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THE PRIME MINISTER

22 July 2021

*Dear Sir Bernard,*

During my appearance before the Liaison Committee on 7 July, I said that I would write following up on a number of points made by Members. You have subsequently followed this up in writing on 13 July.

*1. Afghanistan (Q2 and Q3)*

We are proud of the progress that our Armed Forces, diplomats, and development specialists have made in supporting Afghanistan over the past 20 years. Their work has been critical to reducing the threat from al-Qaeda and building the foundations for a peace process.

Our purpose in deploying was to deny al-Qaeda the opportunity to use Afghanistan as a base for mounting further international attacks. As I said during my statement on Afghanistan on 8 July, the US-led intervention has reduced the threat from al-Qaeda and ensured no successful attacks have been mounted against the West from Afghanistan.

Learning the lessons from Afghanistan has been a continuous process. After the conclusion of Operation Herrick in 2014, the Army conducted a thorough internal review, and lessons were also incorporated into the Integrated Review.

*2. Projected reduction in hospitalisations achieved by delaying the lifting of the requirement for people who have received both doses of the vaccine to isolate following close contact with a Covid case from 19 July to 16 August (Q124)*

Despite the delay to Step 4 of the Roadmap, we are seeing a significant third wave of cases, driven by the Delta variant. While nationally pressure may be within total NHS capacity, there will be significant local variation. Any easing self-isolation requirements for fully vaccinated contacts, who can still catch and pass on the virus, will add to upward pressure on cases and, in turn, hospitalisations. It is therefore important to time this change right. Waiting also allows more people to be fully vaccinated, reducing the risk of severe illness.

*3. Publication of the Hydrogen strategy (Q26-28)*

We aim to publish our Hydrogen Strategy shortly. As we set out in the Ten Point Plan, the UK has world-leading electrolyser companies and unparalleled carbon capture and storage sites that we can maximise as we aim to produce 5 GW of low-carbon hydrogen by 2030.

*4. Target to get all UK homes to stop using fossil fuel boilers by 2033 (Q33)*

As we set out in the Energy White Paper, we will have to transition away from fossil fuel heating to achieve net zero emissions. As we set out in the Ten Point Plan, over the next fifteen years, we will gradually move away from new fossil fuel boilers as individuals replace their appliances and are offered low-carbon, more efficient alternatives. Multiple technologies, including heat pumps, hydrogen and heat networks, have a role to play in this transition.

We are already investing in making our buildings more energy efficient and have set out our direction in the Ten Point Plan for a green industrial revolution.

Our actions include: growing the heat pump market to 600,000 installations by 2028, through a combination of regulation and consumer support; and continuing to determine the feasibility of using low-carbon hydrogen as an alternative to the use of natural gas for heating by supporting a range of research, development and testing projects. And as I said, we are working with industry to help get the costs down so that consumers are treated fairly.

*5. Results of the National Security Adviser's review of the sale of Newport Wafer Fab (Q49)*

I expect the National Security Adviser to provide his advice to me shortly, but it would be inappropriate to comment further on the detail of this national security review at this time.

*6. How the Government will replace the revenues which depend on the consumption of fossil fuels (Q52)*

At every step on the path to Net Zero, we are putting affordability and fairness at the heart of our reforms. But as I told the Committee, I would not presume to anticipate the fiscal options of the Chancellor at a Budget or any other fiscal event.

*7. When the Chancellor is to make a statement on planning for public spending and taxation over the next decade (Q54)*

As has been the practice under successive Administrations, the Chancellor sets out economic and fiscal plans at Budgets and fiscal events. The timing of the next fiscal event will be confirmed in due course.

*8. Schools catch-up programme and the Troubled Families Programme (Q81-83)*

Good attendance at school is vital for children's wellbeing and development, as well as for their academic achievement. Schools recognise this and work hard to ensure that their pupils attend regularly. We have issued good practice guidance during the pandemic to support them in this.

The Department for Education guidance to schools for use of recovery premium encourages schools to take steps to support pupils at risk of poor attendance. The Supporting Families programme (previously the Troubled Families programme) is also working with families where attendance issues are a significant concern. The newly announced expansion of the virtual school head role will also champion children in need in every authority in England and help improve their attendance as they have for looked after children. We also provide further support where it is required to improve attendance, including through the Department for Education's Regional Education and Care Teams. They hold regular meetings between Regional Schools Commissioners, their teams and local authorities/directors of children's services. These meetings help us to understand and help tackle barriers to attendance.

