



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Liaison Committee

Oral evidence from the Prime Minister, HC 744

Wednesday 16 September 2020

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 16 September 2020.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Sir Bernard Jenkin (Chair); Hilary Benn; Karen Bradley; Sir William Cash; Sarah Champion; Greg Clark; Mr Tobias Ellwood; Meg Hillier; Simon Hoare; Julian Knight; Angus Brendan MacNeil; Catherine McKinnell; Sir Robert Neill; Neil Parish; Mel Stride; Tom Tugendhat; Mr William Wragg.

Questions 1-156

Witness

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



Examination of witness

Witnesses: Boris Johnson MP.

Q1 **Chair:** Can I welcome everyone to this second hearing of the Liaison Committee with the Prime Minister? Thank you, Prime Minister, for giving us your time today. This is only the second time you have appeared in front of the Liaison Committee; I must ask you if you will at least fulfil the obligation to appear three times in the current calendar year and therefore if you would, hopefully, respond positively to an invitation to appear again before Christmas.

The Prime Minister: Bernard, can I say how much I enjoyed my last appearance before your Committee and how pleased I am to be here today? Of course, I will—I know that Prime Ministers typically try to come to the Liaison Committee at least three times a year. This has been an exceptional year, but I will make sure that I look carefully at my diary and do my utmost to oblige your distinguished Committee before Christmas.

Chair: Thank you very much, Prime Minister—I will take that as a yes.

The Prime Minister: You can take it that I am going to definitely look at my diary very, very hard.

Chair: If all your answers are as expansive as that particular one, we may have to keep you beyond your five o'clock deadline. If you keep your answers short, Prime Minister, and we will all endeavour to keep our questions short so that you have plenty of time to answer them.

We have three themes this afternoon. We are going to start immediately on the Government's response to the pandemic.

Q2 **Greg Clark:** Thank you for coming, Prime Minister; it is good to see you again.

What we know clearly from the science now is that most people with covid have no symptoms at all, but they are infectious. That is why testing and tracing those with symptoms and without is so key to controlling it. Since you last came before the Committee, we have expanded testing capacity enormously, and we are testing more per head than countries like Germany and Spain. Yet this week, even people with covid symptoms in Kent have been told that they have to go to Cornwall or Scotland for a test or that one is not available at all.

Do we currently have enough testing capacity available?

The Prime Minister: The short answer to that is no we don't. We do not have enough testing capacity now, because in an ideal world I would like to test absolutely everybody who wants a test immediately.

Q3 **Greg Clark:** When will we have that capacity, then?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Prime Minister: Let us be in no doubt, however, that there has been a massive increase in testing capacity: it has gone up from 2,000 in March to 350,000—

Q4 **Greg Clark:** I acknowledge that, Prime Minister. Following the Chairman's directions, let us concentrate on this: when will the capacity be in place?

The Prime Minister: We will be up at 500,000 by the end of October.

Q5 **Greg Clark:** By the end of October. The Health Secretary told the Health Select Committee that it would be within two weeks. What has happened since then? Why has it been put back?

The Prime Minister: Sorry—what would be?

Q6 **Greg Clark:** A week ago, Matt Hancock told the Health and Social Care Select Committee that the problem would be solved within two weeks from then—that is, a week from now. What has happened between then and now to make it go back?

The Prime Minister: With great respect, I said that we would be up at 500,000 a day by the end of October.

Q7 **Greg Clark:** Will 500,000 a day be enough to meet the demands that you project for that time?

The Prime Minister: We sincerely hope so, but what has happened is that demand has massively accelerated just in the last couple of weeks. If you look at the graphs of people asking for a test, getting on the website, or ringing up for a test—they are going up.

Q8 **Greg Clark:** Why do you think that is, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: The reasons for that are that many people are seeking to get a test in the hope that they can thereby be released to get on with their lives in the normal way. People who have come into contact with someone who has tested positive, for instance, are seeking to get a test to ensure that they are okay to go to work.

Q9 **Greg Clark:** Is that unreasonable?

The Prime Minister: It is perfectly reasonable, and I understand why people are doing it. But the advice and the guidance is that people should seek a test not in those circumstances but when they have symptoms. What we are setting out today, or setting out very shortly, is the priority of the groups that we think should have tests. The Health Secretary will be setting that out. As they do in Germany, we will be starting with those who have symptoms, which are clearly the group that needs to have tests. I think that in the case of schools, for instance, it is very important that people—teachers and parents—should look at the Public Health England guidance and the guidance from NHS Test and Trace about when you should get a test.

Q10 **Greg Clark:** Taking schools, isn't it the case that if whole classes are to be sent home to isolate for two weeks because someone in the class has



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a cough, we are going to be in a rolling system of school shutdowns that is going to wreck education for England?

The Prime Minister: That would be wrong. That should not be happening, because the reason for sending such a class home, or a bubble home, would be, as I say, if somebody tests positive.

Q11 **Greg Clark:** But the whole class has to go.

The Prime Minister: If somebody tests positive who has been in contact with the rest of their bubble, then the rest of the bubble has to self-isolate.

Q12 **Greg Clark:** But they have to go while the person is waiting for the test. They have symptoms, and then—

The Prime Minister: No, they should go in the event of a positive test.

Q13 **Greg Clark:** So they should not vacate the school or the class until the person with symptoms has been tested positive.

The Prime Minister: That is correct. If I may say, I think it would be of great advantage to the Committee to consult the guidance that has been issued by Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace on that precise matter.

Q14 **Greg Clark:** That is very helpful, Prime Minister. On the half a million figure, scientists from SAGE have said that half a million people a day will have symptoms consistent with covid in a normal winter—a winter without covid being present. If the target is half a million by October, all that will do is deal with the people who have symptoms of coughs and colds that they get anyway. That will not be enough to deal with the additional risk of people with covid symptoms, will it?

The Prime Minister: We believe that with the additional tests that we are laying on, by ramping up NHS Test and Trace, we can make a very substantial difference. However, you are making an entirely reasonable point; you are making a point about the big increase in demand that we are seeing. That is why it is vital that those specifically with covid symptoms should seek a test, and those who have been in contact with somebody who has tested positive should only self-isolate on the basis, as I say, of a positive test.

Q15 **Greg Clark:** Just a final reflection, Chair. We knew at the start of the pandemic—everyone has agreed, and this is the evidence my Committee has taken—that the virus spread because we did not have enough testing capacity to test asymptomatic people. Six months on, it feels like we have been here before. In April, the Secretary of State had to take a personal grip to increase the capacity. Will you and he do that to sort out the crisis that we have in testing capacity?

The Prime Minister: I can assure you, Mr Clark, that everything is being done that we possibly can do to increase testing capacity. I just remind the Committee that that includes automation, batch testing, and securing supplies abroad. Today, we are commissioning two new labs, for a total of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

four new labs that we are building, as you will know, across the country. We have hired another 300 people. Just in the last two weeks, testing capacity has gone up 10%, and I have given the figure of 500,000 per day that we aim to reach by the end of October.

Greg Clark: Thank you.

The Prime Minister: Just to remind you, Sir Bernard, before people run down the UK's efforts, it really is worth bearing in mind that we are now testing more per head of population than France, Germany and Spain, and have conducted more tests than any other European country.

Q16 **Chair:** Could I just emphasise, though, that if the schools start falling over through lack of tests, that will disrupt everything—the economy and everything? At Manningtree High School in my constituency, 97% of pupils came back when it reopened, but they only have 88% of pupils there now. They have a staff member off, waiting for a test for one of their children, and they have 13 pupils off waiting for tests. How will we prioritise testing for schools to keep them operating?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps, Sir Bernard, you weren't listening when I made the point to Mr Clark that people should not be sent home unless a member of the class or the bubble has tested positive.

Q17 **Chair:** Yes, but the pupils themselves are requiring to be tested, that's the problem, because of something that has happened in their home, not something that has happened at school.

The Prime Minister: As I say, I appreciate the frustrations of parents and of pupils who want more tests, and all I can say is that we are doing our level best to supply more tests, to speed the process up, to turn it around faster and to ensure that people get tests as close as possible to where they want them. I know how frustrating it is that people have been asked to go long distances, and we are doing what we can to bring those distances down. They have come down a bit.

Q18 **Mr Wragg:** Good afternoon, Prime Minister. It's good to see you. Clearly, this aspect of our session focuses entirely on covid, and your announcement that there will be a public inquiry has been widely welcomed. Could you tell the Committee when that inquiry will begin into the response to the pandemic?

The Prime Minister: Thank you very much, Mr Wragg. Of course we will have a lessons learned inquiry, we will look at everything that has gone wrong and gone right and we will try to work out what we can do to do things better in future. Of course that is the right thing to do. I have to say I don't think that would be a good use of official time at the moment. We have just been having a long discussion about the very pressing need to ramp up our testing operation, and huge numbers of officials across Government and across the country are involved in that right now.

Q19 **Mr Wragg:** Establishing any inquiry now would mean it would probably start in the new year. What is the impediment to getting that background work under way?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Prime Minister: Just the one I mentioned.

Q20 **Mr Wragg:** Is there any further thought in terms of rapid response and lessons learned that you have learned already? Could you give us some key examples of those and how they have been implemented?

