

Liaison Committee

Oral evidence from the Prime Minister, HC 491

Wednesday 7 July 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Sir Bernard Jenkin (Chair); Mr Clive Betts; Karen Bradley; Chris Bryant; Sir William Cash; Greg Clark; Philip Dunne; Robert Halfon; Meg Hillier; Simon Hoare; Catherine McKinnell; Caroline Nokes; Neil Parish; Stephen Timms; Tom Tugendhat; Pete Wishart.

Questions 1-136

Witness

[I](#): Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP, Prime Minister.



Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon. Boris Johnson MP.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome, Prime Minister, to this meeting of the Liaison Committee. We are grateful once again for your generosity with your time.

The Prime Minister: It is an absolute pleasure.

Chair: We are covering three main topics: COP26; covid and the secondary impacts of the covid pandemic; and post-Brexit impact. There are one or two flying questions, and we will start with an opener on Afghanistan on behalf of the absent Chairman of the Defence Committee.

Q2 **Tom Tugendhat:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you for coming, Prime Minister. On behalf of Tobias Ellwood and myself, I want to ask about Op Herrick. I realise that you will make a statement tomorrow, but given that more than 450 servicemen and women were killed on operations and that more than £22 billion has been spent, I am sure you will be keen to tell us how an inquiry will be conducted into our deployment to Kabul and to Helmand and, later, the withdrawal.

The Prime Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Tugendhat. The people of Afghanistan have been the beneficiaries, as you know, of decades of UK support and investment. We have done our level best to help with the stability, security and peace of the country—you yourself, Tom, served there—and it has been a huge commitment, with hundreds of British troops dying in the cause.

If you are asking whether I feel happy about the current situation in Afghanistan, of course I don't. I am apprehensive. The situation is fraught with risks. We must hope that the parties in Kabul can come together to reach an agreement. Somehow or other we must hope that an accommodation must be found eventually with the Taliban. We have to be absolutely realistic about the situation that we are in.

We have to hope that the blood and treasure spent by this country over decades in protecting the people of Afghanistan has not been in vain and that the legacy of their efforts is protected. That is what this Government will try to do as far as we possibly can, with our American friends. The situation is difficult. I will make a statement tomorrow and I think it would probably be better not to anticipate further the statement I will make.

On the matter of the inquiry, you are ahead of us there.

Q3 **Chair:** Those servicemen and women who lost their colleagues, and their families, will want to know that lessons have been learned or are being learned and implemented. How will we ensure that happens?

The Prime Minister: We learn lessons the whole time, but if you are asking me to extemporise an announcement now about an inquiry into Afghanistan, I am not going to do that. I don't think the Speaker would want me to anticipate the statement that I intend to make tomorrow, and



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I know that you, Tom, will want to interrogate me. I think that will probably be the right time.

- Q4 **Chair:** May I ask a quick supplementary question about members of the armed forces going on operations now? Most of our NATO allies are double-jabbing their personnel before they go on operations; they are not relying on their civilian roll-out to ensure that their servicemen and women are vaccinated. Could you at least take that away and address it?

The Prime Minister: The carrier strike group that we have just sent around the world will be doing operations with 40 friendly countries—40 allies around the world. They have protection from the virus.

Chair: We will crack on. With short questions and short answers we will get through all the stuff we want.

- Q5 **Chris Bryant:** In the general election, Prime Minister, you told miners in Mansfield, "We will make sure no Mansfield miner, or any other miner signed up to the mineworkers pension scheme, is out of pocket. We will make sure that their cash is fully protected and returned. I have looked into it and we will ensure that's done." When will that categorical pledge be honoured?

The Prime Minister: Thanks, Mr Bryant. The mineworkers pension scheme members are receiving payments 33% higher than they would have been, thanks to the Government's guarantee. On most occasions the scheme has been in surplus, but we remain resolutely committed to protecting the pensions of mineworkers and supporting their families.

- Q6 **Chris Bryant:** But you guaranteed that the additional money would go to them and that you would sort out the issue. All MPs of all political parties on the BEIS Committee agreed to a report that stated that the £1.2 billion in the investment reserve fund, which was put in there by miners, should go to miners and their widows now, not to the Government. Will you undertake to honour that pledge?

The Prime Minister: As I have told you, the trustees do have freedom to be less risk averse with their investment strategy. I will certainly come back to you on the point you raise.

- Q7 **Chris Bryant:** The Government have already told the BEIS Committee that you are not going to honour that pledge. Do you not know the facts of this?

The Prime Minister: I am telling you that the mineworkers pension scheme already ensures that members receive payments higher than they would have done, thanks to the Government's guarantee. We will continue to ensure that the scheme members are looked after.

Chris Bryant: I think that a lot of people will be upset.

- Q8 **Chair:** Perhaps you can write to Mr Bryant on that, Prime Minister, because I don't think that has been answered.

The Prime Minister: I would be more than happy to write to Mr Bryant.



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Q9 **Chris Bryant:** On a different matter, do you support closing the loophole so that MPs who are suspended from the House for more than 10 days for sexual harassment and bullying are subject to the Recall of MPs Act 2015?

The Prime Minister: I know that work is going on to address this matter. It is a matter for the House, and I urge the House to get on and do it.

Q10 **Chris Bryant:** It can be a matter for the House only if the Government table a motion and support it. Will you support it?

The Prime Minister: I think that the Leader of the House is currently working on closing the loophole and I certainly urge MPs to get on and do that.

Q11 **Chris Bryant:** So you think that the loophole should be closed?

The Prime Minister: There is clearly a loophole and I see no reason why it shouldn't be closed, but that is not a matter for the Government; that is a matter for Parliament.

Q12 **Chris Bryant:** It can be decided by Parliament only if the Government allow time. I take the point that you do support that.

At the moment, we have four different registers for Ministers and MPs to abide by: the register of Ministers' interests, the list of Ministers' hospitality, the list of Ministers' gifts, and the Commons register of Members' financial interests. They are all published at different times, at intermittent periods, in different places and according to different rules. Isn't it time we had a single set of rules governing all these matters?

The Prime Minister: Some matters are clearly for Parliament and concern the actions of MPs. It wouldn't be right for the Executive—the Government—to determine how those work. Matters relating to the conduct of Ministers are for the Executive. That is quite a sensible division.

Q13 **Chris Bryant:** But it ends up meaning that two Members of Parliament sitting next to each other in the Royal Box at Wimbledon, for instance, register the matter completely differently under completely different rules at completely different times and in different places. That just isn't fair, is it?

The Prime Minister: I think it is sensible that there should be a distinction between the invigilation of Parliament and of the Executive. It isn't surprising that there are different approaches and different ways of doing this.

Q14 **Chris Bryant:** The list of ministerial interests is published only twice a year, whereas the list of Members' interests is published much more frequently. By the time the list of ministerial interest appears, lots of interests that were relevant at one point during that time no longer appear in the list because apparently they are no longer deemed to be relevant. Wouldn't it make much more sense to publish the list of ministerial interests every month?



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The Prime Minister: It is certainly an idea, Mr Bryant, and I am happy to look into it, but the system at the moment is that MPs and Ministers have to publish their interests. The public can scrutinise them, and that is entirely as it should be. I encourage everybody to do that—to fill in their MP interests in a timely way as well as their ministerial interests.

- Q15 **Chris Bryant:** But for most of the last year the list of ministerial interests hasn't even been an accurate list of Ministers. It is updated so rarely that no member of the public can spot in real time what interests might affect a ministerial decision.

The Prime Minister: The list of ministerial interests, to the best of my knowledge, has only recently been published. It is there for your interest and the public's information. People can look at it and draw all the conclusions they need to draw.

- Q16 **Chris Bryant:** I am glad you referred to it. The latest list says that interests did arise in relation to the refurbishment of your flat in Downing Street, as set out in paragraph 32 of the independent adviser's annual report. Paragraph 32 then says that "an interest did arise", but it does not say what that interest was because it says that by the time of publication, which was delayed by many, many months, this was no longer relevant. Can you tell us what was the interest that you should have declared, how much it was, when it was paid off and why it was not registered in the parliamentary register of members' interests?

The Prime Minister: For the very good reason that there is a ministerial register and all that needed to be registered was duly registered, as the adviser on ministerial interests, Lord Geidt, has confirmed.

- Q17 **Chris Bryant:** That is not what he actually says. He produces an entirely circular argument between paragraph 32 of one report and another paragraph in another report, both of which say that there was an interest that should have been declared and that it has not now been declared.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to what I have just said. Lord Geidt has said that everything that should have been registered has been registered in the proper way.

- Q18 **Chris Bryant:** Final question from me. When a Minister lies, they should correct the record. I am presuming you agree.

The Prime Minister: Of course.

- Q19 **Chris Bryant:** They might lie inadvertently. That is the general assumption of how we do our business in Parliament—that no Minister deliberately lies. Although, there have been occasions in our history when that has happened and the Minister has been forced to resign. It seems that you very rarely correct the record. Why is that?

The Prime Minister: I think I am going to need you to give me chapter and verse there, as they say.

- Q20 **Chris Bryant:** I think there are plenty of instances where you have been told by various independent and outside bodies that the precise words



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that you have used have not been the full and accurate version of events.

The Prime Minister: Okay, Mr Bryant, let me give you an example. With great respect to you, Sir Bernard, I am not entirely sure that Mr Bryant's questions are in order, but let me give an example. It is commonly asserted, for instance, that when we put the figure of £350 million a week on the side of a bus that went round this country, causing a great deal of hoo-ha, that was erroneous and did not reflect the true figure. It is probably one of the things that you are thinking of, isn't it, Mr Bryant?

Q21 **Chris Bryant:** No, I am thinking about whether you sacked Matt Hancock.

The Prime Minister: Well, let me continue this point.

Q22 **Chris Bryant:** Did you sack Matt Hancock?

The Prime Minister: Let me give you an example of the £350 million a week. This was a figure that related to the gross sum that the UK gave to the EU budget and was the subject of lively controversy during the referendum campaign five years ago, as you will remember. Actually, it turned out to be, if anything, Sir Bernard, a slight underestimate. By this year, the gross figure would have been considerably higher.

Q23 **Chris Bryant:** Did you sack Matt Hancock?

The Prime Minister: On your question about Mr Hancock, the former Health Secretary, let me just go back to what I said many, many times and, I think, on the Floor of the House of Commons. We read about—you read about and we all read about—the story concerning Mr Hancock and the CCTV and so forth on the Friday and we had a new Health Secretary on the Saturday. Considering that we are in the middle of a global pandemic and it is quite a thing to move your Health Secretary, I think that was quite fast going, if I may say so. That is all I have to say on that matter.

Chris Bryant: But you said you sacked him and you didn't—

Chair: I am afraid you have had your time. I am very sorry. Thank you very much. We will move on to Philip Dunne.

Q24 **Philip Dunne:** Thank you, Sir Bernard. I am going to move on to the subject of COP26 and the Government's policies, and delivery against those policies, on climate change. Before I came to this place, my mantra was that past performance was no guide to the future. When the Government responded to the Climate Change Committee's progress report recently, they pointed to the historic success, which is laudable, in reducing reliance on non-renewable energy. Given the covid crisis delay on introducing the myriad policies required to deliver against the admirable target of a 78% reduction in emissions compared to 1990, when can we expect you or your Ministers to start delivering to the House the policies required to get us to 78%?

The Prime Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Dunne. You will have seen what the Government announced in the 10-point plan that I set out last November, and you will have seen what is happening with investments in



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green technology in this country. Just in the last week you have seen Nissan confirming that it is going to be launching in Sunderland a massive investment in green vehicles and battery-powered vehicles. You saw what is happening with the gigafactory and what Stellantis is doing at Ellesmere Port.

In terms of delivery on wind power and our objective of becoming the Saudi Arabia of wind, there are huge investments going on now. The Secretary of State for BEIS has a mandate to produce 40 gigawatts of wind, which is enough to supply the domestic energy needs of every single household in this country by 2030. That is an incredible ambition, but I am sure that we can do it. You have been out to the coast of the north-east and around the country and you can see the incredible potential of the UK. You can see what we could do in Doggerland and elsewhere, and we will do it.

You make the point about the historic achievement, and it is absolutely enormous. Don't forget that the UK has cut CO₂ emissions by, I think, more than 40% on 1990 levels while the economy has grown by 75%. We are confident that green technology and green investments are the route not just to cutting CO₂, but to long-term job creation and economic growth.

Q25 Philip Dunne: I think you are right, Prime Minister, that there is enormous potential for the private sector to work with Government in investing in new technologies, but they cannot do so in the absence of clarity about the Government's demand signals and what strategies will be in place. Wherever you look—whether it is the hydrogen strategy, the heat and buildings strategy, and understanding how we are going to cope with the energy efficiency of homes, which is a massive task; 19 million homes need retrofitting—at the moment there is a vicuna. We do not have those policies out there—

The Prime Minister: A vicuna?

Philip Dunne: The private sector is not yet in a position to invest.

The Prime Minister: Did you say a "vicuna"?

Philip Dunne: A "lacuna" is what I should have said.

The Prime Minister: We want to protect the vicuna and eradicate the lacuna. The vicuna forms a key part of our biodiversity objectives, but the lacuna is the thing we are going to—

Chair: Back to the point now, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful.

There is a huge opportunity for this country to lead in low-carbon technology but also to drive jobs and growth. That is what we are doing, if you look at what we have done since I came in two years ago.



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You say that we have not set out the framework for the 10-point plan, but we have set out the framework. People can see what we need to do. It is green vehicles, which is a big thing in itself, and that means basically electrifying our fleet. You could not have a more powerful signal on vehicles than what the Government have said. We are moving to green, electric vehicles by 2030. That is the Government setting the signal and making the market. No other country in Europe has adopted such a brave and bold timetable. What has happened, much to our satisfaction and relief, is that the automotive sector in the UK and around the world has responded and is investing.

I return to what I said about the Nissan investment and what is happening at Stellantis and elsewhere. We will work to ensure that we have a scale of manufacture in this country to allow the price of these EVs and other green technology goods to come down. Then there are domestic cars—

- Q26 **Philip Dunne:** If you will excuse me, Prime Minister, I have only 30 seconds left and I want to ask a couple more questions. COP26 is your opportunity to be on the world stage with representatives of every nation on earth. You will not get another such opportunity during your prime ministership. You need to be able to demonstrate that the UK is leading not just on batteries, but on all the other areas where the strategies are not in place. Will these come out before COP26? Take hydrogen, for example: 16 other countries have developed a hydrogen strategy and we do not have one.

The Prime Minister: I have to disagree with you completely. The UK was the first major developed economy to set a net zero by 2050 target. When this Government took over the running of COP, only 30% of the global economy was committed to net zero by 2050, and it is now 70%. On hydrogen, it is there in the 10-point plan. BEIS is driving a very strong hydrogen strategy—

- Q27 **Philip Dunne:** But they have not published it yet. That is the point.

The Prime Minister: —and if you look at what is happening with carbon capture and the creation of green and blue hydrogen in the north-east and elsewhere, I think you are right. Hydrogen is a big part of our overall strategy—

- Q28 **Chair:** But we do not have a published strategy.

The Prime Minister: —but it is only one of the horses we are betting on. It must be a big part of the solution.

- Q29 **Philip Dunne:** I have one final question. I think we can agree on this. You were as shocked as I was to see reports of Amazon destroying unsold consumer electronics from a warehouse less than an hour away from Glasgow, where you will be holding COP26. Is there anything the UK Government can do to hold global corporates to account for their environmental footprint?

The Prime Minister: I read that and I was absolutely horrified, although I noticed that Amazon then tried to clear it up by claiming that it was not as



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initially presented. I do not know the reality of the position, but obviously, destroying consumer electronics in landfill in that way is insane. What we have done—we did this at the G7—was for the first time to get a global agreement that there should be a tax on internet giants such as Amazon on the basis of their sales in markets. That was a massive achievement, led by the Chancellor, to get a global agreement on taxing the internet giants, and about time too.

Chair: Thank you, Mr Dunne. Clive Betts?

Q30 **Mr Betts:** To continue the theme of moving towards zero carbon, housing is responsible for about 15% of carbon emissions. In December the Climate Change Commission said that there had been minimal progress in recent years in reducing the level of emissions from housing and that what we needed was an agreed framework, not about what we want to achieve, but about how we are going to achieve it. Where can I find that framework for how we are going to get to net zero carbon in housing?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I will disagree with you, timidly, about what has happened already. There has been a massive reduction in emissions from housing. If you look at the proportion of emissions that come from transport, that is because we forced down CO₂ emissions from domestic heating and commercial properties. Let me give you one statistic: 40% of homes in England—that is 10.8 million homes—are now above energy performance certificate band C, up from only 12% in 2009.

Q31 **Mr Betts:** But what the Committee said was that there had been reasonable progress up to 2015, but for the past five years there has been minimal progress. That is in its report.

The Prime Minister: All I am saying is that massive progress has been made and continues to be made.

Q32 **Mr Betts:** But not in recent years.

The Prime Minister: I am going to be frank with the Committee. This is something that is very difficult to pull off, because we need to be able to ensure that we can heat people's homes and provide them with power in an affordable way while also reducing CO₂. You know perfectly well, Mr Betts, that the principal ways of doing that will be through ground-source or air-source heat pumps, or through hydrogen. We are building a market, working with producers and manufacturers and the whole sector, just as we are doing with electric vehicle manufacturers, to ensure that we drive the bills down. What we cannot have is a situation in which ordinary people living in their own homes are suddenly faced with an unexpected and unreasonable cost to put in ground-source or air-source heat.

Q33 **Mr Betts:** How are we going to do it, Prime Minister? The Climate Change Committee said that, on the path to net zero, we have to get all homes to stop using fossil fuel boilers by 2033. That is 25 million homes. Last year, 38,000 heat pumps were installed, but they are saying that by 2033 all homes have to have either a heat pump, or hydrogen boilers, which are currently not available. Where is the plan to do that?



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The Prime Minister: You are right, and what we are doing is working with the manufacturers and with the market—

Q34 **Mr Betts:** So it can be done? Can it be achieved?

The Prime Minister: —to ensure that we have the heat pumps in sufficient quantities to bring the price down. At the moment these things cost about 10 grand a pop. That is a lot of money for ordinary people. We need to make sure, when we embark on this programme, that we have a solution that is affordable and that works for people. We will not be imposing it until we have been able to create the market.

Q35 **Mr Betts:** Is the 2033 target going to be delivered?

