

Good morning, and welcome to the second day of Civil Service Live Online. Yesterday, more than 22,000 staff across the UK tuned in to listen to our panel of speakers, and over 7000 of you submitted a question or a comment or some feedback. So keep the comments coming, keep it interactive. And we're going to kick off this morning's session with a great panel. Let me introduce Alex Chisholm, who is the relatively new Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service. He's also the D&I Champion for government. We also have with us Richard Heaton, who is the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, and the Race Champion. We have some pre submitted questions, which I'll start with which you've all voted for. So I'll ask the most popular ones. And then after a couple of questions, we will open it up to a live Q&A. So a really popular theme that's come through on both days is around Civil Service impartiality. I'm going to start with you Alex. How do you see that, how do you foresee the Civil Service remaining politically neutral when senior roles are increasingly influenced by political appointments?

Great, thanks, Sharon. nice, easy question to get me underway. Morning, everybody. So look, I really understand why the question's being asked at this point in time. But I think that when you look at what people say about the Civil Service, one of the things they value most highly is the impartiality, is the neutrality, and that's something which you can hear from from today's ministers, including the Prime Minister. So the the values that have served us so well around impartiality and integrity and meritocratic appointment and all of that remain absolutely the cornerstone of what makes us a really strong service. And if you look at the international sort of rankings of things, one of reasons why we're ranked number one for effectiveness is around that quality of impartiality. So I don't have any particular concerns about that. I know that people get quite excited about one or two individual appointments. But you know, if you look back over time, you'll see that every, every single administration, in new administration has made a mixture of of senior appointments, some civil servants and some political appointees. So

I don't think there's too much significance to be read into that.

Thanks. Richard, a question we got asked yesterday and it got a lot of likes was, is Dominic Cummings a bigger threat to the Civil Service as the media would have believed? Do you have a view on that?

I don't think it's sensible at all to categorise anyone in that way or or demonise anyone. Just to pick up on what Alex was saying, I've been in the Civil Service for 30 years. I've worked for ministers of three different political parties, and have completely different styles. There are things they consistently want from the Civil Service, which is passion, vigour, drive, efficiency, professionalism, getting things done. I don't think in all that time I've heard ministers asking about or caring about the politics and the civil servants around them. They know that's not part of the deal and that they're not looking for a politicised civil service in my experience. So no, I don't think it's correct or sensible to demonise anyone at the moment. We've got a government with a huge agenda, passionate to get things done, expecting the Civil Service to pick up that agenda and go with it. It's it's always been like this. And since joining the Cabinet Office three months ago, I've seen quite a bit of Dom Cummings. And I can say that he's been incredibly appreciative of the good work done by civil servants. I've been on platforms like this, which he's gone out of his way to thank people for what they've done. He doesn't spare himself. He's pretty hard working, I have to say, and he is very focused on a better government. And that's something which all of us should have an interest in.

And can you say a little bit more about the relationship between Civil Service and ministers because clearly staff have read a lot about this in the media and is top of mind at the moment?

Yes. I mean, I've been to the, Richard's perspective who's been at this longer than me, but I've seen the civil servants and ministers working incredibly closely and actually, you know, partly the Brexit process, which meant that we spent long periods of time locked up together in ExCO meetings, etc. But COVID even more so. From dawn till dusk, people have just been working really, really tightly together, trying to make sense of it, try and try and make the best decisions possible, not just civil servants as well often with external experts, scientists, and so I've been involved in that. So I think we've been, you know, closer than ever obviously sometimes with that closeness can come friction, because you're going to have debates about things not always obvious what to do, you're going to have different opinions, you know, from that kind of diversity challenge usually comes the best way forward. So I think it's, you know, it's it's been a really, really close working partnership.

And I would add, I mean, for every, for every newspaper story you read to the contrary, I have heard and seen ministers thanking the staff around them, thanking them on all staff events. We have zoom meetings now with civil servants, team meetings. I've had ministers on saying from the bottom of their heart, you know, thank you and appreciation. When the Civil Service and ministers work well together as a team amazing things can happen. And that's the kind of dynamic that ministers and I think civil servants should be looking for, are looking for.