The Prime Minister: I wouldn't want to anticipate the work of any such inquiry.

Q21 **Mr Wragg:** But, as you said, work must already have been done for rapid response and lessons learned in the course of the pandemic.

The Prime Minister: Oh yes, of course.

Q22 **Mr Wragg:** Could you give some specific examples of that?

The Prime Minister: I think we've learned all sorts of things. I think it was Greg who said earlier on that one of the things that has really changed our thinking is the high level of transmission that is now asymptomatic. That has changed the way we respond. There are all sorts of things that we're learning the whole time.

Q23 **Mr Wragg:** Can I take you on to issues around the civil service more broadly? Clearly, its ability to respond to the pandemic has been and will continue to be key, so could you outline why you think the civil service requires reform?

The Prime Minister: I think that the civil service does an outstanding job; I think that's the first and most important thing to say. I venerate our civil service. I think that they are fantastic public servants and I think that they deliver extraordinary things every day for the British public and every level of Government. As I think I said in a speech in Dudley, I do think perhaps that one of the lessons that we need to draw from this, and perhaps what Greg and others have been talking about in the case of testing, is maybe there are some times when we need to be able to move faster. Project Speed is of great value, I think, to the workings of our civil service and we certainly won't be shy of reform where it's necessary.

Q24 **Mr Wragg:** Of course, you are the Minister for the Civil Service, so how do you envisage that reform taking place, and when?

The Prime Minister: There are changes and what I hope are improvements going on the whole time, but I wish to stress to the Committee that these are not being done in any spirit of disapproval of the ethic of service or the performance of our civil service. Our civil service do an outstanding job, and what we want to do is to try to make sure that they can perhaps respond faster and better to the needs of the public.

Q25 **Mr Wragg:** So any such reform wouldn't alter that fundamental, established relationship between Ministers and civil servants?

The Prime Minister: No, I think the Northcote-Trevelyan principles are extremely important.

Q26 **Mr Wragg:** So when should a Minister resign, rather than their officials?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Prime Minister: I believe that Ministers should, of course, be responsible, and indeed I, as the Minister for the Civil Service and Prime Minister, take full responsibility for everything the Government does.

Q27 **Mr Wragg:** Could you explain the difference, perhaps, between that responsibility and ministerial accountability?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think ministerial accountability is really before Parliament and the electorate.

Q28 **Mr Wragg:** Can Ministers, for example, dismiss civil servants?

The Prime Minister: A Minister is entitled to make clear that he or she believes that the operation of the Department would be better if things were different. Yes, I do think that is essential.

Q29 **Mr Wragg:** So for a Minister to resign, does it require a failure of policy or a failure of its implementation?

The Prime Minister: I think a Minister is accountable for all the failures that Government can be blamed for. Of course, that is right.

Mr Wragg: Thank you, Sir Bernard.

Q30 **Catherine McKinnell:** Prime Minister, women are attending anxious antenatal scans alone, being induced into labour without their partner, struggling to access advice and support, and facing postnatal depression alone. Why did the Government reject almost every one of the 23 recommendations by the Petitions Committee on supporting new mums during this covid-19 crisis?

The Prime Minister: To the best of my knowledge that is not what happened. My information is that there was a very active campaign led by Conservative female MPs who felt very strongly that the separation of mothers from birth partners was wrong, and I totally agree with them. I said as much in the House this morning.

Q31 **Catherine McKinnell:** Prime Minister, I am talking about the Petitions Committee report. You personally pledged to Bethany Jade during people's Prime Minister's questions that you would read it, look at it and take on board the difficulties faced by many new mums during this covid-19 crisis. The Petitions Committee made 23 recommendations, almost all of which the Government rejected, even things as basic as putting information in place for employers so that they know how to respond and support pregnant and new mums. Why did the Government reject them all? Will you pledge today to look at it again and genuinely commit to supporting new mums during this covid crisis?

The Prime Minister: I certainly am happy to look at what we can do to support new mums. I think we have done a huge amount, investing in postnatal care and supporting the mental health of new mums. We will certainly do that.

Q32 **Catherine McKinnell:** No, Prime Minister. At the moment it is easier for an expectant father to go to the pub or go grouse shooting than to attend



HOUSE OF COMMONS

his own baby's growth scans. The Government need to do much more. If the Prime Minister could personally commit to looking at that report, which he has already promised to do, and report back to my Committee, I would be very grateful.

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to write to the hon. Lady.

- Q33 **Catherine McKinnell:** Thank you. In Scotland and Wales, children under 11 are excluded from the numbers when it comes to covid restrictions, which means that families can have the informal childcare that they rely on to get to work. It also avoids the situation in England, where a mum and dad can go to the pub with multiple strangers but cannot, if they have three children, see their grandparents at the same time. Would the Prime Minister commit to looking at this again in England, in the light of the science and common sense?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, you are making a point that many people are making across the country, who want us to relax the rules. I have just got to tell you, Sir Bernard, alas, that this disease is increasing again. We are seeing an increase—

- Q34 **Catherine McKinnell:** Sorry, Prime Minister, it is not necessarily a question of relaxing the rules. It is a request to look at them in this very limited and specific way in relation to children under the age of 11.

The Prime Minister: I understand your point, but it is, I am afraid, a request to relax the rules, because it is, alas, a fact of the disease that it is readily transmissible between children and adults. We are now seeing, unfortunately, the progression of the disease from younger groups—which, as everyone knows, are much less prone to its worst effects—up into the older groups. The Committee will be aware that the incidence among the 80-plus group is now 12 per 100,000 when only a few days ago it was about half that, and it is growing. Alas, although the number of cases—symptomatic or asymptomatic—is obviously far smaller than it was in the spring, we must expect those infections proportionately to lead to mortality. That is the reality.

- Q35 **Catherine McKinnell:** I will take that as a no, but it brings us back to the issue of testing, which I know you have already responded on. It has been reported that if you land in an Italian airport today you can get tested for covid and have your result in 30 minutes. Meanwhile constituents are reporting to all of us here in Parliament that there is total chaos for them in the testing system—chaos that will lead to another lockdown. It will lead to hundreds of thousands of jobs being put at risk, and lives. What are you practically going to do, urgently, to get a grip on the current testing situation?

The Prime Minister: We have massively increased our testing capacity, which is bigger than Italy's. We are testing more per head—

- Q36 **Catherine McKinnell:** But the system isn't working, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Actually, I know that many people have had infuriating experiences, and I do sympathise with them, and we are trying



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to get as many tests out as we possibly can, but 89% get their results within 24 hours if they have an in-person test. The distance that you have to travel to get a test has come down just in the last week on average from, I think, about six or seven miles to about five miles. We are putting out many, many more tests. As for the test at airports that you mention, you will know that, alas, in the large majority of cases instant tests at airports can produce false negative results, which give people a false sense of security.

Q37 Catherine McKinnell: I would say, Prime Minister, that it is not frustrating or infuriating for people; it is deeply worrying and causes anxiety for people who need a test and want to know whether they have covid, and who do not want to spread it.

The Prime Minister: I accept that.

Q38 Catherine McKinnell: I have to say that the Prime Minister's response that it all seems to be going well is not the reality reflected by our constituents.

The Prime Minister: With great respect, I don't think that was what I said.

Q39 Catherine McKinnell: Okay. Just one more question. What would the Prime Minister say to those who he is asking to abide by covid-19 restrictions—for many, at great personal cost—who may be feeling that, if the Government can break the law in a limited and specific way, why can't they?

The Prime Minister: I want to make it very clear to everybody that the reason we have tightened up the rule of six and buttressed it with the force of law is because we think that the disease is at risk of gaining ground—is gaining ground—and we have a very clear means to suppress it. That is social distancing, the rule of six, and I urge people—

Catherine McKinnell: It requires people to obey the law.

The Prime Minister: I urge people to obey it—as you know, there are sanctions in place—and to uphold the law of the land.

Q40 Mel Stride: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. One of the biggest economic challenges facing the country now is going to be jobs, and unemployment. Of course, furlough is coming to an end at the end of October. There will be hundreds of thousands of jobs, Prime Minister, which are perfectly viable in the post-covid world but that need support from Government in order to get through the coming months of this crisis, so why is it that the Government does not seem to be prepared to provide targeted support to support those jobs, to make sure that they continue in the future?

The Prime Minister: First of all, I would point out that this Government has done more than virtually any other Government around the world to support people at risk of losing their jobs because of covid, with the coronavirus job retention scheme. The furlough money is 80% of people's



HOUSE OF COMMONS

incomes compared with, I think, 70% in France, 70% in Spain and only 60% in Germany. Going forward, Mel, to get to your question, we will continue to show great creativity and flexibility, which the Chancellor has shown, in trying to look after every sector of the economy. We are not just fighting for one sector of the economy; we are going to fight for every sector of the economy.

Q41 **Mel Stride:** May I take that, Prime Minister, as saying that, yes, the Treasury will be seriously looking at this category of businesses and employees, who might make it if they are given more support and will have a long-term future because they are in sectors of the economy?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and we are supporting training—we have the kickstart funds and support for apprenticeships. We will continue to be intensely creative and flexible. I do not believe that anybody on this Committee seriously imagined that the Government of this country would come up with something as imaginative as the furlough scheme six months ago, Mel. We will continue to apply the same levels of imagination.