The Prime Minister: I think we can do it in a very rapid time scale, and that is what we are doing, but it takes a great deal of determination. It means working with the producers and driving down the cost. As I was saying to Philip about electric vehicles, it means setting the markets and the parameters. At the moment, the prices are too high.

Q36 **Mr Betts:** Can I talk about future planning? One organisation looking at planning is called Placeshapers, which represents middle-sized housing associations. They have responsibility for about 1 million homes. They have looked at what it would cost them, as part of their business plan, to get to zero-carbon homes by 2050. For 1 million homes, they calculated that it would cost £104 billion. Only one of the associations could do it without going bankrupt. Where is the financial plan to enable social housing providers who want to do the right thing to plan ahead and do it?

The Prime Minister: In a way, you are repeating what I have just said, which is—

Q37 **Mr Betts:** Where is the plan?

The Prime Minister: The plan is to work with the manufacturers of these ground-source heat pumps—

Q38 **Mr Betts:** Where is the financial plan to enable the housing associations to afford it?

The Prime Minister: We will be bringing forward a plan under carbon budget 6 before COP26, so before November this year you will be getting a plan on the decarbonisation of the domestic market in this country. But what I am saying to you—I think people will be interested in this—is that the Government are determined to keep bills low. That is a priority. The only way to do that is to build the market in a systematic way to make sure that we have the technology and that it is affordable. There are some big bets that we may need to place on hydrogen and on ground-source and air-source heat pumps.

Q39 **Mr Betts:** So we will have a plan in which the Government show their financial support for social housing and for owner-occupiers who want to do the right thing?



The Prime Minister: Yes. The models and solutions may be very different across different types of housing and different housing stocks. You will see it long before COP26.

Chair: Good. We look forward to it.

Q40 **Caroline Nokes:** Are you hoping for any gender-specific outcomes from COP26, and if so, how will they be measured?

The Prime Minister: I think that the COP26 programme will be of immense benefit to all of humanity. I believe that, in helping to tackle climate change, it will help to tackle economic inequality, and I think that it will inevitably be of massive benefit to those who have tended to suffer the most—women in particular, who when it comes to their education, for instance, do not get as much investment as they need. One thing that we did at the G7 was to ensure that we put another £2.5 billion into the Global Partnership for Education, the bulk of which is to be spent on female education around the world. That is something I have campaigned on for a very long time. I think that everybody coming to COP26 will understand that there is a clear link between economic progress, sorting out climate change, addressing climate change and empowering and advancing women and ending the injustice that so many young girls receive far less investment in their education than young boys of the same age.

Q41 **Caroline Nokes:** Will the cuts to UK aid help those girls?

The Prime Minister: The UK is actually investing more, putting more money into female education. I think we are putting £453 million into the Global Partnership for Education, and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya is coming to London in just a few days' time to help us raise even more.

Caroline Nokes: Thank you.

Q42 **Tom Tugendhat:** At the G7, you did not manage to get any of our six closest allies to pledge to abandon coal use. How do you think you will manage to get China to do something similar in Glasgow?

The Prime Minister: China is a huge global economy and the fastest-growing emitter, and we have to address that problem, and I think that—

Q43 **Tom Tugendhat:** How are you going to do it?

The Prime Minister: By engagement. I think that what you cannot do is simply push China away and say that we must have nothing to do with China. China is a member of the P5. China sits on the UN Security Council, quite rightly. We have to engage with China and make the case to China. I think one of the most important things to come out of the G7 was the idea of "Build Back Better World", or the clean green initiative. That is a way—

Q44 **Tom Tugendhat:** I am going to go to my questions, Prime Minister, rather than your answers, if you will forgive me; you are stretching it.

The Prime Minister: If you are more interested in your questions than my answers, that is always your prerogative, Mr Tugendhat.



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Q45 **Tom Tugendhat:** I am interested in your answers to my questions, not to the questions you wish I asked. You said in the General Assembly in 2019, “Digital authoritarianism is not, alas, the stuff of dystopian fantasy but of an emerging reality”. How is that compatible with your recent decision, or rather your Government’s recent decision, not to call in Newport Wafer Fab for investigation?

The Prime Minister: This is a very difficult business. People should know that this relates to a chip manufacturer in Wales. We are looking into it. I have asked the National Security Adviser to review—

Q46 **Tom Tugendhat:** So it is being reviewed now?

The Prime Minister: We will look at it again, but do not forget that—

Q47 **Tom Tugendhat:** The Business Secretary told me that it was a matter for the Welsh Government.

The Prime Minister: They rather sweetly asked us to deal with it. What I can tell you, Tom, is that thanks to this Government and our prudence in passing the National Security and Investment Bill, which I am sure you voted for—

Tom Tugendhat: I did.

The Prime Minister: Good—we are able to take action in respect of this kind of thing.

Q48 **Tom Tugendhat:** I am delighted. That was a very important Bill that you passed. Therefore, if it is not you—

The Prime Minister: I want to stress, on this issue and on the others that there will be— Do not forget that, when I came in, this Government took the very difficult and painful step—Greg will know all about this, because he was the Business Secretary who had to deal with it—of having to extricate this country from Huawei.

Tom Tugendhat: I remember; it was a very successful rebellion.

The Prime Minister: This Government is spending a huge quantity of taxpayers’ money to make sure that we get Huawei out of our telecommunications networks. I want to make a very, very important point: I do not want anti-China spirit to lead to our trying to pitchfork away every investment from China into this country. I have to say that I think that would be economically foolhardy.

Q49 **Tom Tugendhat:** Prime Minister, if I may, there is a difference between investment that is looking for a normal return and the purchase of technology. With Nexperia, which, as you know, is a company that is mostly owned by a Chinese state-backed firm, we are seeing a Chinese state-backed entity buying a semiconductor manufacturer at a time of global shortage, when Beijing is already looking to stockpile semiconductors. If China thinks this is a matter of their national security and is essential to their sovereignty, and if Italy, Brussels, the United States and other countries and entities agree, why don’t you?



The Prime Minister: I think semiconductors are of huge importance to this country, and one of things that I wanted to look at immediately when I became Prime Minister was whether or not we could become more self-reliant. I am told it costs about £9 billion for us to build a proper semiconductor factory. It is a lot of money, particularly during a pandemic. We are thinking about what to do. They make a lot of semiconductors in Ireland, as you know, but there is this company in Newport. We have to judge whether the stuff that they are making is of real intellectual property value and interest to China, and whether there are real security implications. I have asked the National Security Adviser to look at it.

- Q50 **Tom Tugendhat:** You mentioned the pandemic, and I am delighted that you did, because your decision on 0.7% to 0.5% must have been a very difficult decision for you, as you committed so publicly, clearly and frequently to 0.7% yourself. I remember that, as Foreign Secretary, you did so as well. We are seeing a cut in the budget going to global tropical medicine and global vaccines at a time when we now know the interconnectedness of the health of us all globally. It is going from £150 million to £17 million at a time when we are seeing variants coming in from all over the world and are likely to see more variants in the near future. Will you be making sure that there is a vote in Parliament on this issue, and will you be looking to reverse such cuts, which undermine the national security of this country, as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister: Again, Tom, I am going to disagree with you on your characterisation of what this Government is doing. You talk about vaccines. We have put £1.5 billion of UK taxpayers' money into supporting COVAX, and I think a further £450 million or so into Gavi.

- Q51 **Tom Tugendhat:** That is brilliant, but this is separate.

The Prime Minister: I remind people watching this that, of the 1.5 billion vaccines that the developed nations have so far distributed around the world, roughly a third are as a result of the efforts of the UK Government—the deal we did with Oxford so that those vaccines are distributed at cost. That is the direct result of UK Government action, and I think people should be very, very proud of that.

Tom Tugendhat: I agree that we should be extremely proud of that.

The Prime Minister: We are talking about very, very big sums of money in a pandemic, when we have had to spend £407 billion on looking after the jobs, livelihoods, wellbeing and welfare of families in this country as well.

Tom Tugendhat: I think you should be rightly proud of the vaccines technology.

- Q52 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, you have talked a good talk about the ambitions you have for net zero, but £37 billion of revenue a year is solely dependent on the consumption of fossil fuel and greenhouse gas emissions—the same price as Test and Trace, just for ease—and £28 billion is fuel duty alone. Can you give the British public an idea of how



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you are going to fill that gap in revenue as we go greener?

The Prime Minister: Sorry—£37 billion of revenue from fuel duty?

Meg Hillier: No, £28 billion from fuel duty.

The Prime Minister: You make an incredibly good point, Meg. You are talking about the fiscal impact of moving to green technology and the implications of that. As you phase out hydrocarbon vehicles and phase out internal combustion engine vehicles, you phase out the use of fossil fuels.

Meg Hillier: We know why, but I think that the public would be interested to know your thoughts about how we go forward.

The Prime Minister: Sorry; I just wanted to clarify for everybody.

Down the line, of course, the Exchequer will start to see a loss of revenue. What I do not want—let this be said now; I have seen some misreporting about this, or perhaps I should say misunderstanding—is to see fuel bills going up to compensate, if you see what I mean, Meg. That is not the way forward.

Q53 **Meg Hillier:** So that is off the table. Is anything on the table to fill the gap?

The Prime Minister: I would not presume to anticipate the fiscal options of the Chancellor at a Budget or any other fiscal event, as you know, Meg.

Q54 **Chair:** There is something to be said for encouraging the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a major statement about how we are going to plan public expenditure and taxation over the next decade.

The Prime Minister: I do not think you could fault the Chancellor for making major statements in the last few months.

Q55 **Chair:** But you would encourage him to do that.

The Prime Minister: I think you will find that he will have a lot to say in due course.

Chair: Very good. We will now move on to covid and secondary impacts of the covid pandemic. We will start with Greg Clark.

Q56 **Greg Clark:** Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Prime Minister. I would like to ask you about some of the lessons that can be learned so far regarding the response to the pandemic but, before I do, may I ask a couple of quick questions of current concern? First, why should double-vaccinated Brits not be able to go on holiday to Spain this summer?

The Prime Minister: Thanks, Greg. I think that double vaccination is a great liberator. In principle and in practice, I think it is going to be great. You can already see the benefits: two vaccines—whether Pfizer, AstraZeneca, or a wide cocktail—offer a lot of protection.

Q57 **Greg Clark:** So why can't people go to Spain?



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The Prime Minister: What you will find, if you can contain your impatience just a little bit, is that the Secretary of State for Transport may say more about that in the course of the next few days, or perhaps even tomorrow, and I would not want to steal his thunder.

Q58 **Greg Clark:** We know from the press that that will be about quarantine, but I am interested in your instinct regarding the guidance for amber list countries, which states: "You should not travel to amber list countries". Is your instinct to get rid of that?

The Prime Minister: I really don't want to anticipate, or to steal the thunder of, the Secretary of State for Transport, but I can repeat what I have said already: I think that double vaccination offers massive potential—

Q59 **Greg Clark:** But you recognise that, together, the guidance and the requirements should not be—

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course, but you will see a lot more on that. The crucial thing is to remember that, currently, we need to contain the pandemic and to—

Greg Clark: Let us come on to that, because I have one question on that before we—

The Prime Minister: Double vaccination is clearly the way forward.

Q60 **Greg Clark:** On 16 August, the contacts of people with covid will no longer have to isolate. Is 16 August the date on which you expect us to reach herd immunity in this country?

The Prime Minister: That is not the consideration—

Q61 **Greg Clark:** So what is the significance of 16 August?

The Prime Minister: It is the time by which we feel that there will have been much more progress made on vaccination—

Q62 **Greg Clark:** More than on 19 July?

The Prime Minister: Even more than on 19 July. All these decisions are a balance of risk. By 16 August, we will have got many more jabs into people's arms.

Greg Clark: Many more young and healthy people will have been vaccinated.

The Prime Minister: Yes, which is a good thing.

Greg Clark: But they are the most robust against covid whom we are waiting for.

The Prime Minister: Sure, and I am sorry that they have had to wait—I know how frustrating it must be.

Q63 **Greg Clark:** I am concerned about the consequences of that rather than



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the wait. Is it the case that until we get to 16 August, people who have been jabbed twice will have to isolate, even if they have had a negative covid test?

The Prime Minister: We are asking people to isolate, and I know how frustrating it is.

Q64 **Greg Clark:** Why?

The Prime Minister: Because I am afraid this is a highly contagious disease and we have to do what we can to stop its spread.

Q65 **Greg Clark:** Have you seen estimates of how many contacts will have to isolate during that extra 28 days after 19 July?

The Prime Minister: Clearly, that will depend on the spread of the—

Greg Clark: Indeed, but have you seen an estimate?

The Prime Minister: I haven't seen any data on that. Obviously, it will depend on the numbers.

Q66 **Greg Clark:** The Health Secretary has said that there could be around 100,000 infections a day. If each of those has two contacts each, that is 200,000 a day. So over the course of that 28 days—the extra days that have been imposed—that is over 5 million people. Is that a reasonable step? Have you considered how many hospital admissions that is going to prevent?

The Prime Minister: We have been looking at all the data and trying to strike the right balance.

Q67 **Greg Clark:** What are the two sides of this?

The Prime Minister: The two sides of it are, that you could simply say, "We are going to dispense altogether with self-isolation" and move straight to a testing regime and not bother with asking people to do that any more. The difficulty with that is that you would be effectively allowing many more people to be vectors of disease than by continuing with our plans.

Q68 **Greg Clark:** But do you have an estimate of how many fewer hospital admissions would result from that?

The Prime Minister: I can't give you that number. What I can certainly say is that we believe that the programme of test, trace and isolate has actually made a massive difference to the disease.

Q69 **Greg Clark:** I know that you respect Sir John Bell, the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. In evidence to my Committee, he said that at the very least you should be able to be tested and released from covid, rather than to have to isolate for that period. What he said was that actually it is more likely that people will comply with the guidance if there is a way out of it if they test negative. Would you consider at least taking Sir John's very expert advice?

The Prime Minister: We are moving to testing rather than isolation—



Q70 **Greg Clark:** Before 16 August?

The Prime Minister: That is the date. Obviously, we keep all data under review. We will always be open to looking at the data, but that is, we think, the sensible approach. We want to retain the tool of asking people to protect others from the disease. It has been effective. It has been an important thing to do—

Greg Clark: No matter how many people it affects—

The Prime Minister: And I think we should stick with it.

Q71 **Greg Clark:** Let me ask you one last question. Obviously, we are going to have the public inquiry that will look back when it is all over, but it is important to learn lessons on the way, and the Science and Technology Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee are conducting an inquiry into that. What would you do differently, given experience, and what would you do the same?

The Prime Minister: That is a very big question, Greg.

Greg Clark: Give us an example.

The Prime Minister: If you asked me what things we have started to do differently and where we have really adapted since the—

Q72 **Greg Clark:** How you have learned from the experience on the way.

The Prime Minister: Yes—that is a really good question. Since the beginning of the pandemic, what have we learned that is obvious? To begin with, it was clear that we didn't have all the data that we needed, and we certainly didn't have it all in one place or in the right place. Every morning now I go straight into a meeting where I can see what is happening pretty much in any hospital in the country. I can see the breakdown by age, by variant type. I can see exactly what is happening in pretty much real time. We have set up the UK Health Security Agency. We have brought that. We didn't have data, and now we have.

I think that diagnostics is an obvious thing. We didn't even know how to make a lateral flow test when we began. We didn't have the technology in this country and we now do. We now have a diagnostics industry that is growing.

On PPE, we remember how difficult and how traumatic that was.

Greg Clark: So these are lessons learned on the way.

The Prime Minister: We now have the ability to make 80% of our PPE in this country, to say nothing of vaccine technology, which has obviously developed massively.

The single most important thing that we have learned—and I know how much you care about this, Greg, and I think you are right—and certainly what I have learned, is the massive benefits to our country, to our society and to our economy of investing in science. You could not have a clearer



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object lesson than the discovery of the Oxford vaccine and the impact that is now having on our ability to open up our society in way that otherwise, frankly, we could not.

Greg Clark: I certainly agree with that. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you. We are running over time badly, but we will press on as quickly as possible.

Q73 **Stephen Timms:** Good afternoon, Prime Minister. Last October, the Work and Pensions Committee recommended on a unanimous, cross-party basis that the £20 a week universal credit uplift should be made permanent. Last weekend, all six of the Conservative former Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions since 2010 made the same call. How do you respond to that call?

The Prime Minister: I understand very much why people want to continue to invest in and support the poorest and neediest in this society, and that is what we are going to do. We will continue with an increase in pay for the lowest paid workers, which we have done, and we have increased the national living wage. We have given councils huge sums to help those in greatest need; I think 4 million families have been helped to pay their council tax bills. You refer to the universal credit uplift among many, many other things that we have done. They are huge and are part of the £407 billion.

I want to stress, however, that as we come towards the inflexion point in this pandemic, when we start to lift the non-pharmaceutical interventions and we start to lift the restraints on society and the Government-imposed diktat that told people they could not go to work—remember what we were saying—and move beyond that, we have to have a different emphasis. The emphasis has got to be on getting people into work and getting people into jobs, and that is what we are doing.

Q74 **Stephen Timms:** But do you think Iain Duncan Smith, Esther McVey do not understand that point?

The Prime Minister: No, I have huge respect and admiration for all those people, and I understand where they are coming from, but the Government are placing the emphasis on coming out of the pandemic with a strong, jobs-led recovery. That is our approach.

Q75 **Stephen Timms:** If the cut goes ahead in three months' time, unemployment support will be at its lowest level in real terms for over 30 years, just as the end of the furlough scheme increases unemployment. According the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, half a million people would be pushed below the poverty line by taking the £20 away, including 200,000 children, and the universal credit allowance for under-25s, who have obviously been hard hit by job losses in the pandemic, will be cut by a quarter. Can all that damage really be justified?

The Prime Minister: I think the answer to that—I understand what you are saying—is to get people into work. If you look at what has actually been happening just in the past few months, projections for



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unemployment, which you rightly worry about, are for 2 million fewer than we were told they were going to be. We have lower unemployment than virtually all the rest of the G7. Vacancy rates are up at pre-crisis levels, and the number of people on the payroll has now been rising for five consecutive months. It is true that there are now 2 million people still on furlough, and you are right to draw attention to that, and that is a very considerable concern. But if you look at what is actually happening in jobs market, the problem at the moment, as I think most colleagues would testify, is a shortage of labour, not a shortage of jobs. That is what we need to address.

Q76 Stephen Timms: But do you accept that taking the £20 a week away will cause a lot of hardship to a large number of people?

The Prime Minister: I think that the best way forward is to get people into higher wage, higher skilled jobs, and that is the ambition of this Government. If you ask me to make a choice between more welfare or better, higher paid jobs, I am going to go for better, higher paid jobs.

Q77 Stephen Timms: That has always been the view of Iain Duncan Smith, of course, but he is calling for the £20 a week to be retained. Will you review that policy between now and September?

The Prime Minister: Of course, we keep everything under constant review, but I have given you a pretty clear steer about what my instincts are. By the way, we are also developing and pushing forward a lot of really excellent schemes for getting people into work—not just kickstart but restart and JETS, the job entry training scheme, to help people into work. That should be a mission and our crusade.

Q78 Stephen Timms: To raise a different point with you, in February you made the point in the Chamber, rightly I think, that the Government are worried about the increase in online fraud. The Work and Pensions Committee, the Treasury Committee, the Governor of the Bank of England, the Financial Conduct Authority and the City of London Police have all called for the Online Safety Bill—being published now—to tackle scams. Why are the Government unwilling to make that change to the Bill?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware that we are failing to do that. I am very concerned that we should tackle fraud. Indeed, I am told that the Online Safety Bill does just that.

Q79 Stephen Timms: It does it for a very small part of the problem, which is user-generated content. It does not do it for online advertising, which seems to be on a much longer-term track and is causing huge problems. I wonder whether you could just have a look at the current Online Safety Bill and see whether it could be changed to tackle online fraud.

The Prime Minister: I am told that the Bill will tackle a wide range of content and that it takes a focused approach to online fraud. If you feel that it is in some way inadequate, I am more than happy to look at it, but I know that the one of the key objectives of the Online Safety Bill is to tackle online fraud.



Chair: Thank you, Mr Timms.

Q80 Robert Halfon: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. We have Argentinian levels of hyperinflation in our schools, with 640,000 pupils being sent home this week, compared with 385,000 a week or so before. The Centre for Social Justice has identified 93,500 ghost children, who for the most part have not even returned to school since they were fully opened on 8 March. We also have exam orphans, with year-10 pupils, due to sit GCSEs next summer, missing one in four days of face-to-face teaching.

Of course, the £3 billion catch-up programme is hugely welcome, but what is your long-term plan to address the endemic absence of those pupils who have not even been back to school? How will you establish a level playing field so that all students have a fair crack of the whip doing exams next year?

The Prime Minister: Thanks, Rob. I know how much you care about this and how vociferously and vehemently you campaign on this issue. You are right; what has happened over the last 18 months has been for many children really debilitating. There is no question but that they have lost unconscionable amounts of teaching and learning time. We must remediate that; we must make it better. It is probably the single most important investment that we can make, so in addition to the £14 billion into education that this Government began with, we have a £3 billion catch-up plan so far. That is before we come to anything that the Chancellor may do later this year.

You asked how we are going to do that. I think the thing that works, and that I have found parents, teachers and pupils respond to, is more direct one-to-one or one-to-two tuition—focusing on the needs of the individual child and drawing out where they are going wrong. We have a massive programme of that.

Q81 Robert Halfon: I am completely with you on that. I support the catch-up plan, and £3 billion is a significant sum of money, but we know that the catch-up programme thus far is reaching just 44% of pupils on free school meals. Surely it should be focused on the most disadvantaged. It does not address the endemic absence—the 93,500 children who are not in school virtually most of the time, as the Centre for Social Justice has identified. Why not redirect the way the catch-up programme is running, and also expand the troubled families programme to try to get those children back into school?

The Prime Minister: Rob, I know how unbelievably frustrating it is for parents and pupils at the moment because of the numbers who are out of school because of the isolation policy that Greg and I were talking about just now, and the bubbles being sent home. I understand why schools have been taking the actions that they have: they want to stop the spread of covid and they are quite right, and I fully, fully support them. But the best thing is to move, as the Secretary of State for Education said yesterday, from bubbling to testing as the answer. As I was saying to Greg, that is one thing that will help us to keep more kids in school.



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There are plenty of other children who are losing school time for other reasons, as I think you are hinting. We need to deal with that in a very determined way, and there will be more that I want to do on time in school and on making sure that we invest in the school timetable as well.

- Q82 **Robert Halfon:** Finally, just to be clear, will you have a focus on the close to 100,000 kids—I call them the ghost children—who have not been back in school even since they fully reopened in March? Do you not think that there should be a long-term plan for education, a significant part of which would require a longer school day, not just for academic catch-up but for extracurricular activities such as sport and wellbeing? What more needs to be done to convince you as Prime Minister, and the Treasury, that a fully funded long-term plan with a longer school day is worth supporting and giving proper resources to?

The Prime Minister: We are looking at the evidence. If I am absolutely frank with you and the Committee, some of the evidence that we assembled to begin with was not as good as it could have been. The evidence on timetable, the evidence on lengthening the school day, was not as powerful as it was on tuition, for instance, but that does not mean that it is not the right thing to do. I do think it is the right thing to do. The question is how you do it, and what sorts of activities—is it enrichment, is it academic? What is the mixture, as you rightly say? We are doing a proper review of all that to get the evidence that we want. But in the meantime, over the summer, there are, as you know, all the summer schools, the holiday activities fund—a big, big effort to try to help kids to catch up before September.

- Q83 **Robert Halfon:** Will you look at the troubled families programme, or other means, to try to grab those students back into school—to try to get them back into school? There are close to 100,000 who have not been in school at all. They are not going to be helped by the catch-up fund as it is currently running.

The Prime Minister: I understand. You are making a very good point. You get into a risk of a circular problem: you keep missing the same group. I will certainly look at what we can do.

Robert Halfon: Thank you.

- Q84 **Chair:** Prime Minister, could we just spare a thought for the teachers? The health service gets all the limelight in this pandemic, but the teachers have taken a hell of a burden.

The Prime Minister: Sir Bernard, you are completely right.

Robert Halfon: Do not forget the support staff.

The Prime Minister: They have done an incredible job. What is so interesting when you go to some schools is that you can see the challenge that they have, because some children really are incredibly resilient and have just bounced through it without any problems at all, but that is not by any means the case for every child in this country. It has had a big impact on a lot of the kids.



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- Q85 **Chair:** Then could you ask your Education Secretary to make sure that they get a break this summer from initiatives from his Department, which have very often been contradictory—of course, they have had to respond to a fast-moving pandemic. They long for a period of stability and predictability. Can you have a word with him and see if he can provide them with a little respite?

The Prime Minister: I will do everything I can. I totally understand that point. All I would plead in mitigation and forgiveness from our wonderful teachers is that it has been difficult to work out how to keep some things going, and how to do examinations. But your point is well made.

- Q86 **Catherine McKinnell:** Could I add the challenge that many teachers face currently, which is that they are off school with covid, and that is causing huge difficulty for schools and is obviously compounding the issues of catch-up? I absolutely echo what the Education Committee Chair has said. I wanted to ask you about that as well, on behalf of petitioners. The Education Policy Institute calculated that education catch-up spending per head in England is around 19% of what the US is spending and 12% of what the Netherlands is spending. How do you explain that?

The Prime Minister: I do not recognise those figures and I do not agree with them, because they fail to take account—

Catherine McKinnell: I can give you the actual figures, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: They fail to take account of the £14 billion that we invested in education as soon as I became Prime Minister—£14.4 billion—which took funding for every primary school pupil up to £4,000 a head and funding for every secondary school pupil up to £5,000 a head. We began with massive investments and we have added another £3 billion, and there will be more to come.

- Q87 **Catherine McKinnell:** The overall spending on catch-up for English pupils is £310 per head; in the US it is £1,600 per head and in the Netherlands, it is £2,500 per head. We know the impact of the pandemic has been enormous on children and young people. Why is it that the Prime Minister feels that we do not need to invest in helping them catch up and make the best of going forward in the future?

The Prime Minister: That is obviously not how I see it. We are making the thick end of £20 billion in investment already and there will be more to come.

- Q88 **Catherine McKinnell:** Moving on to the impact of current covid numbers and the potential impact when the restrictions are released on 19 July, you have said on many occasions that you do not actually have the data. That is quite concerning, because of the impact of current covid levels, particularly in regions such as the north-east, where we are seeing a surge. We are already seeing businesses unable to function—hospitality businesses having to close. Take nurseries, for examples. They have to maintain legal ratios of staff to children in order to stay open and the early years sector has a very young workforce, many of whom are not



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double-vaccinated. Cases are skyrocketing and nurseries are being put in the position of having to turn families away, in order to maintain legal ratios. Which families do you think they should be prioritising?

The Prime Minister: I thank them for all that they are doing and the difficulties that they are going through. As I was saying to Greg earlier on, we have to make sure that we use the tools we have in the form of isolation to get through this particular phase. It will not last long.

You talk about hospitality sector businesses closing. Actually, thanks to the vaccine roll-out, we were able to get through to step 3 and we will take the final decision on 12 July, but it looks as though we will get through to step 4, which will allow them to open up fully without the need for the 1 metre rule. That is the most positive thing that can happen.

Q89 **Catherine McKinnell:** That is all in theory, Prime Minister. The reality is that businesses are facing huge staffing issues with many having to isolate and therefore they are not able to function. It is in the hospitality industry and it is in many other industries, but particularly in those industries where a lot of young people are employed.

Does the Prime Minister have the data for the relaxations he is proposing and how those businesses are going to be affected over the next two to three months, given we are already seeing the impact of high covid levels in areas such as the north-east?

The Prime Minister: If I may respectfully say, I do not think it is possible to argue simultaneously that businesses need to be able to be more open and at the same time to oppose the relaxations—

Catherine McKinnell: That is not the argument—

The Prime Minister: It is not quite clear to me; I had a bit of this earlier on—

Catherine McKinnell: I am asking whether you have seen the data. That is not the argument I am making—

The Prime Minister: You cannot have it both ways. You are either in favour of opening up and all the rest—

Q90 **Catherine McKinnell:** I am asking for the data. I am asking whether you have seen the data.

The Prime Minister: Well, I have already been very clear that we have data about hospitalisations and deaths. We have predictions for where they might go. They are available under the SPI-M-O charts—you can look at them—but they are speculative. At the moment, we are tracking in about the middle of the projections that SPI-M made for the third wave, if we went ahead with all the openings. So, if you look at the graphs, we are in the middle to low end of the projections that it made.

Q91 **Catherine McKinnell:** The current crisis has put many new parents, particularly mothers, at risk of redundancy. Two years ago the Government announced that they would extend redundancy protection



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for new mothers returning to work to six months. That was two years ago. When is that going to happen?

The Prime Minister: We want to help new mothers to return to work, but we want to help everybody to get back into work.

Q92 **Catherine McKinnell:** But when is the redundancy protection that has been promised going to be given?

The Prime Minister: I cannot give you the answer to that particular payment, but I can certainly tell you that at the moment, the problem, as I said earlier, is not so much a shortage of jobs, or a lack of vacancies; the problem is a shortage of labour. That is what we need to fix.

Catherine McKinnell: That does not stop women returning from maternity leave being made redundant.

The Prime Minister: No, and I do not want to see that happen.

Q93 **Catherine McKinnell:** One in 10 has—sorry, one in nine has currently been made redundant. We are awaiting Government legislation on this.

Q94 **Chair:** Can you let us know when you are going to bring that in, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Of course I will let you know about that. Our intention is to help everybody coming back from maternity leave to get into work, or back into work as fast as possible.

Q95 **Caroline Nokes:** Prime Minister, can you tell me what specific initiatives Ministers are bringing forward to build back in a more feminine and gender-neutral way?

The Prime Minister: Caroline, we are doing everything that we can to ensure that we have a recovery that, as I said just now to Ms McKinnell, gets women back into the workforce. I know that they have had particular problems. We will be making sure that we get everybody back to work in a way that is fair across both sexes. Actually, if you look at what has happened with furlough, according to the Resolution Foundation, 52%--it has generally attracted more female recipients than male so far. I think that is positive.

Q96 **Caroline Nokes:** It is evidence, Prime Minister, that women were more likely to be in sectors that were shut down longer. What level of female employment do you regard as evidence that we have built back in a more feminine way?

The Prime Minister: We want to make sure that we have female employment rising across the board, and we have employment rising across the board. Just to quote Resolution Foundation, it said of covid-19 that "the impact has been surprisingly equal...on men and women." That does not mean that there are not specific problems, such as the one that has just been referred to on returning from maternity leave, that we must address, and we will.

Q97 **Caroline Nokes:** But your own Ministers will not publish economic impact



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assessments on furlough, so we do not know from the Government's own figures what the impact has been across different genders.

The Prime Minister: I am quoting from the Resolution Foundation report.

Q98 **Caroline Nokes:** How about quoting from the economic impact assessments of your own Ministers and the Government Equalities Office?

The Prime Minister: As you know, Caroline, under the public sector equality duty in the Equalities Act 2010 all policies must be scrutinised for their impact on different groups. The information I have is that the gender pay gap is at a record low; we have 1.9 million more women in work than there were in 2010; and women for instance on FTSE350 boards is up around 50%. There has been a 50% increase in women on FTSE350 boards in just five years, which I think is quite fast going. Those I think are pretty useful metrics, Caroline.

Q99 **Caroline Nokes:** Should policies for recovery be in the round, or should they be targeted at those who were most impacted by covid?

The Prime Minister: We want to have a recovery that looks after everybody in society—everyone, everywhere. If I think back to the 2008 crisis, when we came out of it, I am not certain that we did deal with people's sense of injustice and inequality. We have a huge job to do now as a Government, as a Conservative Government, to level up and unite across the whole country, and that is what we are going to do.

Q100 **Caroline Nokes:** But you cannot point to a single policy or initiative that is going to help you build back in a more feminine and gender-neutral way. Just one?

The Prime Minister: I have mentioned—

Caroline Nokes: Those are your words, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I have already mentioned, Caroline, what we have done by reducing the gender pay gap to an all-time low. Let me just give you an example. Look at the Foreign Office, for instance. If you want to look at a more feminine approach to tackling climate change, Caroline, our diplomats around the world—in Washington, in New York, in Beijing—are female, and they are the people at the tip of the UK mission to build back better for the world. If you look at our climate change negotiators, Caroline, half of them are female, and they are doing a fantastic job, as I was saying earlier. They have succeeded in building back better for Britain and the world by getting 70% of the world's economy to commit to getting to net zero by 2050. That is a fantastic achievement by British women.

Q101 **Caroline Nokes:** But you did not get the financial pledges from the G7 for the—

The Prime Minister: I am getting the feeling, Caroline, that you would find fault with almost anything that we did, with the greatest possible respect to you. We did get the £100 billion and I think we will surprise you on the upside. British women in COP and represented in this Government,



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as they are abundantly, will surprise you on the upside by what they achieve to build back better in a more feminine way. If you can think of a pithier way of saying “build back more feminine”, send me a postcard.

Chair: Our sole role is to find fault so that you can make things even better, Prime Minister.

Q102 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, you talk about building back better and levelling up. What is your message to people who are living in seriously overcrowded accommodation, who, in the time you have been Mayor and Prime Minister, have seen toddlers grow into teenagers in that accommodation, and who are working but cannot afford the private rents and cannot afford to buy? Your Government have fuelled house purchases, but what support will you give to those who need better housing?

The Prime Minister: Don’t forget that this Government—first, you mentioned my time as Mayor. I am glad you did, because it gives me the opportunity—

Meg Hillier: Eighty per cent. of private rents was your definition of affordable.

The Prime Minister: —it gives me the opportunity to point out the paucity of the current Labour Mayor’s housing record by comparison.

Q103 **Meg Hillier:** I am actually asking about what you are doing as Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: You brought it up. Am I not allowed to answer your question?

Q104 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, if you want to talk about your record as Mayor, that was when you defined affordable housing as 80% of local private rents. Do you know what private rents are in central and inner London?

The Prime Minister: This is the Government that actually just increased local housing allowance—again, don’t forget—to tackle precisely that problem.

Meg Hillier: That does not tackle the overcrowding, Prime Minister, or the supply.

The Prime Minister: When talking about supply, talking about the record of the previous Mayor of London and the current Mayor of London is banned apparently, but it is a relevant consideration.

Meg Hillier: You are the big boss now, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I built far more homes than he did. Across the UK last year, we had a record number of housing starts. Never let it be forgotten that the Conservatives, in one year, built more council homes than Labour did in 13 years.



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Q105 **Meg Hillier:** But Prime Minister, your Government cannot even tell us how many social housing units have been built. You are fuelling supply but for purchase, which is fine for those who can purchase, but many people, particularly in expensive parts of the country such as my constituency, cannot purchase and cannot rent at private rates.

The Prime Minister: Don't forget, Meg, that we built more council homes in one year than your Labour Government did in 13 years. Okay? So, I won't take any lessons about building social homes.

Q106 **Meg Hillier:** It's not enough is it, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: I built more in London than the current Mayor has done, or will do. By the way, I disagree with you respectfully about people's ambitions for home ownership. I do think social housing is of massive importance; we must build more social housing. That is totally right, but ultimately lots of people in this country, in their 20s, 30s, 40s, should have the chance—

Q107 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, you are playing games with my words. I have nothing against home ownership.

The Prime Minister: You could have fooled me.

Meg Hillier: Many people simply can't afford it.

Chair: You have made your point, Meg. Thank you very much, Prime Minister. I prefer respect as part of the discourse. Can we move on to post-Brexit impact? We go to the Chair of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, Pete Wishart.

Q108 **Pete Wishart:** Thank you, Sir Bernard, and good afternoon, Prime Minister. Since Brexit happened, there has been a lot of activity around what is referred to as strengthening the Union. What if it becomes clear that Scotland does not want the Union strengthened?

The Prime Minister: I am not at all sure that that's true, Pete. You and I have had many exchanges on this in the past. There was a vote in 2014, and it was pretty clear what the people of Scotland wanted. It was decisive. In terms of the Union, just look at it in a dispassionate way. The strength of our common institutions was palpable during that pandemic, and still is.

Q109 **Pete Wishart:** What I am looking at is an election that was held less than two months ago. As you know, Prime Minister, what was elected was a majority of MSPs who favoured independence for our nation. That would indicate to me that there does not seem to be such an appetite for a strengthening of the Union. In fact, quite the opposite. So, would you just do that to Scotland anyway, regardless of what our democratic institutions say about it?

The Prime Minister: Would I do what?