Great. So another popular theme, in light of how we've been working during the COVID pandemic is around flexible working, working from home. People have demonstrated that they can be productive from home. So we've got a lot of questions in, is working from home the new normal? And if not, Alex, when do you perceive a return to more people in the office?

Great, well, it has become the new normal. And I've been really impressed by the ability of colleagues right across the service to adapt to it. It's been, I think, around about 75% so three quarters of us have been working from home for the last three, four months since the since the virus really hit in full. And that's a testimony, as I say to both the ability of our kind of technology platforms to support that and DDaT colleagues but also really to individuals who've had to adapt their way of working not not always the For people working from home, I know the pressures that can bring, but people have stuck at it. And we've remained, you know, very effective as a service, providing brilliant advice and brilliant services so to the public. So that's been really impressive. When I think forward, I think kind of, obviously, ultimately depends on the public health situation. So we have to pay attention to the advice that we get from the experts, but I think there will be more people coming back to work. It doesn't suit back to work in the office. It doesn't suit everybody working from home, I have to acknowledge that. You know there are some welfare challenges there. Also, certain types of work probably best done face to face, or at least in the same physical environment. Some jobs require particular access to secure information. For example, obviously, Richard in the MOJ you've got prison officers and people who've not had the opportunity to work from home at all and that be true for people working in benefits office's as well, in DWP. So, overall, when I compare where we were, I don't think we'll ever go back to that situation, Sharon. I think that, you know, the idea that we're going to this is just a sort of v and we get

back to where we started. I don't think so. But I don't think that the current level will be sustained. We will have more people working from home, hopefully still with a lot of flexibility for individual staff members.

Great. Richard, do you have a view on that?

I agree with that. I think one of the great myths that we have busted successfully is that working from home is a proper, productive, sensible way to do your work. I think there's a bit of sort of well working from home, is not really working. We've demonstrated across the country that it really is and we get things done. And that's, that's going to be a huge part of I think our working going forward, what I'm sure it'll be mixed, as Alex says. But Alex is right to call out those frontline members of staff from whom working from home, frankly, is not an option. And the work that some of the frontline staff have done in the UK Civil Service has been just breathtaking and commendable of our utmost respect. The men and women who have looked after the prison and our care for example. The men and women who have responded to the economic issues caused by Coronavirus by laying on Universal Credit and rearranging tax credits. And we've done some extraordinary things on the frontline. And our staff are incredible and deserving of our full appreciation and support.

Absolutely. So linked to this theme are a couple of questions around working flexibly via location. And there's a few questions about when will the senior jobs move out of London? How will we get the government's footprint out of London, and especially now with more flexible working? And that should be possible? Can I start with you, Alex, on that, please?

Great, thanks. So I'm really happy to have a chance to talk about that, because it's something that's really important to me, I know, a huge priority for the Prime Minister as well more importantly. A couple of things, I think, have really been game changers. One is obviously the experience of COVID has meant that, just as Richard was saying, the idea that you have to be present in person to brief a minister that myth I get always was a myth has been broken quite comprehensively. Ministers themselves have been working from home and finding, you know, working over Zoom and so has worked very well. So that's been good. I think the second thing that's really important is that this government, this new administration is massively committed to levelling up. And, you know, right, you see that the presence of civil servants across the whole of the UK is good for our connectivity, it's good for our visibility, it's good for our credibility, frankly, locally. And well, we'll sort of break the idea of a kind of a London group of people trying to make decisions for people around the whole of the country. We want the government of the UK to be based in the UK. And this is not just a if you like rhetoric or plans or ideas because we have committed a lot of money to building 14 government hubs and over the next 18 months, they're going to have capacity for 49,000 civil servants in 10 different locations in England and four across the devolved administrations. So, I mean, it's really going to be a great reality and I'm enormously positive about that. Because I think it means that for people wanting to join the Civil Service or stay in the Civil Service, there's no sense of having to be pulled towards London. You can work in any part of the country.

Great. Another popular theme, and I'm going to start with Richard as Race Champion on this, is around diversity and inclusion. Do you think diversity and inclusion has improved over the last year?