Q42 **Mel Stride:** Thank you, Prime Minister. The Committee has recognised the progress that has been made, but there does need to be more in that area.

Can I just ask you, Prime Minister, about corporate indebtedness? The business bounce back scheme, which is largely for small and medium-sized companies, has been very successful—over a million loans have gone out the door—but these companies are now going to come through this crisis loaded up with debt at the very time that we are expecting, or hoping, that they will be investing in growing the jobs of the future. The Treasury seems to have been remarkably silent on the whole issue of how to address that point, and I wonder what your thoughts are on it.

The Prime Minister: Mel, I think you are making a very important point. We are talking about what can be done to help SMEs, particularly, with their debts and to keep them going.

Q43 **Mel Stride:** Thank you, Prime Minister. Can I come now to the issue of spending? We have a comprehensive spending review at the moment. A large part of the Government's economic policy is predicated on low interest rates persisting for some time, and in the short term, that looks quite realistic. But three or four years down the line, it is not inconceivable that interest rates may have to be raised. That could have a very powerful and detrimental impact on the economy and the public finances. Is that something that you are taking into account when you consider the issue of spending? It seems to many outside No. 10 that the impetus inside No. 10 is to spend, spend, spend, and then spend even more, rather than prudently looking at this issue and making sure that we are in a good position to go forward if we do end up in the circumstances I have described.

The Prime Minister: That is also a very good point, Mel. If I may say, it is slightly incoherent with your previous two questions, which seemed to be asking for more Government spending and more Government



borrowing. But you are entirely right that the threat of future interest rate rises is something that we have to bear in mind.

- Q44 **Mel Stride:** Support for jobs in the short term is very distinct from profligate public spending in the longer term—I think they are two different things—but can I ask you one final question? The Government generally did a pretty good job in supporting jobs in the early stages of this crisis. However, over 1 million people fell through the gaps and did not receive support. Many of them were company owners, the self-employed, new starters, freelancers and so on. The Treasury has said that it has drawn a line under any further support for that group, or rather, making up support for that group. Is that a position that you also adopt, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Mel, you have raised this with me a couple of times—not least in the Chamber—and you are right. I have real, real sympathy for the self-employed and others who have been unable to qualify for some of the schemes that we have. On the other hand, there has been such a dizzying variety of schemes—bounce back loans, grants, CBILS, you name it—that most people should have been able to qualify for something, even if it is only cuts in VAT and business rates.

A huge amount has been done. The overall bill for that, as you know, Mel, is about £160 billion so far. We are determined, as I said to you, to put our arms around the workforce of this country, to support this country to bounce back strongly. To go back to your third point—I think you said, “Are you committed to ‘Spend, spend, spend?’”—we will do what it takes, but there must be, of course, limits.

What we also want to do, rather than support people to stay out of work and keep them on schemes that prevent them, actually, from getting on to the labour market, is do everything in our power to support them to get back into work and to encourage in-work training, apprenticeships, a kickstart scheme and so on.

- Q45 **Chair:** Can I just raise a point that Philip Dunne, the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, wanted me to raise? He points out that we have the largest peacetime investment in economic recovery by this Government. He wanted to ask, with 14 months to go before COP26, how we are ensuring net zero is on target and showing true global leadership on environmental policy?

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Sir Bernard, and thanks to Philip for his question. We are doing a huge amount. As everybody knows, we reached carbon budget 3. Carbon budget 4 is trickier to achieve, but we will be setting out steps to achieve carbon budget 5 and to get to net zero by 2050. There is a huge panoply of measures that we will be using, from clean power, greener power and investing in green energy solutions to retrofitting homes. I will be making a thoroughgoing announcement in the course of the next few weeks about how we propose to do that.

Chair: That is extremely good news. We look forward to that.



- Q46 **Julian Knight:** Prime Minister, thank you for appearing today. I am going to press you further on furlough for a moment, as the DCMS sectors are very much in the firing line of covid-19. Over 40% of workers in arts and entertainment are still furloughed, while 70% of theatre workers are freelancers. Is it morally right, Prime Minister, that these people face losing everything come the end of the furlough scheme in October, particularly as it is the Government's own restrictions that make it impossible for them to work and make their businesses unviable?

The Prime Minister: Look, Julian, I know how maddening and difficult it is for everybody in the arts and culture sector, the sporting world and local football teams. What we have done, as you know, is make a big investment in the arts and culture sector of £1.57 billion, but we have also got specific funds to help everybody through a very, very tough time. But the best answer to all of this is to get these businesses going again and to get the theatres lit again by having the virus down and having a testing regime that allows us to do that, and that is what we are working for.

- Q47 **Julian Knight:** Okay. On that point, you said only a week ago that theatres could be "much closer to normal" by Christmas, but by your own admission, true mass testing will not be widespread before spring next year. Do you recognise that we need to find smart ways to ensure that the likes of theatres and live music venues can open at a very specific date in time, so that they have some certainty, without strict social distancing?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do. You are right to stress smart solutions. Julian, to get people to, as it were, break the rules on social distancing, to sit cheek by jowl in a theatre again, you are going to need lateral flow testing of a kind that we are on the brink of getting right—pregnancy-style testing. But I cannot sit here today—I wish I could—and tell you, in spite of what Catherine says about tests at Italian airports, which I will have to check out—

We are a long way off, I am afraid—or still some way off—having those instant, pregnancy-style, liberating tests that tell you whether you are infectious or not. That is what we are working for. The science is almost there. As soon as we can do that, then you do have the possibility of theatres, football clubs and all these sectors that are currently finding it so difficult being able to open again.

- Q48 **Julian Knight:** The £1.57 billion package that you referenced earlier is of course very welcome, but it will only keep some venues going for the relatively short term. These sectors, which are world leading and bring huge value to the UK economy, will need a long-term, sector-specific plan of recovery. Are you aware of that reality, and what are you going to do about it?

The Prime Minister: Of course I am aware of that reality, because I used to represent those interests directly in my capacity as Mayor of the city in which we now sit, and because I know vividly their importance to our country and its prosperity. It is absolutely vital. This is a sector that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

generates probably £16 billion a year—huge quantities—in taxation and employment, and it is vital for our prosperity.

Q49 **Julian Knight:** So are you committing, Prime Minister, to a sector-specific recovery plan for the arts and culture?

The Prime Minister: Yes. As you know, there already is such a plan under way.

Q50 **Julian Knight:** Okay. In terms of national debt right now—this is my final question—we have levels not seen since 1961, when we were still paying off the war. In all honesty, can this country afford a second national lockdown?

The Prime Minister: I do not want a second national lockdown, Julian. I think it would be completely wrong for this country, and we are going to do everything in our power to prevent it.

Q51 **Julian Knight:** Can we afford it, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: Can we afford it? I very much doubt that the financial consequences would be anything but disastrous. But we have to make sure that we defeat the disease by the means that we have set out. When I see people arguing against the rule of six or saying that the Government is coming in too hard on individual liberties and so on, I totally understand and sympathise with that, but we must, must beat this disease.

Q52 **Chair:** Thank you. Can we just remind ourselves that musicians, singers and performers are part of a very large group who have fallen through the cracks of the support schemes available? They are economically very distressed and emotionally very distressed, because they cannot fulfil their vocation. If this is going to go on for much longer, what can we do for them?

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Sir Bernard. At the risk of repeating what I said to Julian, we need to get back to a world where everybody meeting together to sing or to perform in a traditional way has a ticket to ride, as it were—the knowledge that you are not infectious. You have a green light on your head saying, “I can’t transmit it to you,” so both the performers and the audience have that confidence.

Q53 **Meg Hillier:** Already, 11% of pupils are missing school, even though most are back. What are you going to do to support schools to make sure that those pupils do not slip further behind?

The Prime Minister: Meg, just to clarify your figures, it is absolutely correct to say that we have got roughly 11% of kids not yet in school.

Q54 **Meg Hillier:** Yes. We have said that, so we don’t need to repeat it.

The Prime Minister: But that is not because of problems in the classroom with covid. It is only 1% of schools that have been infected by covid.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q55 **Meg Hillier:** I was only asking what you are going to do to support the children who are not in school, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: What we are doing is record investment in schools of £14 billion, and about another £1 billion to help schools catch up with one-to-one direct tutoring.

Q56 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, your figures are a bit out. The per-pupil funding has gone down by over 6% in the last decade. The record funding is only in the last year, on top of cuts. What are you actually practically going to do? Are you going to learn the lessons of the failure of test and trace and make sure that local schools and local councils can be in the driving seat to make sure that pupils do not lose out?

The Prime Minister: With great respect, I am surprised that you are taking quite such a hostile tone. We are increasing the per-pupil funding to £4,000 in primary schools and £5,000 in secondary schools.

Q57 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, that is a long-term plan that we know about.

The Prime Minister: No, it has happened just now. On your point about what you call the failure of test and trace, I am respectfully going to reject that characterisation. I think that although it has huge problems and although many people are deeply frustrated, as several colleagues have pointed out, actually they have done a quite remarkable job in expanding that operation from a standing start. Yes, there is a long way to go, and we will work night and day to ensure that we get there, but I would not want the many, many thousands of people who are working now to deliver test results to think that people in this House of Commons are seriously accusing them of being failures, because I don't think that is true.