*9. Extension of redundancy protection for new mothers returning to work (Q91)*

Equalities legislation already requires that employers must not discriminate based on gender or pregnancy and maternity in the workplace - however, we are determined to do more. We have committed to extend the existing protection afforded to mothers on Maternity Leave into pregnancy and for 6 months on return to work. We will also extend redundancy protection into a period of return to work for those taking shared parental leave and adoption leave. We will introduce these measures as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

There is also work to help ensure employers are fully aware of their obligations and responsibilities to pregnant women and new parents. That is why we are finalising plans to bring together a broad set of key stakeholders to look at what improvements can be made to the information available to employers and families to address pregnancy and maternity discrimination in the workplace.

*10. Support for women in the recovery from the pandemic, and the publication of equality impact assessments (Q98-100)*

The economic impact of the pandemic is complex and still emerging. We know that men continued to have higher redundancy rates over the course of the pandemic, while women have been more likely to be furloughed until recently when the balance shifted. We will continue to monitor the evolving situation and ensure any action we take in response is based on robust evidence.

We have responded positively where the evidence has shown specific barriers or problems. That is why we have introduced flexible furlough agreements and extended the furlough scheme through to September, supporting employees who are struggling to work due to childcare.

Departments routinely and systematically consider the likely impact on different groups and individuals when developing new policies, a legal requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty in the Equality Act 2010. As the Minister for Women and Equalities explained during her appearance before the Women and Equalities Committee on the same day, they are not routinely published because they are used by Departments as internal policy and decision making tools that may evolve with emerging evidence. It is important that officials can draft them with openness and candour.

*11. How embassy staff overseas will support UK businesses to increase food and drink exports (Q122)*

As I told the Committee, we already have staff that support exporters to access 119 markets worldwide who stand ready to support our agriculture, food and drink businesses. This includes specialist agriculture counsellors in China and the Middle East. We will increase our support for food exporters to help them access new markets and promote their products around the world. The Department for International Trade is reviewing the recommendations of the Trade and Agriculture Commission as to how we might approach this. We will also be working in partnership with key agriculture, food and drink organisations to strengthen our overseas presence.

*12. EU visa waiver for touring artists, musicians and performers (Q127)*

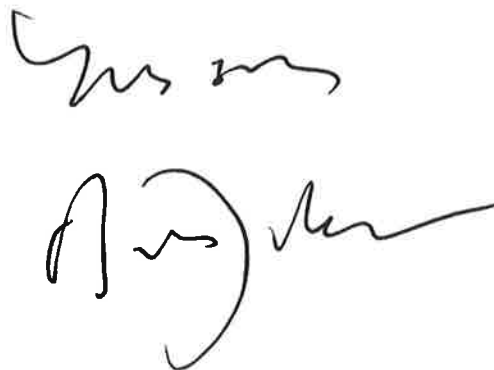
We have always acknowledged that the end of freedom of movement would have consequences for touring musicians and performers. We are working urgently to address issues that the creative industries have raised with us. Through our engagement with Member States we have established that at least 17 out of 27 Member States, including France and Germany, allow some visa and permit free touring. We are calling on others to match the UK's generous domestic arrangements.

A visa waiver of the kind proposed by the Commission in the Trade Co-operation Agreement would not be compatible with our manifesto commitment to take back control of our borders. No G7 economy has signed up to this previously, and nor could we.

*13. Mineworkers' Pension Scheme (Q8)*

The Minister of State for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change met the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme Trustees on 21 June to discuss the Committee's report and options for the way forward. The Minister asked the Trustees to consider whether they would be willing to include the Government Guarantee in any future discussions around surplus sharing and the Investment Reserve and we await their thoughts.

The Government responded to the BEIS Select Committee report on the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme on 28 June. The arrangement agreed in 1994 was fair and beneficial to both Scheme members and taxpayers. Scheme members have rightly shared in the benefits while the Government has taken on all the risk.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is a cursive name that appears to be 'Bernard Jenkin'. The bottom signature is also cursive and appears to be 'Bernard Jenkin'.

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP