitely very useful in exercising. As John said, it informs the situation that you are trying to exercise. If you want to stretch the exercise to really test and challenge your plans, you want to model what you would consider a worst-case scenario. Certainly in my experience in exercising, we have definitely done that a lot in the past.

It is coming back to a point I made earlier about how you pull together lots of sectors. As we have seen in the coronavirus pandemic response, it is not just a military or a health response. It involves the whole of society. That is going to be important for getting infection rates down. It is what the public do to keep themselves safe, how the health service gets the messaging across to make sure that happens, how the social care sector copes, how the National Health Service copes and how public health copes with tracking and tracing all the cases.

It soon becomes a very complex environment, and exercising that is very challenging. You could exercise it in terms of compartmentalising the different aspects of, say, a pandemic preparedness exercise, but at some point you need to look strategically at the whole picture. Another important element is to be able to exercise the operational elements at the local level and exercise the local response, but, at the same time, have the exercise involving that kind of strategic overview at the national level to try to bring together all the different elements required in a response such as a pandemic response. That could probably be applied to lots of other scenarios as well.

Lord Willetts: I wonder if Deborah Higgins also wanted to comment, particularly on this issue of whether, as you look around, you find a sector, in business or elsewhere, that you think is particularly good, which we can all learn from.

Deborah Higgins: Firstly, the use of technology modelling in any scenario exercise can be incredibly useful. There is always a risk that it will fail and add complexity. There may be training that you need to provide on the technology beforehand. In my experience, it works better with operational and tactical-level training, such as firefighting, where you can use VR, et cetera, and that kind of modelling if you are looking at particular scenarios where you need to manufacture a certain problem and use that technology to help create realism in an exercise. It is certainly extremely useful to help push people's minds to create that realism.

Lessons from other sectors is a really interesting question. There are lessons that we can learn from other sectors. If I think about those highly regulated sectors, such as the nuclear sector, for example, and finance, where exercising is actually mandated and required, that is the key difference. Although in civil protection we have a duty to exercise plans and people, I see very good examples and a great deal of support for regular programmes of exercising in more regulated sectors. It is what my colleague John was saying. They are typically held in higher regard. Those types of organisations tend to have a heightened sense of readiness. You see a difference in those sectors where it is mandated and they are regulated. It is the "have to" element of exercising.

Lord Willetts: That is a very interesting point. Do you think there should be wider requirements for exercising? Do you think there should be more mandating?

Deborah Higgins: I do, yes.

Lord Willetts: That is an important point for us to consider.

Q180 **Viscount Thurso:** This has been a fascinating morning's evidence, particularly in learning the separation between war-gaming and exercising. I want to follow on from some of Lord Clement-Jones's questions around the attitude of government to the whole question of war-gaming and exercising. Do government value it enough? Is

exercising and war-gaming something it really takes on board? Are we effective in identifying and acting on lessons learned? In talking about government, perhaps make the separation between the officials and the Ministers. If the leadership in a crisis is ministerial, do they have the buy-in at the right time and the right place?

John Curry: Going back into history, one of the reasons why Napoleon was a successful general was that he fought over 60 major battles, which meant he had far more experience than any of the people he was ever fighting. Running forward to today, we need to better prepare our leaders. We need to better prepare them with war-games and these war-games should be short, snappy, cheap, tabletop and to the point. Their time is the most valuable thing in the world. If we want them to practise these things, we need to be very careful about managing their time.

What do leaders need to do? They need to provide leadership and decisions. If you want to know how to deal with a denial-of-service attack, fine, get a geek like me to do that. All I want from the manager is, "Do I have the company credit card? What is my spending limit?" and how quickly he wants a response.

Dr Karen Reddin: I agree with what John said. The frequency of exercising is very important. Major emergencies do not happen that often, although they seem to be coming more frequently than in the past. If people at all levels are going to have a role in a major emergency there must be frequency of exercising and training to prepare them.

We also perhaps need to think about how we link the exercises that we do and the learning that comes out of them. How do we get better at that? How do we link that with our risk assessment process more strongly? Where is the feedback loop in terms of what we have learned from an exercise and how that informs the national risk register, for example? Perhaps that is something else to think about. The frequency of exercising is certainly very important.