Q58 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, you yourself have set the targets, along with the Health Secretary. You have now set the moonshot target of ramping it up to £10 million. Who is going to be leading that charge to make it get to 10 million a day?

The Prime Minister: I do not recognise the figure that you have just given—

Q59 **Meg Hillier:** You said that in public, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: What I can tell you is that—this is the point I was making to Greg and to others—there is an opportunity to do something that is wholly separate from the expansion of NHS Test and Trace, and that is to see if we can get to a world in which there is a test and release system, as it were, that enables the—

Q60 **Meg Hillier:** So when will that technology be ready? You highlighted that in an answer to Mr Clark. When will that technology be ready? You promised lots of this by Christmas. How do you know that that is going to be in place?

The Prime Minister: I don't, and I will be absolutely clear with the Committee—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q61 **Meg Hillier:** So you are being optimistic, but have you got any evidence to back up that optimism?

The Prime Minister: Well, there are people who make all sorts of claims already about this technology—

Q62 **Meg Hillier:** Well what claims are you making?

The Prime Minister: I am going to be cautious and say that I can't sit here today and say that we have such a pregnancy-style test today.

Q63 **Meg Hillier:** Okay, but you promised the moonshot.

The Prime Minister: I think the Committee would agree that, given the stakes and given the opportunity, it is right for Government to invest in such a project—or wouldn't you?

Q64 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, can we just go then to labs. You are building four new labs. When will they be built, because the lab testing capacity hasn't gone up much since June?

The Prime Minister: Actually, it has gone up 10% just in the last two weeks.

Q65 **Meg Hillier:** Still, though, it is in the 300,000s. When will the labs be built—the four labs that you are building?

The Prime Minister: As I said, we will be up at 500,000 tests per day by the end of October, and I think one of the labs will be capable of doing 100,000 tests a day, and another of them 40,000.

Q66 **Meg Hillier:** Are you thinking of using any university laboratories, as well as the ones that you are building?

The Prime Minister: Not only that; we will be using facilities across the country and, indeed, we are already buying lab space, as you know, Meg, in other countries as well.

Meg Hillier: We will leave it there.

Q67 **Neil Parish:** Good afternoon, Prime Minister. In the EFRA Committee we looked into covid-19 and the food supply earlier this year. A huge amount of work has been put into it, both by Government and all of those producing food and processing it. What we found is that the food chain is a just-in-time food chain and it works well if you can get things through the border. So my question to you is, if we have an Australian-type deal in January, with a basic no deal, our key supply routes across the channel will be disrupted at the time of year when we heavily rely on imports. About 90% of lettuce, 80% of tomatoes and 70% of our soft fruit comes through at that time. Given the best estimate by Government, a reduction by one third of imports across the channel could be due to border checks. Are you confident that we can get food through the border in January, whatever happens with the EU, and will you waive tariffs if that can't be got through? I know Europe is being very difficult over third country status at the moment.



The Prime Minister: Thanks very much, Neil. I am confident that we will be able to keep things flowing smoothly at the border—or as smoothly as we possibly can. A huge amount of work is being done by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the XO Committee and others to prepare for the smoothest possible shipments at the border, no matter what the arrangements that we have. But one of the reasons we were bringing in the provisions under the UK Internal Market Bill, which I imagine we will come to in a minute, is to ensure that tariff barriers within the UK, for instance, could not be imposed. As for the possibility of tariff barriers on either side, I don't think that our friends and partners would want to see them go up—us putting tariff barriers up against their produce—any more than we want to put tariff barriers up against theirs, for the very good reason that they have a considerable net surplus in food products coming into this country.

- Q68 **Neil Parish:** That leads me neatly on, Prime Minister. If we are not going to levy tariffs on their goods coming in, are we just going to give our trade away to the EU? Surely, if they are playing hardball at the moment, we should put tariffs on absolutely everything that comes in because that will bring them to a negotiating position where we can actually get a tariff-free deal. At the moment we seem to be very blocked. We will just trade away our farming and our food processing industry, and so much of it relies on having a true level playing field with the EU.

The Prime Minister: As I said, our external tariff regime, were it to come in, would be quite formidable for some of their products, and I think it is all the more reason why everybody should want to agree a zero-tariff, zero-quota arrangement.

- Q69 **Neil Parish:** So will you commit to putting reciprocal tariffs on EU imports if we do not make a free trade agreement with the EU? It is essential if we are going to maintain production in this country and also get a deal with the Europeans.

The Prime Minister: Neil, you are quite right.

- Q70 **Neil Parish:** So you will commit to a reciprocal—

The Prime Minister: We certainly will. Of course. The tariff schedule has been published, and you will be familiar with it.

- Q71 **Neil Parish:** And it will be reciprocal.

The Prime Minister: Of course.

Chair: We are moving on to the Brexit section with Hilary Benn.

- Q72 **Hilary Benn:** Good afternoon, Prime Minister. Can you tell us whether the Advocate General for Scotland is still in post?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid, Mr Benn, all I can tell you is that, as far as I know, conversations on that matter are still continuing.

- Q73 **Hilary Benn:** Right. Last week, the Government confirmed that the Internal Market Bill does break international law. We heard your



HOUSE OF COMMONS

justification in the debate on Monday, so you do not need to repeat it in front of us today. Why are you not prepared to rely on article 16 of the Northern Ireland protocol, which you negotiated and which deals with how you resolve any disagreements, rather than engage in lawbreaking? What is wrong with article 16?

The Prime Minister: Sir Bernard, can I take it that we have moved on from covid?

Chair: We have.

The Prime Minister: Hilary, on the legal position and why we need to do it, can I direct you to what the Attorney General said as she tried to summarise the legal position? What we are trying to do here is really provide a belt-and-braces protection against extreme interpretations of the protocol—what I think my learned friends have called an “abus de droit”—and a way to a watertight bulkhead, as it were, to avoid—

Q74 **Hilary Benn:** Article 16 gives you protection.

The Prime Minister: Our legal advice is that we need to go further than article 16—

Hilary Benn: Why?

The Prime Minister: To put in the protections described in the Bill.

Q75 **Hilary Benn:** Why does the Government think it needs to go further than article 16?

The Prime Minister: Because we believe that that is the only way, with the notwithstanding clauses that we have currently in the Bill, to provide the certainty and the protections that we are talking about.

Q76 **Hilary Benn:** Is that because article 16 is defective, or is it because you think you would lose in an arbitration case?

The Prime Minister: It is because we think that in order to provide the protections that are necessary in the very limited range of circumstances in which it might be necessary, because of an extreme interpretation of the protocol, we think it would be necessary to have the notwithstanding clauses there on the face of the Bill.

Q77 **Hilary Benn:** Did you not realise this when you negotiated article 16?

The Prime Minister: That’s a fair question, but on the other hand we also—

Q78 **Hilary Benn:** So what’s the answer? Did you not realise this at the time when you signed it off?

The Prime Minister: I believed, and still believe, that our friends and partners in the EU will negotiate in good faith and will apply common sense and reasonableness. The reason for the clauses in the Bill is, as I say, as a belt-and-braces safety net.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q79 **Hilary Benn:** Do you think that the EU is negotiating in good faith?

The Prime Minister: Alas, they began months ago—to get to the question Neil raised, we had an opportunity for them to lift this issue of third country listings. They could have said, “Of course, under no circumstances will we blockade, or stop agricultural products going from you to us—that is clearly absurd”, and yet they have signally failed to do that, and they are still failing to do that.

Q80 **Hilary Benn:** So are they negotiating in good faith?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid, alas, as I have said, I don’t believe they are.

Q81 **Hilary Benn:** So why did the Northern Ireland Secretary tell the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that in his opinion the EU is negotiating in good faith?

The Prime Minister: It is always possible that I am mistaken, and perhaps they will prove my suspicions wrong. Perhaps they will agree in the Joint Committee to withdraw some of the extreme suggestions that I have heard and all will be well but, until such time, I prefer to have protections that guarantee the integrity of this country and to protect against the potential rupture of the United Kingdom.

Q82 **Hilary Benn:** When you decided to announce that the Government would break the law, did you anticipate that your five predecessors, two former leaders of the Conservative party and the Attorney General who helped you to negotiate the Northern Ireland protocol and signed it off legally would all say to you, “Don’t do that”?

The Prime Minister: I have the utmost respect for all the gentlemen and ladies in question, but I have to tell you that I think that it is the duty of a UK Prime Minister to protect the integrity of the UK against any extreme, irrational and unreasonable interpretations of the protocol, and that is what we are trying to do.

Q83 **Hilary Benn:** That leads us neatly on to irrationality. May I turn to what happens at the end of this year? You said recently that leaving the transition period without an agreement would be a “good outcome” for the United Kingdom. Will you explain how, to go back to Neil Parish’s point, tariffs on UK exports to the EU, which could be as high as 90% by value on beef, more than 61% on lamb—those are the figures you used in the House on Monday—and of course 10% on cars, represent a good outcome for those sectors of the British economy? What is good about that for them?

The Prime Minister: Well, it is of course not what this country wants and nor—Neil, I think, got to the right answer—is it what our EU friends and partners want from us. Therefore, I have every hope and expectation that that won’t be the outcome.

Chair: You are running over your time, Mr Benn.

Q84 **Hilary Benn:** This one just requires a yes or no answer. Will the Goods



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Vehicle Movement Service be ready by January?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, we are doing everything in our power to get ready. There is a massive amount of work going on to get business ready. We are investing in border preparedness, with about £705 million going into that. For anybody who needs advice or to know what to do, we have a government website set up for the purpose. A huge programme of engagement is going on.

Hilary Benn: But will it be ready?

The Prime Minister: I believe that we will get through it. There may be difficulties, but we will get through it very well.

Q85 **Sir William Cash:** Prime Minister, this Internal Market Bill and, indeed, section 38 of the withdrawal agreement Act of 2020 deliver the promises that were made to the British people on the question of lawfully leaving the European Union, which we have done. In addition to that, the fact is that the referendum and the general election result endorsed those decisions. That is the actual position, as I said in the debate a couple of days ago.

Amendments are being proposed that many people may think would jeopardise the very comprehensive manner in which those promises are being delivered. I want to ask a couple of questions relating to two issues, one on sovereignty and treaty override, and the other on the misleading allegations that have been generated, which come to this, that the Government is unlike other member states and the EU itself, both of whom have been egregiously in breach of international law on very massive questions without any sanctions or any infringement whatever being brought against them.

I start by saying this: on the question of sovereignty, do you agree with the fact that, as the German constitutional court said in 2015, "International law leaves it to each state...to give precedence to national law", and, "International law does not preclude legal acts that violate international law from being effective at the domestic level." That sounds sensible to me. That is what they said in 2015.

The Prime Minister: Well—

Sir William Cash: If I may—

Chair: Will you let him answer that question?

Sir William Cash: Yes of course, but I have one or two examples.

The Prime Minister: Well, as I say, Bill, I think that you are right in what you say. I think that it is essential that we uphold the will of the people in the way that we are. It is also right that we should have a system that allows us to protect parliamentary sovereignty, but also to protect the economic, political and geographic integrity of the UK, and that is what this does.

Q86 **Sir William Cash:** On the question of some of the examples that I have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

here, in the first place, just to get this one out of the way, on the question of treaty overrides, I have something in the order of 20 examples of overrides in UK statute of international EU law—that is just for a starter. I am sure that these matters will have been brought to your attention, but this is by no means an unusual situation. It is just that they don't like it, which may be another way of putting it.

The second thing is in a way more substantial in terms of the current heated debate that is going on about the breach of international law, which Hilary Benn just mentioned. Could I perhaps just mention to you that Chancellor Schmidt actually said in a debate, "We breached applicable international treaty law, the IMF treaty, in multiple ways. We have neither complied with all the rules, the procedural rules of the treaty, nor have we complied with the substantive provisions"?

Or take Chancellor Schröder, 1999, "We sent our warplanes...we bombed a sovereign State without a decision of the Security Council" in "violation of international law". Or take, for example, the manner in which Angela Merkel unilaterally suspended, or tore up, the Dublin regulation with respect to the Syrian refugees, which raised a lot of questions about potential terrorism, for example.

Do you not agree that all these examples demonstrate the fact that there are some double standards going on here and that, in fact, we are not only supporting our sovereignty, but consistent with international law and the practice of other member states and the EU itself?

Chair: One minute to go on this.

The Prime Minister: Thank you. Bernard, I do not really want to repeat what I have already said, except to say, look, I think on this vexed issue, the Committee has what the AG has said about this. I repose my confidence in that. I just tell the Committee that I think this is really about us as a country being able to ensure that our friends and partners don't do something that I think people would think was unreasonable or extreme in the interpretation of the protocol. It is about belt and bracing and there are various situations that you could imagine where it would be important for us to protect the integrity of the UK—tariff barriers, blockades on food, unnecessary checks and so on. We can readily identify those. What we are trying to do is prevent that happening.

Chair: Thank you, Sir William. Brilliantly on time. Angus Brendan MacNeil, please.

Q87 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Good afternoon, Prime Minister. How things have changed. It seems quite recently I was at the Liaison Committee here questioning your predecessor and you were resigning in the Chamber—you were leaving the Government—and here you are in front of us this afternoon. It is good to see you.

Prime Minister, the Japanese trade deal is worth about 0.07% of GDP—one seventieth of the cost of Brexit. Simple question—how many Japanese trade deals do we need to make up the damage that Brexit is giving us?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Prime Minister: I do not accept for one minute the characterisation that you make of Brexit, and actually—

Q88 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** It is your own Government that says it will cost 5% of GDP.

The Prime Minister: We had a fantastic presentation in Cabinet the other day from Liz Truss of the list of trade deals that she is now able to do that were not open to this country before, that she is engaged on now. They will not just help to open markets, stimulate trade and help citizens and consumers in Japan and in the UK, but we can be at the heart of a great cat's cradle of deals across the world. For 20 years now, world trade has been in the doldrums, and the UK—

Q89 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** It is a simple question, and you are going off piste, with respect, Prime Minister. The answer is 70. You need 70 trade deals to make up the damage that Brexit will do, or 70 Japan-style trade deals—

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that at all.

Q90 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** It is your own Government's numbers. It is 0.07% of GDP that is your gain; 5% is your loss. Therefore, divide one by the other and you get 70.

You are accused of intending to break international law and, as Hilary Benn mentioned, the Advocate General for Scotland has resigned. Can your Government find somebody else who does not quite share his honourable principles to replace him and take the job? Have you got anybody in mind?

The Prime Minister: As I said to Hilary, I cannot comment on that matter, because it is still, as I understand it, to be resolved.

Q91 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Okay. You are accused also by the Congressional Speaker, Nancy Pelosi, and Congressional Chairpersons Eliot Engel, Richard Neal, Peter King and William Keating of efforts to "undermine the Northern Ireland protocol of the Withdrawal Agreement", and as a result you will have no UK-US trade deal. Is that a price worth paying for breaking international law?

The Prime Minister: I have the utmost respect for Nancy and for all the people—the distinguished Congressmen and Senators—that you mention, but I think that when they understand and see what we are trying to do, I think they will share our ambition and our concern, which is to protect the balance and the symmetry of the protocol—

Q92 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** So, does Nancy Pelosi misunderstand the situation? Do Nancy Pelosi and the Chairpersons misunderstand?

The Prime Minister: And to protect the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Have they got it wrong? Has Nancy Pelosi got it wrong? Is Nancy Pelosi wrong in her assertion that the four Chairpersons



have written to you?

The Prime Minister: Possibly the vital importance of protecting the symmetry of the Good Friday agreement is something that may have been lost so far in the presentation of this matter, and I have no doubt that it is something that will be readily appreciated by our friends in the United States.

Q93 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** I am sure they are watching in Washington. You are accused, Prime Minister, of having a centralising state, and clearly independent Ireland has more autonomy in the European Union than Scotland does in the United Kingdom. The reality is that the European Union that you demonised is a lot more flexible than the UK you preside over, isn't it? Are you proud of being the Prime Minister of such a centralising state?

The Prime Minister: I really have to disagree very, very strongly with that—

Q94 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Ireland has got less independence than Scotland?

Chair: Order. Let the Prime Minister answer.

The Prime Minister: I would point out that if you look at what is happening as a result of Brexit, underpinned by this UK Internal Market Bill, powers are being handed directly back down from Brussels to Scotland—70 or more. And if the Scottish nationalists really want to go back—

Q95 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** It seems the Scottish Government misunderstand you like Nancy Pelosi now.

The Prime Minister: They probably do. If the Scottish nationalists really want to reverse that process and go back into the EU, you would be giving back control of energy, of agriculture—of a huge number of policy areas. Above all, you would be giving back control of your fisheries. You would be giving back control of your fisheries, and that point cannot be—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Moving on, Prime Minister—

The Prime Minister: I know you are trying to interrupt me from saying this, but that point cannot be repeated often enough.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: I need you to hurry up; I need you to be quick with your answers. You are not respecting—

Chair: Less interrupting, please.

Q96 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** You are not respecting democracy in Scotland, Prime Minister, but the good news—the happy reading—is that poll after poll shows that Scotland wants to be independent, like Ireland, which I mentioned earlier. When will you agree to the Scottish Government's request for a section 30? Will you ever agree to the Scottish Government's request for a section 30 to hold an independence



HOUSE OF COMMONS

referendum?

The Prime Minister: The Scottish National party fought the referendum in 2014 very clearly on the understanding that this was a once in a generation—

Q97 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Not at all. That was not written in the Edinburgh agreement—

Chair: Order. Let him answer the question.

The Prime Minister: That was something that I believe both Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond said at the time in persuading people to cast their votes. They voted—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: You said you would die in a ditch.

The Prime Minister: They voted overwhelmingly or very substantially to stay in the Union. I believe the Union is a great—

Q98 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** Are you going to give a section 30?

Chair: Order.

The Prime Minister: I believe the Union is a great and a beautiful thing and I think we should—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think we should keep it, and I don't think that a generation has elapsed since 2014. My understanding of human biology—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Is that a no?