It's a great question. And I'm going to concentrate on race just for the moment just because as you say, I am Race Champion. And I think the answer I'd have given three months ago would have been something like this. I would have drawn attention to improvement in a number of key indicators. Number of black or ethnic minority staff in the senior Civil Service has increased, it's now I think 6.6%. Four years ago, it was down at three point something maybe 4.1. So that that has been steady but sure progress. Our Fast Stream is more ethnically diverse. Our talent pipeline below the SCS is much stronger than it was a few years ago. So there are lots of indications and we've nurtured lots of talent. And we've got amazing programmes like META to bring people on and prepare people for the senior Civil Service and everything is going in the right direction. And that's, I think, would have been my answer, broadly optimistic more to do. I think things changed when Black Lives Matter, became such an important force. When George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis and when the PH report came out into discrepancies in COVID outcomes. And I think what that told us and what we were told by our own staff, was that the lived experience of our black colleagues and our minority ethnic colleagues in the Civil Service was pretty poor in many, many cases. And that they had experienced attitudes, adverse attitudes, ranging from indifference through to outright racism. And this was a thing happening under our nose, and somehow collectively, we had not realised it, and we have not picked it up and we'd not addressed it. So I think it's been a bit of a cliché coming up, wake up call for us to take a bit more seriously, what in fact, we have been told consistently for several years, which is that we do not have a truly racially equal Civil Service or society or set of departments. We are doing great things. And in many cases, we are truly diverse. And we're great organisations, and we're ahead of lots of other sectors, but it's nowhere near where we should be. I think is my short answer. And the Civil Service collectively needs to as we're now doing, I hope and believe, grip this and take more seriously. We need to be actively anti racist, to take much more seriously the equality impact of what we do, the policies we implement and the way we implement it and to work harder on becoming representative and on sharing power and visibility at the senior levels with non white colleagues. There is a similar but different stories to be told about other aspects of D&I but that's the key one, I think I wanted to get across.

Okay, can I bring Alex in because I know you feel very strongly about this, too. Thank you, Sharon. Look, I agree with everything that Richard has said. Maybe just a couple of things to add to it. I think, you know, one is that our kind of responsibility to deal with discrimination, to deal with bullying, harassment of any kind, and to create a real, genuine open opportunity for all the talent of the nation is something that I feel incredibly strongly. I know, that's true for not just for Richard but actually every one of my Permanent Secretary colleagues has had a real push from from ministers as well, and particularly in recent months, as you say. So that is and the reason we feel so strongly about it it's not only about the law, about legal obligations, it's not only about, you know, a sense of kind of moral responsibility, but also because we recognise that we really need to have all the talents fully deployed in the Civil Service to deal with the massive challenges that we face. So it's a performance issue as well. So we really feel that incredibly strongly. And I think in the past, at some times, it's been a kind of, pursued by maybe, itself a minority group of people who have been actively about it and really enthusiastic about it. I think one of the things that Richard and I have been really pushing is to make sure this is a, you know, a universal preoccupation for all the leadership of the Civil Service, not just an HR matter, not just in the

hands of the voluntary networks, important role that they play, but really as something as a leadership responsibility and holding people accountable for that.

I'm gonna stay on the theme of D&I then I do want to come back to how COVID's affected different sections of the workforce. But in terms of D&I one of the questions we've been asked on the iPad is what are you personally going to do to be part of the change and make that change? I'll start with Alex and then move to Richard.

Great. Well, Sharon you work with me in the Cabinet Office and since I've joined we've done a great deal, I think, to try and to improve the environment for people and that is both. So take something like you know, bullying, harassment, discrimination, we were dissatisfied with our scores there. And one of the things we've done is we've analysed and say which of the units in the Cabinet Office are below par and require kind of programmes to correct that, and which are the best to, you know, which are the best units, what's the best practice that they're doing which can be spread across. We've also seen that things like mentoring and sponsorship can be enormously powerful and kind of raise, you know, helping people to develop their talents, express their talents and improve the under representation at senior levels. So every one of the senior leaders have in the Cabinet Office has taken on some responsibility for mentoring and sponsorship and I've done that myself, of course. But I think the biggest thing that I can do is to use my if you like my position and my responsibility to try and really lead these efforts right across the whole Civil Service. And I'm really grateful for colleagues like Richard who've been Race Champion for five years now doing a fantastic job. But I do feel that real change here means constant push from all of us, but certainly I accept my responsibility as D&I Champion to really make sure that people from every background feel they can give of their best in the Civil Service and that requires constant attention and effort. Needs to be baked into everything we do and our core HR practices around recruitment, around promotion, around recognition, around performance assessment, but also needs to be something where, again, to Richard's point, it has to be an activist agenda for the leadership to really lean in there and change the way things are today because it's not satisfactory at all. Thank you, Richard, as a Perm Secretary, as well as a Race Champion, what are you personally doing to improve D&I in your organisation? Well, very.

