

Good morning and welcome to a very special edition of Civil Service Live. We are broadcasting live from London to an audience, I'm told is over 23,000 people. So a very huge welcome to our very large audience. So today Mark Sedwill, the Cabinet Secretary can't be with us. But we'll shortly be broadcasting a message that he's recorded from Paris. And then we'll hear from our new Chief Operating Officer, Alex Chisholm. But for now over to Mark.

Hi, everyone. Mark Sedwill, the Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service here. I'm sorry, I can't be with you at Civil Service Live this year. I'm abroad, representing the country at Bastille Day and meeting some of my counterparts. But I'm more sorry that you aren't all together because Civil Service Live is one of those fantastic events, where notwithstanding all of the opportunities that are provided by technology for us to meet and listen to each other and learn, we don't really have the opportunity this year for all that informal networking, wandering past stalls seeing new opportunities that is the hallmark of the event. And let's hope that it's possible to put it together again next year, as I'm sure you will all engage in it and look forward to it then. As we start this year's event, I just wanted to start with an enormous thank you to all of you. The entire Civil Service, indeed the entire public service, should be enormously proud of the contribution that we've made to the COVID crisis and the national response to it. Everyone in this country who's needed medical treatment has had the medical treatment that they've needed. We have put together world beating programmes to shield our most vulnerable, medically and socially vulnerable citizens. And we've ensured that people needing the furlough programmes, businesses needing support from the economic crisis that's arisen as a result of COVID have also had that support and indeed those programmes were in place ahead of time. It has been a truly remarkable performance. And in my time as Cabinet Secretary, we've shown that same teamwork and application to other issues as well. Whether we look back to the Salisbury attack of a few years ago or to the preparations for Brexit, or indeed just to the day to day work, that hundreds of thousands of civil servants and their colleagues in the rest of the public service, carry out to support our fellow citizens. As we look ahead, and as I finished my term as Cabinet Secretary, there's one key message I'd like you all to take away. And that is, can we ensure that we bring together that same sense of purpose, agility, application and teamwork, to our daily work as we do so magnificently when responding to crises? I'm absolutely sure that we can, as an important agenda on Civil Service and public service reform that you'll be hearing more about later this morning. I know you'll do a terrific job of know you're continue to support our citizens, our communities and our country. And there'll be another opportunity for me to say farewell. But for now, enjoy the rest of the day and enjoy this unique Civil Service Live. And let's look forward to, as the Queen put it meeting together again at a future one. Thank you very much. Have a great day.

And now we're going to have a short speech from Alex Chisholm and then afterwards there will be a chance to submit questions and also there'll be a panel Q&A with pre submitted questions.

Hello, I'm Alex. And it's great that so many of you are here today, I think over 39,000 people registered for Civil Service Live. So if we were together, in person, we would need one of the larger football stadiums in the country. And I would be hearing not the echo of my own voice against the muted silence of an online audience but the buzz of a vast crowd. I hope at least that you're sitting comfortably. Sharon mentioned a short speech just to pace yourself this is going to take about 12

minutes. So that gives you an idea of what to expect. I've got a few things to say. I think, first of all, is that I believe that so many of you have registered for Civil Service live today at this particular moment in time, because you think that is really an exciting and important moment for those of us who work every day to serve the public. And the reason for that, as we just saw in the short videos, was that we have seen during the pandemic, how much our fellow citizens have needed in support from all of us in public service. And I must say, I'm really delighted that there's so many of you here as well because it means that like Sir Mark just now I can thank you all from the bottom of my heart for what you do every single day. And also invite you to explore with me ways we can do even better. It also means that in front of all of you, I can say on the record to Mark from all of us, thank you for your service, you have been a brilliant and brave leader, and we salute you. In the Civil Service, we work every day to improve the lives of people in this country. That has always been true but never more clearly or more importantly than during this crisis, where our collective actions have been essential to saving lives and livelihoods. The media talk about the government as if there is some impersonal institutional machine or Leviathan that has all this control and influence in our lives. But we who work in government know it as a collection of individuals and teams, friends, colleagues, characters, and it is teams of civil servants who have helped perform the brilliant feats of the last four months as we have struggled with the virus, shielding over 2 million vulnerable people, protecting millions of jobs in the furlough scheme. Preserving businesses and communities across the country with vital grants, distributing thousands of laptops to help schools deliver online education and dispensing benefits to help the many who badly needed financial support. All of this has required extraordinary ingenuity and effort from an army of civil servants, from you working your socks off. To give examples for just two departments while represented here at Civil Service Live in that first strange period of lockdown 35,000 DWP staff managed to process over 1.8 million Universal Credit claims, six times the previous number. And HMRC colleagues in just four weeks, largely from their spare rooms, designed, built, tested and launched the job retention scheme, even while staging webinars for 40,000 worried taxpayers. And you have done all of this while living through the same pandemic as everybody else, threatened and in some cases even infected by the virus, coping with locked down, caring for loved ones. As I've talked with colleagues across the service, people working in benefits offices, in the prison service, collecting tax, procuring equipment, advising ministers, running digital services, what I have heard more than anything is a mix of pride and wonder. Pride in what we've been able to do to help manage the toughest public health crisis and the biggest economic shock we have faced in decades. But also wonder that we've been able to do this so quickly. And so inventively. We've built new hospitals in weeks, set up digital services, the vulnerable in days, established new grant schemes in hours, and learnt to process Universal Credit claims in minutes. And this must give us all great hope, confidence even that we can rise to the challenge that lies before us.