The Prime Minister: I don't think a generation has elapsed.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Is that a yes or a no?

The Prime Minister: It is a statement of the obvious that I don't think a generation has elapsed.

Q99 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** So it's a no to a section 30, regardless of the wishes of the Scottish people and the polls on independence.

The Prime Minister: It was said very clearly in 2014 that this was a once-in-a-generation event.

Q100 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** That was not said clearly; that is not in the Edinburgh agreement.

The Prime Minister: Was that not said by the Scottish—

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Not in the Edinburgh agreement.

Chair: Order. I think next time I'll sit you further away. A bit more social distancing would help us.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q101 **Sir Robert Neill:** Good afternoon, Prime Minister. These are legal questions, but of a different kind. The Government are committed to maintaining practical criminal justice co-operation—those are the words of the Minister—with the EU after 31 December. At the moment, we leave and lose access to the European arrest warrant, the Europol and Eurojust systems and, in particular, the criminal justice information systems: ECRIS, which is the criminal records information exchange system, and the databases under Schengen Information System II. What practical steps are we taking to ensure that we continue to have access to those critically important matters?

The Prime Minister: All those, Bob, as you know—you're quite right that there will be changes, but the safety and security of UK citizens will continue to be our No. 1 priority, and we still believe there is ample scope for co-operation with our European friends and partners. I will not go into the detail of the negotiations now, but a huge amount of work is being done to ensure that the priorities of the British people are achieved.

Q102 **Sir Robert Neill:** On extradition, for example, the 1957 convention has been described as slower and more awkward and cumbersome than the current European arrest warrant. You and I remember Hussain Osman, the failed London bomber. He was brought back under the EAW in eight weeks. It could be months or years. Are we prepared to seek to negotiate our way back into the EAW once we have left?

The Prime Minister: As I say, Bob, we certainly want to have arrangements that protect British citizens and that ensure speedy justice, including under extradition.

Q103 **Sir Robert Neill:** The National Crime Agency said that loss of access to SIS II would seriously inhibit our ability to identify and arrest people who are a threat to our public safety. To get into the information systems, we need to have an agreement on data adequacy and equivalence. What is the state of progress on seeking a data adequacy agreement with the EU?

The Prime Minister: Bob, you are quite right: we do need to be able to exchange information in real time on DNA, on identity, on all sorts of things, and that is part of the negotiations right now.

Q104 **Sir Robert Neill:** What is the timeframe for concluding that? The risk, of course, is that you have a gap.

The Prime Minister: We hope that we will be able to reach an agreement, and above all we want to protect the UK public.

Q105 **Sir Robert Neill:** Do you want to do that by 31 December? Is that the objective?

The Prime Minister: We were very hopeful that our friends and partners will see the logic of reaching an agreement, because after all, they have symmetrical concerns.

Q106 **Sir Robert Neill:** Precisely. Is it possible, do you think, to decouple some



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of those issues from the controversy around some trade matters?

The Prime Minister: I think that is not something that is favoured by the EU.

Q107 **Sir Robert Neill:** Would it be by the UK Government if need be?

The Prime Minister: We want to get on and just settle the whole thing.

Q108 **Sir Robert Neill:** The other issue that is important about data is that of course it is important to financial services—both the financial services sector as such and the British legal sector, which on its own is worth £60 billion to the economy. Are you prepared to take personal charge in driving this forward, given its importance both to the legal sector as a whole and the UK as a jurisdiction of international choice, and to access for the many trades—derivatives and many other things—that take place in the City of London?

The Prime Minister: Well, I am in personal charge of the whole negotiations, as you can imagine.

Q109 **Sir Robert Neill:** That is indeed my point—it may need your personal intervention.

The Prime Minister: I am following each dossier very carefully and I hope we will make progress.

Q110 **Sir Robert Neill:** The final topic I want to turn to is that we will also be leaving the Brussels II arrangements, which enable the mutual enforcement of judgments, including in civil cases and in things like maintenance cases and child access cases, where one of the partners is in the EU and one in the UK. It also covers things like commercial contracts. These are very important issues to us.

The Lugano convention is not as good. We have sought to accede to Lugano. At the moment, EFTA members of the Lugano convention accept our joining it, but the EU Commission is not yet prepared to accept our joining. That is unsatisfactory. Are you prepared, if need be, to go to the member states as well to put pressure on the Commission to say, “It is in the interests of your nationals and your businesses that we must join”? I am concerned that the atmosphere we have around some other matters will prejudice what are basic things that affect people’s lives and the flow of business.

The Prime Minister: You make a good point. I know that Hilary Benn has also raised the issue of the Lugano convention in the House. I think the fundamental advantage we have in this is that we have all got skin in this game. Our friends and partners also want to see judgments upheld. I hope very much that common sense will prevail.

Q111 **Sir Robert Neill:** Finally, can we ensure that these important issues are not lost? It is a real concern, in both the criminal justice community and the legal fraternity, that these things get lost.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Prime Minister: You are totally right to worry about that, Bob, but I can tell you that we are keeping an eagle eye on every aspect of the negotiations. You are right that there are a lot of plates being spun at once, but I have got great faith in our team.

Q112 **Sir Robert Neill:** Do you accept that perhaps continued updates on these aspects of the negotiations will give comfort to British firms and businesses?

The Prime Minister: Bernard, if I can just say, pursuant to my earlier commitment to scrutinise my diary, we should be able to come back to this, I hope, before the end of the year.

Chair: Thank you, Sir Bob. Briefly, Meg Hillier.

Q113 **Meg Hillier:** Prime Minister, your Justice Secretary says that the Internal Market Bill only breaks international law if the powers are used. Your Minister, Brandon Lewis, says it breaks the law just by granting the powers. Which of those two is correct? Who is right?

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Meg. I want to go back to what I said to Bill, I think, and Hilary and others. Look at what the AG says in her summary. My position is her position.

Q114 **Meg Hillier:** So who is right? Just for clarity, who is right: your Justice Secretary or Brandon Lewis?

The Prime Minister: My position is the AG's position, and the objective of these measures is to protect this country against accidental or unreasonable measures that serve to break up our UK.

Q115 **Meg Hillier:** You say it is the AG's position. Which of those two Ministers is right, then, because they can't both be?

The Prime Minister: I have given you my answer.

Q116 **Chair:** Can I ask briefly about the future relationship? The White Paper in February said, "Whatever happens...we will not agree to any obligations for our laws to be aligned with the EU's, or for the EU's institutions, including the Court of Justice, to have any jurisdiction in the UK." Can you assure voters that is still your objective?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Q117 **Chair:** You have highlighted the food blockade issue as one of the casus belli for the Bill, but then you said in the House of Commons that "we are not taking powers in this Bill to neutralise that threat, but we obviously reserve the right to do so if these threats persist". Why aren't you just putting it in the Bill like you are putting other things in the Bill?

The Prime Minister: That is a very good question. There are important issues and problems that we do address in the Bill—excessive checks, misconstruction of state aid rules so as to govern the whole of the UK, and so on and so forth. The Finance Bill will deal with the tariffs issue. On the third country listings, although the EU have not yet taken that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

revolver off the table, as I said in the House, I think it would be so extreme and so unreasonable to keep it on the table and to deploy it that we don't yet propose to bring forward legislation to deal with that point. We will wait and see what they do, but we do need to fortify ourselves in the way described.

Q118 **Chair:** So it might have to be emergency legislation.

The Prime Minister: We may very well have to.

Chair: We are going to move on to the integrated review now, with Tom Tugendhat.

Q119 **Tom Tugendhat:** Prime Minister, who does the Sino-British joint declaration protect?

The Prime Minister: Above all, it protects the rights and the freedoms of the people of Hong Kong.

Q120 **Tom Tugendhat:** So it protects British nationals overseas?

The Prime Minister: It does.

Q121 **Tom Tugendhat:** Has China broken the Sino-British joint declaration?

The Prime Minister: As you will have heard the Foreign Secretary say in the House, alas, we believe that the security measures that have been brought in by Beijing do, sadly, amount to a breach of the letter and force of the spirit of the Sino-British declaration.

Q122 **Tom Tugendhat:** The breach of the treaty puts at risk the freedoms of British nationals, correct?

The Prime Minister: We think so. Not only that but, I am afraid, you are starting to see that already. You are starting to see a chilling of free speech; you are starting to see the effect of that security rule—the Chinese legislation—already starting to bite on the people of Hong Kong.

Q123 **Tom Tugendhat:** To be clear, international law does protect British nationals. A simple yes or no.

The Prime Minister: It does.

Q124 **Tom Tugendhat:** Do you agree that the persecution of Uyghur Muslims amounts to genocide?

The Prime Minister: I certainly think that what is happening in Xinjiang is objectionable. The UK Government have continued to protest and taken a leading role in holding China to account.

Q125 **Tom Tugendhat:** But would you use the word genocide?

The Prime Minister: However, on the specific term, genocide, that is an important term in international law and, with great respect to the Committee, I would have to get back. I do not believe that we are at the position so far of characterising—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q126 **Tom Tugendhat:** The eminent human rights lawyer, Ben Emmerson, uses the word “genocide” and other members of the United Nations Human Rights Council have done so.