I have recently written a paper and did some research on exercising for pandemic preparedness. One of the things that I came across there was some exercises that took place just before the Manchester Arena attacks. Just a very small sample size was interviewed of those involved in that response, but because the exercises took place just before the attack took place it proved very valuable training for them in advance of it. That does not happen very often. Often, something happens and the training or exercise happened many months before, or even a year or two before. If we are thinking about mandating exercising and having a more structured programme for exercising, we need to think about what the frequency of exercising looks like at the different levels, such as strategic, tactical and operational.

Viscount Thurso: Can I press you a little on the core of my question, which is government's attitude? I am quite sure that most organisations, if they are well led, will be practising, in one way, shape or form, war-gaming and exercising. At the top of a big emergency is a Minister

probably taking a decision. Are they sufficiently engaged? Do we get them to be sufficiently engaged in sufficient practice to be able to do their jobs properly, or is it something we need to highlight should happen more often?

Dr Karen Reddin: I think David Alexander is here. I think David has said in the past—he can correct me if I am wrong—that when you talk to Ministers you are asking them to spend an awful lot of money to prepare for something that might never happen. That is sometimes quite a difficult argument. There are also competing priorities. Getting people to allocate some time to exercising can also be quite difficult.

That also happens with learning lessons from exercises. The lessons are often identified, a report is made and actions are identified to implement those lessons, but taking that forward is very difficult, because often there are competing priorities for different organisations following an exercise. They then get on with their normal business and do not start thinking about that terrible event until it looks like it is going to happen.

Viscount Thurso: I have a very quick question for Deborah Higgins. Earlier in your evidence, you mentioned that one of the critical points was that there should be a safe place, and that honesty and mistakes should not be seen as failure but as learning points, broadly; I have probably paraphrased that wrong, but that is roughly what you said. Again thinking about government, that is the antithesis of everything anybody ever does in government; the last thing they do is admit to any form of failure anywhere. In that respect, do you think there are lessons or changes of that attitude that government could have?

Deborah Higgins: There are lessons for all leaders in any organisation to value and understand the benefit of exercising. To do it just because it is expected or it is in their schedule is not reason enough. It has to be seen as something that is extremely worth while. It can be perceived as expensive. Like Dr Reddin says, it can be complicated and time-consuming, and these are very busy people. It is our job to remove that suspicion and fear, and provide exercises that are simple to do and can fit in with their timetable, but are also really valuable to them.

It is an attitude about, "It is going to be worth my while to sit down in the room with my colleagues, go to places that can feel quite uncomfortable, be challenged by the red-teamers, for example, on things that I may not have thought of before and take those 'What if?' questions to the very worst-case scenario." It is far better to do that in a safe environment in an exercise than when it is happening for real.

Q181 **Lord Robertson of Port Ellen:** I am interested in following through on that last series of questions with you, Dr Reddin. You have experience in terms of Public Health England. I have a fascination with Exercise Cygnus. Here we had an exercise that was based on a pandemic in 2016, yet we are facing this pandemic. I know that they are different: one was a flu and this is a virus. I still cannot really comprehend why it is that the basic lessons of Exercise Cygnus, which must have been to do with

connections, PPE and the rest of it, did not seem to have been learned at all. Deborah Higgins said that there was no point in doing exercises unless you learn the lessons and apply them after that. What do you draw from Exercise Cygnus and the failure to learn from its lessons?

Dr Karen Reddin: That is a good question. I was involved in Exercise Cygnus. I was involved in exercising the national emergency co-ordination centre for Public Health England. Overall, it was a well-planned and well-run exercise. It stretched the health sector in its response to a major flu pandemic. As you say, this pandemic is a different virus; it behaves in a completely different way from flu. However, some of the lessons that we learned from Exercise Cygnus have come to bear in the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of the issues around supply and PPE, the social care sector, the co-ordination between the National Health Service and the social care sector, and surge planning and public messaging.

Those lessons are well documented in the report, which was published last year sometime. Some of the more short-term and quicker-to-implement lessons probably were implemented, but there were some that were more long term, such as those issues around surge capacity and the social care sector. Perhaps one of the reasons—this is something that I researched into in the paper that I have just published—was that there may have been competing priorities. I remember that just after Exercise Cygnus we were then very involved in preparing for EU exit following the EU exit referendum. It was possibly a question of competing priorities more than the lack of a will to implement those lessons. This again comes back to the issues around how we effectively learn from exercises in a timely fashion in order to drive change in policy governance and practice.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The committee would love to see that paper, because it goes to the very heart of what we are investigating at the moment. Every time I have raised Exercise Cygnus, you say, “What else was going on in 2016?” and the EU referendum was going on and was the priority. How do those involved in an exercise like this then say, “This is important and these lessons are important”? How do you then influence the policymakers to say, “Maybe you should not just close this file and go away and look at Brexit. We have the experience of Ebola, SARS and H1N1. The next one is going to be much bigger”? Is there a responsibility on the exercisers to do something about it?