First of all, I should say I'm leaving the Civil Service at the end of next month. So it's answering in two halves really. As Perm Secretary and Race Champion, I think the best thing I can do is to try really hard with Alex to embed what exactly Alex was talking about, namely, accountability for this in departments. So Permanent Secretaries, and chief executives and heads of agencies feel accountable to their boss, but also to their workforce and to their ministers and to their network groups. And I really, really want to embed that so I'm going to do everything I can between now and leaving the Civil Service to try and achieve that. In the MOJ, like in every department, it's about giving visibility and sharing power and sharing senior leadership with our colleagues. It's about bringing people on, I've got several mentoring relationships, which I will continue after I've left, I hope if I'm allowed to. It's also about working hard to make sure that our return to work and our post COVID recovery properly understands the different needs of different communities because COVID as we might come on to, is a phenomenon which has affected people in very different ways and affected different communities. So seeing that through is quite important. And making sure that I do my best to hand over a department that has this central to what it's about.

Great. So moving on to the pandemic and how COVID effected different sections of the population. You mentioned the PHE report Richard. There's a question here that says what steps has the Civil Service taken as an organisation to safeguard our BAME community as they return to work. Shall I start with you, Alex.

Yeah, thanks very much, Sharon. So, you know, in keeping with every other organisation, every every employer. We have made sure that every department and every arm's length body have been doing properly the risk assessments before people coming back to work. I think we've also really stepped up the support available to people, individuals and communities affected. And you know, the feedback we've had on that people have been appreciating that. We've also been pushing particularly recently to make sure that you know, voices of people from BAME and other backgrounds with particular kind of differentiated outcomes are really brought to bear in decision making around what our policies should be. So I suppose those would be the three things that I'd highlight the most.

Did you want to come in Richard? No, okay. So we're going to move on to, I will confess the most popular subject today. It was the second most yesterday around pay. So after 10 years of a 1% pay increase, what does the panel feel are the prospects for pay for civil servants over the next 10 years? I'll start with Alex on this one. Okay, thank you.

Yeah. So look, first of all, I really understand how you know, every civil servant watching this will be feeling that, you know, they would like to be paid more. And that is a really common and understandable feeling. Probably we can all derive a little bit of encouragement from the Prime Minister saying very clearly that he doesn't feel that austerity is a good response to the current COVID related pressures. Also, you know, he's going out of his way to really praise public servants and to recognise, you know, particularly frontline workers have, just as Richard was saying, we've had a very hard and they've done an amazing job in very tough circumstances. So I suppose that's a degree of encouragement. The payoff for this year, as you know, for departments has been between one and a half and two and a half percent. That's obviously not not everything that people would want. There is scope within that sometimes to address, you know, individual pay anomalies for individual cases to go even beyond that. When I look back over the last few years, undoubtedly, there have been times when pay has not really being compatitive with the private sector. And I think that today that is probably, kind of in a way that the gap sometimes closes and widens, I think today, we're probably going to be pretty close because a lot of private sector firms obviously are not able to increase paying in fact a lot of them are shutting workers, unfortunately, tragically, actually, as you see in the forecast, just yesterday, could be as many 4 million people unemployed. So you know, against that context, actually steady employment in the Civil Service has been able to increase its numbers in recent years in response to EU Exit and COVID and regular work and a fantastic pension. These things are probably in the overall package are worth quite a bit.

So we've got a lot of questions on how can we learn about the lessons of COVID-19. So I'm going to take one from the iPad and a pre planned one, because they're kind of similar but the one from the iPad says the pandemic is shown, when red tape is removed, things can be done quickly. And we can achieve amazing things and we have a similar one, which basically says, how are we going to learn

from COVID? And how is it going to shape how we work? And how is it going to shape our future? So I'm going to merge them and start with Alex on that one.