Pete Wishart: Strengthen the Union—whatever that is supposed to be. Would you do it, just like you imposed the Internal Market Act 2020 on



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Scotland, and just like you decided that Scotland would be taken out of the European Union, even though that was rejected by the overwhelming majority of people in Scotland? Is it just something you do to us? Is that how you approach Scotland and the Scottish Government now? You just do things to us.

The Prime Minister: No, but I don't think it can be bad for all the constituent parts of the Union to have their trading relations strengthened, their friendships strengthened, their means of easy communication strengthened, their routes from one part of the Union to another strengthened. It seems to me a good thing, and something that is pretty hard to argue against.

Q110 **Pete Wishart:** Your former senior adviser rather uncharitably said that you were "an unthinking Unionist who thinks devolution was a disaster...who would like to reverse it but won't dare try". That is pretty accurate, isn't it? Would you reverse devolution if you had the chance? What do you really feel about devolution?

The Prime Minister: Pete, I was a massive beneficiary of devolution. As I just said to Meg Hillier, it was the Labour Government's decision in the late 1990s to follow the John Smith package, and to devolve, that enabled me to become Mayor of London. I think it was a great thing. When I was Mayor of London you didn't find me endlessly attacking central Government and moaning about it. You did not find me endlessly trying to shuffle off blame and responsibility on to central Government. I took responsibility.

Pete Wishart: This disaster theme seems to be—

The Prime Minister: The problem is not with devolution; the problem is with the party in power in Scotland.

Q111 **Pete Wishart:** Just on that, this disaster theme seems to crop up quite a bit. One thing you have admitted to and conceded was when you were talking to northern Tory MPs and said that devolution was "Tony Blair's biggest mistake" and again you referred to it as a disaster. You did say that, didn't you?

The Prime Minister: I certainly think there are disastrous aspects of Scottish Government, the Scottish National party's performance—

Q112 **Pete Wishart:** But you were not referring to Scottish Government, you were referring to devolution.

The Prime Minister:—on the Scottish National party's performance in delivering education, in fighting crime, in tackling the scourge of drugs, I think there have been lamentable failures. Yes, I do. Now the difficult thing for me as Prime Minister of the UK, and it is a difficult thing because I love the whole UK, and I want it all to succeed. It is very hard to mount the ramparts and say that something is going wrong in Scotland. I do not want to do that; I want Scotland to be brilliantly governed and it should be, but I just think that the SNP is not delivering what it could for the people of Scotland.



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Q113 **Pete Wishart:** We will not start to speak about your Government. But you are now the Minister for the Union. Could you maybe list your top three achievements since you gave yourself that position?

The Prime Minister: I think that it would be invidious of me to comment—

Pete Wishart: Go on!

The Prime Minister: I will leave that to others—

Pete Wishart: There must be loads. You are Minister for the Union for goodness' sake!

The Prime Minister: I think that the Union— Let me give you an example of the strength of the Union. It became obvious to me during the pandemic. The role of the British Army for instance in rolling out not just the vaccine—

Pete Wishart: One of your achievements is the British Army?

The Prime Minister:—but the testing centres. I think that the vaccine roll-out can be broadly counted as an achievement of the Government; yes, I do. I think I would even go so far as to say that the Union played a massive role in the development of the vaccine, and whole testing—

Pete Wishart: I have only got a minute left, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Well, you have asked me, so I am going to—

Q114 **Pete Wishart:** You have not given me any examples.

The Prime Minister: I have; I have given one, which is the vaccine roll-out. No. 2 is testing. It was fantastic to go to Glasgow and see the work of scientist students in Glasgow testing the samples that came from Kent. It was thanks to the work of those Glasgow scientists that we were able to identify the Kent variant.

Pete Wishart: I am asking specifically about Scotland. Just lastly, because I can see Sir Bernard hurrying me along—

The Prime Minister: It has been wonderful to see the Union pulling together.

Q115 **Pete Wishart:** Are you going to come back to Scotland for another staycation this summer?

The Prime Minister: Wild horses won't keep me away.

Q116 **Pete Wishart:** Because they always go so well, don't they? Particularly for us and the independence movement anyway.

The Prime Minister: I notice that the Conservatives got a bigger share of the votes than ever before—

Pete Wishart: No, they didn't.



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Chair: Mr Parish.

Q117 **Neil Parish:** Thank you very much, Sir Bernard. Come to the west country, Prime Minister, for your holiday this year. Come to Devon; the sun shines always in Devon.

With Brexit comes trade deals. We now have got an in-principle trade deal with Australia, which we welcome, strategically. What it brings with it in the future is 100,000 tonnes of beef. We have got great ruby red beef being reared on Exmoor, great lambs across the country and great milk. What we need now to do is to go on a great drive to export to Australia and all across the world. What, Prime Minister, will you put in place to help us to help us get our great British brand—I do say British—across the world?

The Prime Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Parish. We are doing a massive export drive for British food, and we have staff in 119 markets who are dedicated to supporting UK food and drink, and we are opening up. In June, thanks to the deals done by Liz—the Secretary of State for International Trade—we are now sending poultry to Japan for the first time. In March of last year, we finally broke down the barriers to British beef going to America. I know that you take a lively interest in British beef, Neil, and you will be thrilled to know that one company, Foyle Food, has already sold 3 million tonnes of beef to the United States—sorry, £3 million-worth. Three million tonnes would be a lot—

Neil Parish: A lot of beef.

The Prime Minister: Where Foyle leads is the thin edge of the wedge; it is the beginning. I am sure that you, Neil, and British farming will find plenty of other opportunities around the world.

Q118 **Neil Parish:** Yes, we greatly welcome what we are doing, but we have a counsellor in Beijing and that is about all we have in our embassies. You have the Australians within 15 locations across the world, and they spend \$20 million. In our embassies, we need food counsellors to promote our British food, because if we are to really get on the front foot—Trade is not only one way, coming into this country; it is going out. If we want to build a greater environment for our food—That grass-fed beef has to be reared, it has to be looked after and then it has to be sold at a profit. We have to get that into those foreign markets. What are we going to do so that our embassies have these counsellors across the world? Can you give me a commitment to do that, please?

The Prime Minister: Let me say first how much I love your attitude. You are right to be optimistic—and about Scottish beef too, Pete; it is the future. You will find as you go around our embassies that there is already somebody there who knows what to do. I think we need to make sure that the agricultural sector itself knows where the opportunities are. What we should be doing, I think, in a much more crisp way, is summarising the opportunities, giving them to the food and drink businesses—

Q119 **Neil Parish:** Sorry to interrupt, but that is what these food counsellors



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particularly do in all these countries. They go back to their country and say, "This is the way to get into the market." This is to help the small businesses, the farms, the processors and everybody else get out there into China, the far east or wherever it might be. That is why we need these food counsellors.

The Prime Minister: I totally agree that there should be someone in every embassy around the world who has that responsibility. However, we are also putting £38 million into giving SMEs the information that they need on their side. We need to join up the British food business, in all its amazing diversity—the manufacturers, the entrepreneurs, all the people who are making this stuff—with our diplomatic network, so they know—

Q120 **Neil Parish:** Prime Minister, we are in total agreement, but the one thing I have not heard from you is whether you are going to put those resources in place.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have already told you. We have the £38 million going into DIT's internationalisation fund—

Q121 **Neil Parish:** But will you ensure that, within our embassies, we have those food counsellors? I am sorry to press it, but we have been trying to do this for years. We must make sure that we do it.

The Prime Minister: In 119 markets—by markets, I mean countries—we have specific staff dedicated to agriculture, food and drink—

Q122 **Neil Parish:** And you will put those resources in?

The Prime Minister: I undertake to you, Neil, that I will go back and make sure that we have somebody specifically devoted to increasing food and drink exports. What we also need to do is build up the networks so that businesses in this country that mainly sell within this country start to think about export as well. That is why we are putting £25 million into Export Finance for food and drink and £38 million to build up that network.

Neil Parish: Thank you, Prime Minister. I will take you up on your offer. I look forward to that happening.

The Prime Minister: I hope to see your—

Q123 **Chair:** Can we add that topic to the letter that will follow this?

The Prime Minister: You certainly can.

Q124 **Chair:** Can I also ask, Prime Minister, if you will include a note on the figures of expected hospital admissions if isolation was ended on 19 July rather than 16 August?

The Prime Minister: I will see what I can do.

Q125 **Chair:** That would be very helpful. Thank you. May I also add one of the post-Brexit hangovers? We used to export musicians and talent across the European Union with great alacrity, but this is severely threatened, as you know; this was raised by Julian Knight at the last session, and he has asked me to raise it again. It seems that the EU is still digging in on the



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question of an EU visa waiver for touring artists, musicians and performers. In your talks with Chancellor Merkel—I did raise this with you by letter before you saw her—did you get an opportunity to raise this with her?

The Prime Minister: In fact, Germany is one of the better countries on this issue. We did not specifically discuss this at our recent meeting, but the Germans are better than some others. About 17 EU members are quite good; seven are not so good. We are working on it to sort it out, and we will.

The proposal for a total visa waiver is obviously an interesting one, but you would have to ask yourself, “But what other professions could you include in that?” It is hard to see where you would draw the line. Sir Bernard, you campaigned heroically for taking back control of our borders and for coming out of the EU. We would not want accidentally to reverse that in this particular case by gradual erosion of our freedoms.