Dr Karen Reddin: It is important to make that an integral part of any capability built around exercising. One of the areas that really needs strengthening is that monitoring and review loop following an exercise, especially when it comes to lessons that will take a long time to implement and may cut across many sectors and involve many different people. A lot of it also comes down to providing the right amount of resource into making sure the lessons that have been learned from an exercise are actually monitored, reviewed and followed up until there is evidence that they actually have been learned. That area definitely needs to be strengthened.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Mr Curry, you gave that remarkable

story about Hurricane Katrina, which is seared in my memory. What do you make of Exercise Cygnus and the lack of preparation after it?

John Curry: All organisations have to make judgments. A game can raise a number of risks, a number of black swans that people did not anticipate. I hate to say it but, after the game or exercise has finished, it is then a management judgment: how much should you spend on a low-probability, high-impact event? For example, you might decide you need to stockpile more protective equipment—say a billion more items. You can spend on that, bearing in mind the protective equipment will degrade over time, or you can get another intensive care bed, with another three intensive care nurses. At the end of the year, if you do that, you know you will have a clinical outcome that will benefit some of those people.

To me, it is all about judgment and risk management. I am very wary of throwing stones at leaders, saying, “You should have learnt the lessons from games”. No, because the games are just an input into it. That is what you are paid to do: you have to make those judgments.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Do you think the right judgments were made?

John Curry: I am not saying that. I am saying that the right-level people made those judgments. You know more about it than I do. I suspect they probably should have made different judgments, but games are only an input into it. In the end, especially in the private sector, CEOs are paid a lot of money, but they have the skills and experience and they have to make judgments. Games can only ever be one element feeding into that judgment.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I appreciate that. Deborah Higgins, do you have a comment on Exercise Cygnus and what we might have or should have learned?

Deborah Higgins: Not specifically on that exercise because I was not involved in it. I stress the point that lessons are learned at a given time to a given risk. There is a danger that any investment in time and resources spent on lessons could be right for that context in that time, but it might be completely wrong to apply that in a new context in a different time.

You have to avoid that whack-a-mole approach of solving something that you can see and then not being ready for what you cannot see. That is where I think the key to all of this is preparing people and building those capabilities, so that, when we are faced with something, we can respond competently and make those judgments and decisions based on the set of circumstances in front of us. That preparation, those competencies and those skills that people need are absolutely critical to successful response to any disruption, in the UK and overseas.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: You make a very good point.

The Chair: This is very interesting. Deborah Higgins, are you suggesting

that the skills and experience should take priority over the scenarios?

Deborah Higgins: From a college perspective, it is about capability-building. You cannot prepare for every single scenario. Scenarios and the lessons to learn are incredibly important, but they are not the building blocks of the skills and capabilities. We need to know to what standard we need to train our people. We need to know what “good” looks like. We then need pathways for how people can get better at it, and have that open and transparent dialogue between organisations in that joined-up way, from my perspective, for us to be ready for anything. That lack of joined-up approach and co-ordination tends to let us down time and again. That is something that is a lesson for all leaders and Governments.

Q182 **Lord Rees of Ludlow:** We always end these sessions with what we call the “Desert Island Discs” question, where we ask the witnesses to suggest one policy recommendation that the committee should make to the Government. We would like to put this question to the two outsiders, as it were, on the committee, namely John Curry and Karen Reddin.

John Curry: Gosh. I would be very wary of suggesting things to the Government. My recommendations were to treat games more seriously and make them short, snappy, tabletop, cheap and rapid-iteration. You will then get the right-level people engaging in those games and developing the skills that we have talked about today.

Dr Karen Reddin: My recommendation is to have a look at some of the technologies we could use to make exercising more accessible and agile, especially for people who have less time, perhaps those people working at the strategic level. Let us have a look at the use of technology for exercising, but also technology for how we might have a more systematic way of identifying and learning lessons from exercises, and linking that up into risk registers, from the local level up to the national risk register.

The Chair: Unless anybody has any further questions, that brings us to the end of this first panel. We packed a lot into that. We had a lot of interesting discussion and I am most grateful to our witnesses for that.