Great. Well, look, so I mean, I couldn't agree more with the spirit of that question that it is vital that we learn the lessons of working faster in a more solution mindset from COVID. And it's just been really extraordinary to see the quality of the response and they're talking to colleagues for example, in DWP and HMRC. I mean, they were able to stand up schemes in, new schemes and in weeks that you know, they freely admitted would have normally taken them several months and careful planning. And it's not that the all the extra time and effort would have produced a scheme 10 times better it was just it would have been a bit more, a bit more steady the progress a bit more cautious, maybe more people involved, more signoffs. So I think that's given us the kind of an idea of how we should be able to work much faster, in a more agile way. Empowering teams to come up with solutions quickly, much more focused on the outcome that we want to achieve and not so much on the sort of process of getting there. So I think that is, you know, is really, really encouraging. I think it's also great to see the kind of the focus on real impacts on our fellow citizens. So when you've been standing up schemes to protect 2.2 million vulnerable people, or you've been trying to make sure that you've got money available for businesses, which you know, we're going to fail if you can't do that or being able to take as 1.8 million additional Universal Credit people online in a matter of weeks. These things are being run where the kind of the motive has been we must do this now there's going to be terrible effects to the public. And that has been very energising and really, really impressive.

Can I bring you in on this, Richard?

Yeah, I mean, I agree with all that there's been there's been an extraordinary kind of action this day spirit, which I think has been incredibly valuable. It's been helped by some, some easements and some relaxing in the rules, which has really helped. And I think there's there's quite a lot to play for in our future domestic regulatory framework, how much can we relax? How can we depart from for example, the procurement regulations that we've long had. I'd just add one thing, I think it's, I think what's been great when it's worked well has been we've done things really quickly and we've cut through a lot of governance and red tape, which is good, but we haven't thrown risk out of the window. And it's really important, I think it's worth investing more into our risk teams so that we can do risk quickly and smartly rather than throw risk out to the window. And that's quite an important distinction. I don't think we're simply I think it'd be cavalier for us to take risks with human lives by just chucking everything at the problem without assessing it, so it's smart, it's quick. It's cutting through regulations where we're allowed to and it's taking a sensible, smarter attitude to risk.

And I'm going to abuse my position as chair to give a big shout out to the government comms service. I was impressed with how they worked throughout the pandemic and a big shout out to the Department of Health who, they turned around a TV ad around in 24 hours, which I actually think might be a record. So, you know, everybody was working hard in this, during this situation. So we're going to move to the final pre planned question. We've got several questions around climate change. Some of them are around how is COVID set back our progress on sustainability? But the one I'm going to read out is are we on course to reach net zero by 2050? And is this target ambitious enough? So I'll start with Alex on this one.

Great, thanks very much. I mean, some of you will know I used to be Permanent Secretary at BEIS which I had you know, lead responsibility for net zero and so on. So it's a bit of a special subject so you have to stop me quickly. So first of all, I think that, you know, it does make me feel very proud, I think in the UK that we've been able to adopt the net zero target formally in legislation. First of the major nations to do that. And furthermore, that we have made great, great progress in reducing our mission since the Paris target. 43% reduction on 1990 levels more than any other OECD country and also actually have grown our economy more more than ever in that same period. So that's been really impressive and really important, gives us great confidence. We know that kind of despite that zero reason for complacency because that's, you know, that's mainly been achieved in the power sector, which is, you know, easier than some others who've got a lot of work to do on heating and transportation, waste, housing, all of those things, the challenges are even greater. I have been encouraged, I must say that in the election period all the manifestos were very committed to work on this. This government, you know, since getting returned has immediately set up a climate action committee at the Cabinet level. You saw the announcements just a week ago from the Chancellor, major spending around energy efficiency. We have that again in the budget back in March around carbon capture and so on. So, good progress, undoubtedly. I think the COVID impact is a kind of a, is bit of a question mark at this stage. I say question mark, because you can see that it saved a lot in you know, transport related emissions. So that has been a big positive, no question. It's probably given people a bit of a different idea about you know, lifestyles in the future and sustainability, which again, I should be positive for net zero. And also, you know, frankly, you know, the pandemic was a kind of low probability, high impact event. Well, that's very, very, very true of climate action. So I'm hoping that that will make us be more responsible again in our future investments and actions. It's only a question mark, though, because we saw in the financial crisis, how actually when governments are under pressure they can sometimes cut back on those commitments. We lost ground after the financial crisis in dealing with climate. We can't afford to do that this time around.