And let's face it, it is some challenge.

I remember well the moment 20 long months ago, when Mark, as Cabinet Secretary addressed all of us permanent secretaries at the height of the Brexit frenzy and told us suddenly that we all needed to make no deal planning our main effort. And I remember how in March this year as the full horror of the Coronavirus pandemic hit us, Mark again had to bring us together and tell us responding, that responding to this unprecedented threat must now be for every department, the main effort. It's sobering to reflect that even with all the progress we have made, we're still contending with the

challenge of EU exit and with a response to COVID-19. And we cannot have two main efforts. Sobering also to reflect that the manifesto on which the government was elected included over 400 commitments, some of which such as levelling up, require a reversal of trends that are run for decades and others such as netzero a profound change in our systems for power, heating, transport, housing and food. Much is needed from the Civil Service to deliver these mighty objectives. We should have to blend all that we've learnt about teamwork from our can do COVID response with what the Prime Minister calls the psychic energy that has hummed through the nation over the last few months, bottle it with the extraordinary zest of Captain Tom, who at the age of 100 has raised so many millions for charity by yomping thing around his garden. And to that formula, add another refreshing ingredient for Civil Service a newly have a-go attitude to trying new stuff without the fear of failure holding us back. Inventiveness and bold experimentation were championed by Michael Gove, the Minister for the Cabinet Office in his recent speech at the Ditchly Foundation, highlighting key themes for Civil Service reform. It is he said common sense to take a method and try it and if it fails, admit it frankly and try another. It's an idea that has found its time in the era of Coronavirus when the complexity and urgency of the response, the need for sophisticated modelling and real time data, has made a powerful case for more experimentation, innovation, and increased awareness of the role of data and of science. And as renewed weight to our need to tackle the other frustrating side of the Civil Service, where we get bogged down in costly, inefficient processes and teams on the ground see problems only to clearly but their proposed solutions go nowhere. The speed at which we had to scramble a response has underlined the merits of breaking down any barriers that stop us working together, of embracing new technology and making sure all our people have had the necessary training and support do the best possible job even when having to operate at the edge of deliverability as one of my most hard pressed perm sec colleagues put it last week. Michael Gove and I are going to be talking about this at Civil Service Live tomorrow at 11:30 when you will have the chance to put questions to the two of us. He has invited us to help renew and even reinvent a Civil Service that can meet the expectations of our fellow citizens for brilliant public services. And I would like us to accept that challenge, and want you to join with me and with thousands of other civil servants, who have already begun to engage with the next chapter in Civil Service reform. A chapter whose title that you have yourselves already chosen in the registration process for this event, when you voted overwhelmingly for 'Shaping our Future'. Today, we publish our perspectives for Civil Service reform. And we call it a prospectus not because you have to subscribe for anything or you can make any money from it, but because it outlines an offer of real value that we think you might want to benefit from. With Michael tomorrow and other sessions here, we'll be challenging ourselves every stage about the best and most effective ways to strengthen our structure and culture method so that we are ready enabled for the challenges we face today. We'll draw out three key areas to ask you to focus on innovation, data, and barriers to joint working. Recognising these in turn bring into play key issues of skills and training, IT systems, office locations, in some what our 21st century workplace should look and feel like. Do we have the people with the knowledge and skills to do their jobs well? Do we all value sufficiently the time and effort it takes to learn and practice new skills? Does the Civil Service truly reflect to the people we serve and make the most of all the talents available? How can we overcome the frustrations of antiquated IT systems do a better job of sharing data.