The Prime Minister: It is not, as far as I know, something that the UK Government have so far endorsed.

Q127 **Tom Tugendhat:** It would be great to have clarity on that. In the light of the abuses you have listed, both to British nationals and to minority communities within China, will you allow Ministers to attend the winter Olympics in Beijing in 2022, and will you ask members of the royal family to boycott the event?

The Prime Minister: We will review that matter as and when we need to make a decision, but generally speaking, I think it is important, if you can, to protect international sporting events and, indeed, members of the royal family from political ramifications.

Q128 **Tom Tugendhat:** You were very clear about 18 months before the Russian World Cup, when you were Foreign Secretary and came before the Committee that I am privileged to chair, that you would not encourage Ministers or members of the royal family to go to Moscow. Why will you not do the same for Beijing?

The Prime Minister: I did not say that. All I am saying is that it is not something we have taken a decision on yet.

Q129 **Tom Tugendhat:** Okay, but you certainly would not suggest, I am sure, that British nationals overseas or Uyghur Muslims have fewer rights or are less appropriate for boycott than Russian citizens in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: All I am saying, Mr Tugendhat, is that you are asking us to take a decision some way out and we have not yet. We have not yet reached that decision.

Q130 **Tom Tugendhat:** Okay. What representations have you personally made to China’s communist leaders about the persecution of both Uyghur Muslims and British nationals?

The Prime Minister: I have raised many times, both in my position as Foreign Secretary and indeed before, human rights in China and the issues of Tibet, Falun Gong and all kinds of issues where we in the UK wish to be very clear with our Chinese friends that we do not—Hong Kong being the most recent and the most notable. On Hong Kong, I think the UK can be very proud of what we did in deciding that the BNOs and their dependants should be able to come to this country. That was the right thing to do.

Q131 **Tom Tugendhat:** As part of Britain’s support for the international rules-based system, would you agree with your friend—and indeed mine—Minister Kōno Tarō, former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Japan and former Defence Minister—

The Prime Minister: Tarō Kōno.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q132 **Tom Tugendhat:** Surname first as he is Japanese, presumably, so Kōno Tarō, but yes. Would you agree with him that Japan should be looking to be the sixth member of the Five Eyes community?

The Prime Minister: There is certainly a big opportunity here, Tom, for the UK to bring together like-minded democracies. The Five Eyes is a particular group and has particular coherence. It is not something that our Japanese friends have yet raised with me. It is an idea that we are thinking about. We have a fantastic relationship with Japan, and a very close defence and security partnership, as you know. That might indeed be a very productive way to build on it. We would have to work with other Five Eyes members on that.

Q133 **Tom Tugendhat:** You have been very forward in pushing for a global vaccine alliance. Will you organise a G7 covid conference as soon as possible after the US elections to bring any new or existing Administration into a vaccine alliance?

The Prime Minister: Yes, as you know, we had the GAVI summit, which raised about \$8 billion or \$9 billion for global vaccines, particularly for covid. One of the things the UK is going to do with the G7 is to try to bring the world back together after covid, because it has been a disaster—the fights at airports over PPE, the borders that have sprung up around the world, the sequestering of stocks of drugs. You have seen a return to nationalist priorities in a way that I think has been very depressing for those who believe in globalism and internationalism. We certainly want to use our G7 presidency.

I profoundly think that organisations like the WHO are of huge value to the world. In free trade, which we talked about earlier, in health matters and in the fight against climate change—

Q134 **Tom Tugendhat:** One last question, if I may. In that case, you will agree that tariffs are a tax on British people, but let us move on—

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with that.

Q135 **Tom Tugendhat:** I thought you would. What advice did you get from the Foreign Office and, most particularly, from Dame Karen Pierce, our ambassador in Washington, on the impact of the latest statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on Anglo-US relations, now and under a possible new Biden Administration? Did you get any Foreign Office advice?

The Prime Minister: If I did, I wouldn't tell you because it would not be right, Tom, to talk about the advice that good civil servants give to Ministers. Since I am not aware of such advice I can tell you that—

Q136 **Tom Tugendhat:** Would it not be odd if the Foreign Office had not given advice on the change in an international treaty?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of any such advice, but if I were aware of it, I wouldn't tell you.

Tom Tugendhat: Thank you, Prime Minister.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q137 **Sarah Champion:** Prime Minister, are you looking to amend the International Development Act 2002?

The Prime Minister: By that, do you mean do we want to move away from the 0.7%? Is that what you are saying?

Q138 **Sarah Champion:** No, I meant the Act itself, for example the commitment to the DAC definition of what constitutes aid.

The Prime Minister: I will have to reserve my position on amending the Act and come back to you with further and better particulars on that.

Chair: We will follow that up.

The Prime Minister: It may not be necessary to amend the Act. We want to ensure that ODA—£16 billion of UK taxpayer's money—is better spent on serving the diplomatic and political interests and values of the UK, and indeed the commercial and employment—the jobs—interests of the UK. I see no contradiction at all.

Q139 **Sarah Champion:** May I come in on the details of that, please? The integrated review states that it has an Indo-Pacific focus. Which regions that we currently support will lose out, then? Who do you think will fill in the gaps?

The Prime Minister: Ah, that is like asking a lion to choose between its cubs.

Sarah Champion: That is what you're going to have to do, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: We are not going to get into the game of deprioritising. I cannot tell you now which area of the world must, therefore, logically be subject to less UK aid, because I do not accept that idea at all. When I was Foreign Secretary, we opened embassies around the world. That will continue to be our approach. Global Britain has got to be more outward looking and more engaged than ever before.

Q140 **Sarah Champion:** But the integrated review does say that Britain will have an Indo-Pacific focus. That means, by logic, that it will be shifting away from other countries. Which countries will they be?

The Prime Minister: I have just rejected that logic. I do not think that is true.

Q141 **Sarah Champion:** Okay. I look forward to that future.

The Prime Minister is clearly committed to girls' education, so it was very shocking that the first project cancelled by the summer cuts to ODA was a Rwandan girls' project. It begs the question, Prime Minister, who has oversight of ODA now, and why are your priorities being ignored?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the changes she has referred to. I will look into that. Twelve years of quality education for every girl in the world remains one of the most important things the UK can campaign for, and we will continue to do so.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q142 **Sarah Champion:** I agree, so why was that ignored by either the Minister or the civil servant who decided to make that cut?

The Prime Minister: Sarah, I will have to go away and look at that particular change and come back to you. I cannot give an explanation. But we are massively committed to supporting 12 years of quality education for every girl in the world. There is scarcely anything more beneficial for the future of the planet.

Q143 **Sarah Champion:** Thank you. It concerns me and many others, with such a serious shift in our policies internationally, that you do not seem to know who has strategic oversight of it.

The Prime Minister: The Foreign Secretary is in charge of the FCDO. He has accountability, but I have ultimate accountability, so I will get back to you about that particular programme.

Q144 **Sarah Champion:** Thank you very much. Last question from me: are you frightened of parliamentary scrutiny of foreign aid?

The Prime Minister: No, not at all—in fact, I relish it. I think it is extremely important.

Sarah Champion: Excellent.

The Prime Minister: May I say that I know there may be some suggestion that the FCDO scrutiny committee—the former DFID Committee—should be bundled into the Foreign Affairs Committee? I perfectly understand why parliamentarians should want to have a separate group that can look at development issues, even if you are ultimately interrogating people from the same Department. That is often the way in life, anyway. It is a matter for Parliament. I will not impose my own views on Parliament, but I have sympathy with that approach.

Sarah Champion: I am grateful for your support, Prime Minister. Thank you.

Q145 **Chair:** We have strayed a little late, and we still have one Select Committee Chair to go. If we could steal a little bit more of your time, we would be immensely grateful.

The Prime Minister: I am very happy. I could not leave without being interrogated by Tobias. It would be totally wrong.

Q146 **Chair:** Just to follow up on that last point. When you say that there should be a separate group, presumably you mean that there might be a separate Committee, if Parliament so desires it.

The Prime Minister: I did indeed mean that. But that is for you—that is for Parliament.

Q147 **Chair:** Can you guarantee that the payroll will not be whipped against it and it will be a genuinely free vote for Parliament to decide?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think Parliament should decide that. Look, these are large budgets and it is a very important matter. I want



HOUSE OF COMMONS

everybody in FCDO—I don't want to take up too much time—to be animated by the same idealism and spirit that DFID has. I see no reason why there should not be a separate Committee.

Chair: That very much reflects the view of this Committee. Thank you.

Q148 **Mr Ellwood:** Prime Minister, thank you for agreeing to take a few more minutes to turn to the integrated review from the perspective of the MOD.

I have two short asks and three questions, which should not take too long. For the first two asks, Prime Minister, you simply need to nod—that would be fantastic.

The Prime Minister: Increased defence budget?

Mr Ellwood: We'll get there in a second; that was my question.

The service charity sector is suffering immensely due to the pandemic—unable to raise critical funds to look after our brave veterans. The support that they receive has been significantly impacted. Please could I meet the Chancellor and some of the service charities to see what can be done to make sure that our brave heroes are not forgotten?

The Prime Minister: Yes is the answer to that one.

Q149 **Mr Ellwood:** Thank you. That is a good start; we will continue in that vein, Prime Minister.