It's completely not a special subject of mine. But just on the last part of your question, is it ambitious enough? I suspect, looking at the long term, it's not ambitious enough. And I don't think our net zero ambitions are going to be enough internationally. I think we'll have to go further. I think it needs to be closer to 00 not net zero. The whole industry of offsetting, is there ever going to be enough offsetting needed to offset the enormous outputs of our major economies? Who knows? So I think the ambitions will go further and further as we get further into the problem.

I should just mention that it is fantastic that the UK is leading the international efforts next year with COP. We've had to put that back a whole year because of COVID, but with the agreement of the UN we've been able to it'll now be COP 2020 rather than COP 20 in Glasgow, and a great opportunity for the UK to really push other countries to match our own efforts and to redouble our own.

Okay, I'm gonna take some more questions from the iPad and this is a recurring theme also. Given that some of our IT systems are outdated, are there plans for modernization or replacement in order to keep up with industry and also have shareable data across systems?

Absolutely. And so I think that, you know, one of the things that we're really focusing on the modernization and reform agenda, and I hope you've had a chance to look at what we've published just yesterday on Shaping our Future, which is the title we've given to that reform prospectus. One of the big themes within that is to try and make it easier for our fellow civil servants to do their jobs. And part of that is about getting easier access to data and part of that is having better technology and systems to support people. I know how frustrating it is for people trying to do a good job of serving the public when the systems that they rely on are pretty antiquated in some cases or the data is inaccessible. So we're having a real big purge on that. I don't think I'm telling any state secrets to say, only this week, the Cabinet had a big discussion about data sharing and trying to make it easier to access data and to share it with other parts of the public service but also with the general public. It's something we've had a push on before, we're really redoubling our efforts there, which is very necessary. And I also think that you know, we're going to be pushing from the centre to try and have more interoperability between systems was very frustrating even at the beginning of COVID that some of the video conferencing equipment we were using in different departments was incompatible. We've been able to unblock that but it's still, you know, it's a sign of how perhaps we've had too much kind of autonomy in some areas of technology, expenditure and practice, and we want to try and make sure that yes, lots of individual activity and lots of empowerment. But there should be a core case around common API's, sharing data, interoperability.

And another question's come in on your reform programme and prospectus and it says, will the comments from today be used to help shape the change programme? And if so, how?

Yes, and yes, again, so one of the, when we started on this, and I took up this post three and a half months ago, and was discussing there with ministers and with colleagues. We said to each other, the one thing we don't want to do is to try and go off into a little room and work out what what needs to be done and then tell people, it's the absolute opposite. I mean, even in the prospectus you see today and it is a prospectus, it's setting out it's an invitation take to come forward with your ideas. See what it is the value you see in that, work with it and tell us what else we should do. But even that prospectus reflected input from over 2000 people across the Civil Service, all grades, all disciplines, all parts of the country. It really is, you know, we want to make it more like a movement and not like something which is kind of like we've published the paper and here's what everyone has to do. So that is absolutely the spirit. In terms of how, I mean, we've done a lot of kind of open engagement type sessions. We've had huge numbers of, you know, Skype calls with, you know, chat suggestions, etc. Now, we're trying to kind of get that up a scale again. So the launch of Shaping our Future yesterday, there's actually a website for that shapingourfuture.civilservice.gov.uk. And that is the main tool, I suppose for collecting people's responses. But you know, this is a big programme of work. There's got to be massive and mass opportunities at local level and team levels people to contribute.

I have a follow up question on this. What one thing would you like to see less of after the modernization programme? And what one thing would you like to see more of? Very good, okay, so less of.

I think sometimes, you know, we do make it too hard for people to do to do their work, but sort of the meta work cost is quite high. As long as people have an idea and they think, oh, it's never going to, it's never going to get out there, but sort of the amount of testing and kind of, you know, the layers of

governance, the whole process orientation. So I'd like to see a bit less of that. More experimentation, as the Chancellor of the Duchy Lancaster was saying in his Ditchley lecture. More experimentation. That's the bit I'd like to see more of, and less, less bureaucracy, frankly, standing in the way of that.

Richard, I know you said you're leaving in a month but if you had a magic wand and as you depart, what would you wish for as you depart to see less of and more of in the future?

More of and continuing and forever is the extraordinary spirit and professionalism, skill and resilience of the Civil Service. I just want to shout out as loudly as I can close to my departure. I do think, you know, we're infuriating organisation and frustrating and the size of us makes us difficult to get things done and all that. But we have and no doubt inadequately led by those who've been in leadership positions for so long. But we are an extraordinary service in pursuit of public service in the genuine sense. Not only in, we've talked lots about ministers, not only looking after our ministerial colleagues here in London. But up and down the country, working flat out and getting things done. And being on the front line and talking to people and delivering public services in the best possible tradition. So that I want to continue and just get better and better. There's a whole load of stuff that frustrates our customers, users, with the state of dealing with government and frustrates us, our colleagues as well. I'd like to see the end of all forms and PDFs and things that felt like they were designed 30 years ago and nobody's bothered to update them because it's been too difficult and they've left legacy system's in place. And people are working with green and black on screens. You know, we still surround ourselves with lots and lots of stuff that is infuriating and time wasting and duplicative and loses data and doesn't have API's, and it's just in the wrong place. So I'd love to, I'd love to see us getting through that hump of bad stuff, investing a bit. And moving to a world where jobs are better. We can look after people much more effectively, we can understand who a person is in front of us and what contact they've had with the other parts of the state or all that stuff, which has been as true an observation 20 years ago, it is now but we haven't cracked it. So I'd like to see that disappearing, and people being free to do public service, as befits their calling. And their profession.

Great answer. So this question has had 174 likes. It's kind of a suggestion, but I'm going to read it out and get your views. So it says could all government and local government offices become places of work? So you had one government pass, one IT system and you could just I guess it's the flexible working and you could work in any government office in any part of the country. What do you think of that as an idea Alex?

I love that idea. And I'm pleased to hear how many likes it's got. So one of the things that we have been thinking about for these hubs that I mentioned earlier, the 14 new, is that they're not just one department. It's going to be multiple departments within that, they're really government hubs. And as part of that, where we'd like to get to, and it won't be on day one, but where we'd like to get to, is absolutely the case. Then, as a civil servant, you can go and work in your local hub, it's a government office, your pass will work, your IT will work, you'll get through security. And there'll be space, touchdown space for you to access, Wi Fi or meeting room space, if you need to have a meeting. That's exactly where I would like to get us to. So thank you very much. And I'm pleased to hear that's a popular, popular suggestion.

I'm going to loop back on two D&I questions that have come through and I'll start with Alex. Someone's asked the question that we've been very successful in getting women in senior positions. What can we learn from that to make sure we do the same for our BAME colleagues.

Great. Well, thank you. And look, you know, I was lucky at a BEIS where I was before to have made, I think, six Director General appointments, four of them women which is great. And that's certainly improved, and one from a BAME background. So that it did make an impact there because it meant that everybody working the department, they looked at the top of the department and they thought, well, gosh, that seems like the rest of us, you know, and that's been really positive. I think what's been important within that definitely has been, you know, pretty active talent management. You know, we've put a lot of effort into trying to build up networks of people. When we use headhunters, we kind of you know, push them hard to come up with really diverse lists. Really went out of our way to kind of position the department as a place that was really welcoming to people from all different backgrounds and including, you know, women with young children, people from BAME background's and others. Everyone should feel you can be a successful leader in this organisation. There's no kind of identity kit that you know, one version of what leadership looks like. So that's all worked really well. But I think that, you know, it does, you know, to what Richard was saying before, SCS BAME is 6.6%. That's twice what it was. It's half what it needs to be. And we've got, you know, the next three or four years to be able to achieve that doubling up again, and that's going to require a very active programme and sponsorship and really inviting people and make them feel you can do this job, you can be successful. Come and join us.

Okay, and staying on the D&I theme, someone has asked that they know that you two probably have very busy day jobs. So they've asked what resources underneath you do you have to make sure that you can deliver the change and ambition on D&I that you've set out? Can say a little bit about that, Richard?

Yes, certainly. So the the champion job. It's a great job because I can roam across government. I can ask people questions and challenge people and make the case for and convene. It's not a job with leaders in all departments. So it's a persuasion job rather than an executive job. So that has inherent limitations. But there is an excellent team in the Cabinet Office that is focused on my batch, which is ethnicity, the ethnic diversity programme, and there are, and it's programmatised. And they run our talent programmes, and they run our engagement sessions, and then our mentoring sessions, and I meet them every week or every fortnight to work out what we're doing. So that is where my results come from. It's not the MOJ part of my job. It's run through the from the Cabinet Office because it's regarded quite rightly, in the centre as something that needs dedicated resource and dedicated programming. We could do more with more. But I think the other part of it is, as I was saying earlier, to get into departments and make independent individual departments realise that they too, need to resource and invest in this as a subject and then networks as a sounding board.

We've probably got time for two or three more questions. I'm going to ask this. It's an interesting one, somebody has asked, are the panels surprised by the themes? Did you expect these themes? Or is there anything else that you were expecting to be asked? So what's top of your mind? You've heard what's top of staff's mind? I'll start with Alex on that one.

I think they've been good questions and they're questions on my mind as well. I suppose the only, you know, the thing that kind of gives me a lot of sort of pause really is just, I suppose the situation we're in. I mean, some of you maybe heard what I said yesterday, at the opening of CS live that I just do feel as a country, the combination of having going through this incredible pandemic, the economic consequences of that align with other big changes we're making, like leaving the EU huge ambitions and levelling up net zero as was saying before. I mean, those, every one of those is a massive thing. And we're doing five massive things at one time. So I mean, it's an exciting time to be in the Civil Service, no question. It's also quite daunting, what we're trying to do. And I think that therefore that some of the things that people were saying before about let's learn from COVID about doing things faster, being more agile, getting getting more quickly to the solution, not getting bogged down in bureaucracy. Things like that are going to be really important. Probably also, we shouldn't try to do quite as many things. And we do need to kind of be a bit more focused on things that really make an impact. And be a bit more ruthless maybe about closing down projects that aren't getting anywhere or people who are, you know, who are better deployed on things that are high priorities.

Anything surprising or missing for you, Richard?

No, look I am. I was expecting pay to be as as central. We're acutely aware that many cohorts of our people are not paid competitively or not paid as competitively as the department next door, the agents next door or the office in the next County. So I'm aware of that dynamic. I expected that to come up. As Alex was saying, we are facing an extraordinary season aren't we of a possible second wave of winter flu, of the end of transition period and of economic uncertainty. And if that came through in anxiety in the questioning, it was very well hidden. So kind of hats off again to our resilience of our folk. But now more than ever, is when departments and DWP and HMRC, we've well represented on this call I know, when departments that are the automatic stabilisers that help the country through difficult times are really called upon to do their stuff. So the people listening to this call up and down the country, you are integral to the success not just the Civil Service, but of the society that we're serving.

100%. Can I say one final thing? This is maybe the last chance, Richard is a high guy to embarrass you can tell from the shirts he wears. But just to have a go at it as we've got a few thousand people watching us today. Just to say, Richard, you've been a fantastic colleague. We're talking earlier about leadership and you've been a brilliant leader at MOJ before me as Permanent Secretary at the Cabinet Office and as Race Champion, just to take the chance to thank you and salute you in this public way. Thank you.

How lovely. Well, actually, whilst we're doing mutual appreciation. There's a comment on here that says not a question. But could I just say thank you to Alex for how visible and available he's been since he took the role. So high accolades to both of you. Very last question. What message with the speakers like the listeners to take back to their staff and their networks. Very short, we've only got one minute left. If you get one message back to, through the cascade mechanism? What would it be Alex?

I think, you know, can I have to, I'd say, Well, number one, huge appreciation. I mean, really, people have been magnificent through this crisis. And that is, I had to choose one, it would be that. But I'm also

saying, please just take away the thought about how can we be better again, in future. Do take a look at Shaping our Future? Do join us in the next stage in reform of our wonderful Civil Service. Thank you.

And Richard, final words.

I'm just going to stick to thank you. Thank you and ceaseless admiration.

So, that's all for me. Thank you.

And thank you from me, thank you for all of your questions. It makes my job much easier.