We are making a great deal of progress and I appreciate how frustrating it is. I know that Sir Elton John is in talks with other EU partners about how to speed this up, but I feel it is very much in their interests. This is something that all our societies benefit from massively, and I hope that it will be speedily resolved.

Q126 **Chair:** I would have enjoyed asking Chancellor Merkel, “Who wants to stop cultural exchange?” which was one of the objectives of her visit. The answer is the European Commission, because we would not stop visiting artists coming to our own country, but we are losing people from London permanently. They are going to take up residence in other European countries with European citizenship, because they cannot operate—they cannot pursue their careers—if they stay in London.

The Prime Minister: I hope that we are not and the evidence does not seem to support the view that we are losing all EU nationals, because, after all, as you will have noticed—

Q127 **Chair:** No, it is not about EU nationals; it is about British citizens taking up citizenship in other countries because their career opportunities are so limited compared to what they were. It is a very serious problem, Prime Minister. I hope you will encourage Lord Frost—

The Prime Minister: I will. I know that you are a distinguished and famous chorister, Sir Bernard, and I hope that your own gigs have not been in any way restricted as a result of this. I will make sure that we do whatever we can.

Chair: I have been resting for some time. I am now going to move on to Simon Hoare, Chair of the Northern Ireland Committee.

Q128 **Simon Hoare:** Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, Prime Minister. Prime Minister, I think you and I will agree that there is nothing in the Northern Ireland protocol that in any way affects negatively the constitutional integrity of our United Kingdom. Now, while you and I might see that and understand it, there is a growing group of people who



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live in Northern Ireland—you will be aware of this—who are very concerned that the protocol is in some way a stepping stone to a border poll, a reunification referendum and the like. In a number of recent evidence sessions in my Committee, it has become very clear that they want to hear in the clearest possible terms from you as Prime Minister your support for Northern Ireland as part of the UK, its continuation as part of the UK while it wishes to be so, and a determination to maintain the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Could I invite you to do that this afternoon?

The Prime Minister: You certainly can, Simon. Actually, I have just been called an unthinking Unionist by my friend Pete. I do not think I am an unthinking Unionist; I think I am a passionate Unionist. I believe in our country and the way it works, in the four nations coming together. It is a fantastically powerful thing. It is the greatest global advertisement for co-operation and working together. It is a wonderful thing. We want to further strengthen it, not in an assertive or interfering way, but we want to strengthen it. There is absolutely no threat to Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom and there should not be—let me measure my words—from the protocol.

It is clear in article 6(2) of the protocol, for instance, that all sides are asked to use their best endeavours to ensure that there is free trade and seamless movement between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is clear that Northern Ireland is part of the sovereign territory of the United Kingdom. That is all clear from the protocol. The unfortunate thing is that the protocol is being applied currently in a way that causes some of the anxieties to which you have just referred, so what we have to do—

Q129 **Simon Hoare:** I wanted to come on to that point. Thank you for the clarity of the first part of your answer—that is appreciated, and I know it will be heard across Northern Ireland this afternoon. The Joint Committee was clearly set up because it was known that the protocol was not going to be perfect at the start and that there were going to be issues that would need to be addressed, which is best done through a position of mutual political trust. We keep hearing in the Committee that businesses will abide by whatever rules the politicians require them to abide by, as long as there is certainty, clarity and stability in their delivery. What value would you put on the issue of political trust in the workings of the Joint Committee—with a bit of give and take on both sides, which I know is not always palatable to some—to make sure that the protocol is working as well as it possibly can, so that those benefits of having one foot in each market, which is a unique selling point for Northern Ireland, can be maximised?

The Prime Minister: You are spot-on, Simon. That is what is needed. What is needed now is good will and imagination, but there are some very serious problems. You know the statistics: of all the checks that are currently conducted around the whole perimeter of the EU for customs and other purposes, 20% are taking place in Northern Ireland, although the island of Ireland has only 0.5% or thereabouts of the EU's population. You have a very difficult situation in which vital drugs have not been able to be moved from Great Britain to Northern Ireland—30 drugs, including



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cancer drugs. I think about 200 companies have stopped shipping stuff. There have been impediments to the movement of guide dogs, parcels, potted plants and tractor parts. I think I am right in saying that they do not actually have Asda shops in the Republic of Ireland, yet Asda goods coming into Northern Ireland all have to be checked. Only yesterday there were very serious representations from the Jewish community in Northern Ireland, who pointed out that because of the problem with the food sector, it was becoming difficult for them to have timely access—or any access—to kosher food. They are talking now about an exodus from Northern Ireland by the Jewish community. Clearly, we want to do everything we can to avoid that and to sort it out, but it is going to take our friends in the Joint Committee to make some movement, and to make that movement pretty fast.

Q130 **Simon Hoare:** What movement would you envisage the UK Government making? To coin a phrase, it takes two to tango.

The Prime Minister: I think we have been very clear that we are implementing the protocol. The UK is a faithful, obedient servant of the law. The things that I have described are a direct result of what UK officials are doing in upholding the law and obeying the EU jurisdiction. I think any impartial listener of this conversation would agree that the problem is the EU is currently trying to implement the protocol in a way that is grossly disproportionate and unnecessary.

Q131 **Simon Hoare:** Can I ask one final question? Could you say a little about the status of our relationship with the Republic of Ireland at the present time and where you would like to see it move to? How would you like to see it develop?

The Prime Minister: That is a terrific question. The sooner we can put this problem behind us, the better, because the relations between London and Dublin underlying this issue are truly fantastic. Our relations with Micheál Martin, as with his predecessor Leo Varadkar, are very progressive. There are things we want to do, and we want to get on and do them. There are things where the UK and Ireland can work together. I was talking about connectivity with Pete; there are things on north-south connectivity in the island of Ireland and on what we can do east to west, and what we can do over the border, working together in the Londonderry area. There is a huge amount that we want to get on and do together to strengthen our friendship and partnership. Don't forget that the UK's economic relations with Ireland are colossal. They remain one of our biggest export markets, our biggest trading partners and friends.

Chair: Prime Minister, we are testing your patience by going over time. You are being very generous.

The Prime Minister: No, it is alright.

Chair: This is the final set of questions, on the same topic, from Sir Bill Cash.



The Prime Minister: Our viewers may be switching over to the football. I don't know that we will be able to compete for much longer.

Q132 **Sir William Cash:** Prime Minister, do you agree that one of the primary reasons for our signing the Northern Ireland protocol was to preserve the Belfast Good Friday agreement and that the mutual obligations in the protocol must be seen through that focus, which we do, but unfortunately the EU seems to ignore? I have to admit they have made one sensible decision, on the question of chilled meats, but we need many more sensible decisions of that kind. Do you agree that we need them soon and in the immediate future?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we do, Sir Bill. On chilled meats, going back to what I was saying to Simon, that is very far from fixed. All we have there is a stay of execution. That is what the Jewish community in Northern Ireland were saying. They are facing a real problem unless we can sort this out.

I agree totally with your characterisation of the problem. We understand the vital importance of protecting free movement north-south and making sure that there is no hard border within the island of Ireland. That is the whole point. We have done that. It has been a massive effort by the UK state. What we agreed was that to make that happen in a reasonable way, we would undertake to do certain checks on stuff that could in theory circulate in Ireland itself after arrival in Northern Ireland. That is what we undertook to do—as an act of neighbourliness, to look after the EU single market, which is what they wanted us to do. We also agreed, unfortunately, that the EU could have a say in how that was done. That has been the problem. They have been implementing the protocol in a way that is producing the types of anomalies that I have been describing. We need to fix it.

Q133 **Sir William Cash:** Given the unique circumstances, as the protocol states, of the Northern Ireland situation, which is both deeply historical and deeply political, and with the marching season coming along and all the rest of it, do you agree that we must also focus on stability, trade, peace and community relationships in Northern Ireland, without in any way apologising—to pick up on what Simon was saying earlier—for our insisting on the constitutional integrity of Northern Ireland as an inviolable part of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Absolutely—that is, after all, what it says in the protocol. That is a very fair point. What we all need to do is to work rapidly on some solutions—to fix this thing fast. It will take some effort, but we really cannot exclude any actions that the UK Government may need to take, as I have said many times, to protect what it says in the protocol—the east-west dimension of the Belfast Good Friday agreement, which is equally important as the north-south dimension, clearly, and to protect the territorial integrity of the UK.

Q134 **Sir William Cash:** How often do we have to say to them, “It is in your and our mutual interests to be flexible about this arrangement”? It may



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be written down in a certain fashion, but the truth is that if we want to get it right, you have to have a degree of mutual co-operation and flexibility.

The Prime Minister: That is right. The noble Lord Frost will continue to make that point with his customary diplomatic force and skill.

Sir William Cash: Quite right.

Q135 **Chair:** Could we not ultimately recognise that article 13(8) of the protocol presages the possibility of superior arrangements to the protocol—alternative arrangements?

The Prime Minister: It does.

Q136 **Chair:** If that is going to protect the Good Friday agreement more effectively and treat the two communities with more parity and fairness, that would be the right way forward.

The Prime Minister: Completely right, Sir Bernard. It cannot be beyond the wit of man, as you and I and others have been saying for at least five years, for technology to come to our aid and sort it out.

Chair: Prime Minister, thank you very much. You have been very patient staying an extra 20 minutes. I am very grateful to you. We will not detain you a moment longer.