Secondly, relating to the Government's response to covid-19, please could we make greater use of our fine armed forces? It is not a mark of failure to lean on their versatile skills more than we are currently doing when we are faced with such an enduring emergency and trying to move, perhaps, on to a war footing.

The one Department in Whitehall that actually plans for and trains for crisis situations is the MOD. Please would you consider taking more advantage of their incredible skill sets at the centre, here in Whitehall, in respect of assisting with strategic planning, operational delivery, command and control and managing the narrative?

Prime Minister, turning to the actual integrated review itself, your first duty in government is the nation's security. As we have been discussing here, crudely put, this integrated review falls into two parts: first, defining our place in the world, our ambitions and emerging threats; and secondly, the corresponding defence posture required.

Could I ask you to share part one of that with Parliament and indeed the nation? Your own federalist papers, if you like—a sober assessment of the great power competition that we face. We talked about some of the challenges; they seem to be tactical at the moment, not strategic. We are helping those in Hong Kong, but not dealing with the wider China issue; we are dealing with migrants in the Channel, but Libya is the problem there. We are defeating Daesh—

Chair: Shall we let the Prime Minister—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Ellwood: If I can, Chair—this is my time, sir.

We are defeating Daesh, but Syria is now still left—so tactical versus strategic. Could I therefore ask that you set out what our vision is? Then we can craft the necessary defence posture from that—rather than what I see us doing at the moment, which is forcing the MOD to go through the savings from the spending review, rather than designing our defence architecture to fit in with your global vision.

The Prime Minister: Thanks very much, Tobias. I think it is important to note that this country is not at war at present, but of course we are engaged in defending, protecting and supporting people around the world where the UK has an interest.

I pay tribute to our armed services for their engagement around the world. You are right in what you say, by the way, about the medical officers of our armed services: they are outstanding. I have met many in the course of the last six months of handling this pandemic. They are fantastic people. I have been bowled over by the way our armed services have led the way in distributing tests around the whole UK—a fact that I hope is not lost on our distinguished friends from the Scottish nationalists.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: It is not.

The Prime Minister: It is not lost on our friends from the Scottish National party. I saw them in Orkney and elsewhere doing an absolutely amazing job.

Q150 **Mr Ellwood:** I am asking for a focus more on the Whitehall piece—strategic thinking and planning.

The Prime Minister: On the strategic thinking, Tobias, we are progressing with an integrated review, as you know. There are bits and pieces—as Sarah just said, we are looking at the Asia-Pacific region, but we will be setting out a wholesale analysis of where the UK sees its opportunities but also its responsibilities. I do not want to summarise or caricature it now, but it is an opportunity for the UK to project our values overseas, to change the world for the better in the way that we have been describing, and to create, as it were—to open up—opportunities for the UK around the world as well.

The animating principle will be not just the need to project UK ideas and values but also opportunities for jobs and growth here in the UK.

Q151 **Mr Ellwood:** I hear that, but I still make the case: please express in detail what global Britain means so that we can then craft the necessary defence posture from that, rather than savings just being forced on to the three services.

I move on to the second question, which is to do with the defence budget. You said that we are not at war. That is absolutely correct, but there is far more activity beneath the threshold of normal conflict. The character of conflict is changing. We are going through a period—an era—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

far more dangerous than any time since the cold war. In recognising that we want to play a role on the international stage, that comes from our respected hard power, so I simply ask whether you will now commit to ignoring the 2% GDP target—that means little, because of the pandemic and its impact on the economy—but instead to a real-terms growth, an 0.5% increase in our defence budget as previously committed by the last Government, to make sure we can invest in our armed forces to recognise the changing threats we face?

The Prime Minister: As you know, Tobias, we are increasing our defence budget by 2.6% above inflation in 2019, 2020 and 2021. We have made the 0.5% commitment, from which we do not resile. We are increasing spending by £180 billion on defence equipment alone in the next few years—I think it is up to 2029—and we are one of the very few countries in NATO to spend 2% of our GDP on defence. You mentioned Libya earlier; you mentioned all sorts of theatres where the UK could be doing more, and will be doing more. We will be setting a lot of that out in the course of the review.

Q152 **Mr Ellwood:** I hope that is the case, because there is an absence of international leadership, and I think there is a desire for Britain to play a greater role. My final question is on equipment.

Chair: Very quickly.

Mr Ellwood: Yes, Chair, but I think the Prime Minister is willing to stay. I absolutely welcome the increased investment in space and cyber-security, but this should not be at the expense of conventional deterrence. I simply ask that you recognise the importance of investment in our land warfare—in Challenger, Warrior, Ajax and Boxer, for example—and also increasing the surface fleet. You mentioned the trade deal with Japan; we have to make sure that our trade routes are protected, as indeed are the international cables. Finally, if we want to have that aircraft carrier operating, we will need a minimum of 80 F-35s per aircraft carrier because of the training, equipment and redundancies that are required. I hope you will be able to commit to those.

The Prime Minister: Absolutely—well, I am not going to commit to absolutely everything, because I have to go away and look at some of the programmes that he has mentioned, but on shipbuilding alone, he should look at the ambitions of the Defence Secretary and what we are doing with the fleet solid support ships, as well as the investments we are making in frigates, the type 31s and type 36s. This is going to be a fantastic time for investment in shipbuilding, for which this country was once absolutely renowned around the world.

Just to give the Committee a sense of three things we are going to do, in addition to projecting our values around the world and all the commitments we make with our armed services, which are massively admired—three ways in which the UK is going to continue to show international leadership—I have already mentioned the first, which is bringing the world back together in public health: GAVI, vaccines, the



quest for a cure for covid. At the moment, it is totally fissiparous; we need to unite the world. No. 2 is trade, which has already been discussed. World trade is totally in the doldrums; the UK can lead on that. The third and most obvious is climate change, the struggle there, and bringing the world together in the run-up to COP26. Those are the three huge projects for global Britain, and you will be reading a lot more about those. We will certainly be setting out at least some of that in the integrated review, but there will be a wealth of other detail that we will cover.

Mr Ellwood: Prime Minister, thank you for your time. Chair, thank you.

Chair: Well done. Prime Minister, you have been very generous with your time. There are actually two follow-up questions, if you can bear it.

The Prime Minister: It is an absolute pleasure. I cannot tell you what joy it gives me.

Chair: The first is from Angus Brendan MacNeil.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Chairman.

Chair: If you will not interrupt the answer.

Q153 **Angus Brendan MacNeil:** No, I will do my best not to; I am sure the answer will be concise, to the point, accurate and brief.

You mentioned trade there. There have been press reports in the last 48 hours of queues of 7,000 lorries, 70 miles in length, taking two days to clear. If this happens in Kent, it will make the covid lorry crisis look like a walk in the park. If it happens and the supermarket shelves are empty because of this post-Brexit scenario, who will be responsible for this—for stuff not getting into the supermarkets, for 7,000-long lorry queues? Would the buck stop with the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: I do not think anybody will be under any illusion about who is going to be held to account for that. It is certainly going to be me and the Government.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: Good, thank you.

Q154 **Greg Clark:** Going back to covid, for a final time. Are you aware, Prime Minister, of how frustrated many young people are feeling? They are having to make a huge sacrifice for the rest of us with laws like the rule of six, when a 20-year-old is vastly more likely to die in a road traffic accident than they are from covid. It seems only fair for them to understand when and how the restrictions will be lifted. What test will govern how that happens?

The Prime Minister: Greg, the first thing to say is yes, we think about that every day. As I said this morning, I don't think there can have been a Government in modern history that has faced such painful dilemmas of having to restrict people's everyday lives in the way that we are having to do for the sake of protecting the public, protecting more vulnerable people—ultimately, of course, in order to defeat the disease. You ask what



HOUSE OF COMMONS

criteria we are going to apply. I look at all the data. I look at what is happening on hospital admissions, I look at what is happening in care homes, I look at every single thing. We have a covid dashboard, and every day in the morning we go over every single indicator, and where the lights are flashing. The single most important fact, as you know Greg, is what the R is doing and where the R is going. At the moment—alas, alas, alas—the R, having been under 1 for so many months after the fantastic efforts of the British people, is now above 1. That is the most important thing we have to look at.

Q155 **Greg Clark:** Sir Patrick Vallance, your chief scientific adviser—

Chair: It was going to be one question, Greg.

Greg Clark: Absolutely. He said that the R number was the right thing to measure early on in the epidemic, but it is not the right thing to be using now. So Prime Minister, would you look again at what should trigger a change in the rules?

The Prime Minister: The rate of spread of the epidemic above 1, above R, clearly expresses itself in all sorts of ways. Tom Tugendhat mentioned hospital admissions, and they are crucial. Alas, they are also going up now, having been flat or going down for a long time. So we look at lots of ways in which the R expresses itself, and that is entirely right. But the rate of reproduction of the disease is still very important.

Q156 **Greg Clark:** Will you write to us with the criteria?

The Prime Minister: I have given you some of the most important points.

Chair: If we extend this too much, we will provide excuses for more reluctance from the Prime Minister in future. Thank you very much indeed for your time, Prime Minister, you have been very generous.

The Prime Minister: Thank you.