Can we relearn how to set up major programmes so that they reliably deliver on time and on budget and achieve all their objectives? Big issues which flow into count the smaller ones? Why can't one Civil

Service pass get you into any building? Why do we operate with incompatible video conferencing systems? Why is it sometimes easier to join as a new recruit from outside than to transfer between two different departments. This Civil Service reform programme must make colleagues feel their efforts are valued, their successes rewarded, their ambitions fulfilled. With focusing on people and place and whether you have what you need to do your jobs because in so many ways, what's good for civil servants is also good for the country. Like our commitment to becoming less London centric so that you can make progress even if you're not wanting to be based in the southeast. This means more jobs becoming available in the regions and our people be more closely rooted in local needs, social, economic, health related when they make decisions. With better defined paths to promotion and recognition, colleagues will no longer feel they must switch roles to secure a promotion and higher pay. Instead, building the deep knowledge and expertise that helps drive continuous improvement. And we've redoubled awareness of our need to provide a fully diverse and inclusive working environment where everybody can give their best we can be sure every government policy in action reflects the full range and diversity of thought from people of every social, educational and ethnic background. As the Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion champion, I recognise there is much good work happening to create the fully open, welcoming and supportive work environment we want. As expressed in our core HR policies and practices, in the inspiring work of our staff networks, in the 1000 daily actions to support colleagues and lend a hand or make a stand. But there's also evidence of continuing prejudice, unacknowledged biases and unequal opportunities. So we have much work to do and must go faster and further to create a truly great place to work for everyone. By place, I mean not just your physical location, I mean your place in your organisation and on the career ladder. And whether you're in a good place mentally are you feeling stressed or well supported, overwhelmed or suitably stretched, unfocused or purposeful, daunted by the challenges we face or excited. My wish is that you feel stretched and excited by your work, well supported by colleagues, pleased to be part of something bigger than any of us, our mission of public service. Thank you for listening to me. In a moment, there'll be a chance for you to ask some questions of me and of Rupert. Before that, I like to ask something of all of you. Please take the chance to reflect here today at CS Live. And when you are back to daily work, think about where you are now and where you'd like to be. Think about where we are now and where you'd like us to be. Think what you might do to help build an even better Civil Service. Do take a look at the reform prospectus we're publishing today. Perhaps start talking to your manager or your team about doing things differently ask colleagues from other teams and agencies, what works well for them, get the ideas flowing, and importantly, please share them with us. We would love to hear them from you. Do visit shapingourfuture.civilservice.gov.uk a new website just put up today. Let me end on a personal note, many years ago, okay, decades ago, when I was starting out in the world of work, I met an inspiring leader. He had great responsibilities, but was modest with it. His job, he said simply was to help other people be successful. I remember that dictum so well, and so often it's become like a part of me. It's what I said to myself when I applied to the job I do now. And now that I have that job, it's what I offer to you. My promise to work for you, to help you be successful, to help us deliver for the public, to help us be truly a brilliant Civil Service. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Alex, you now have to imagine the applause of 23,000 people. Thank you. And we are now going to take some pre submitted questions, and we're going to ask the ones that were voted for the most popular questions. And it's very interesting this year, the most popular question isn't about pay. It's the second most popular so we will get to that. The first question I'm going to ask is about the

impartiality of the Civil Service. And there are about three questions bundled up in this, but I'll do them one at a time. And I'll start with Alex. Can the Civil Service still be considered politically impartial given the recent new appointments of the National Security Adviser?

Thanks a lot, Sharon. Thanks for asking that question. Look, I really understand why it's being asked at this point in time. Let me say a couple of things. I think, first of all, that the neutrality of the Civil Service, the way in which we operate as a very meritocratic system is I think, the kind of cornerstone of our strength as a service much admired across the political spectrum. Now, as much as ever and indeed, internationally as well is probably the key reason why we're seen as number one in the world for effectiveness. That said, I think that whenever you get a new administration come in, they are always going to look and see whether the balance that they have of the different functions that different departments, the organisation of structures at the centre, and indeed some key appointments is to their liking. And, you know, so far we have seen how a number of appointments they have chosen to make as political appointments rather than Civil Service appointments. I think that is just the same as we have seen from previous administrations. There's nothing particularly strange or unusual about that. And the particular role separating out the National Security Adviser from the Cabinet Secretary Well, that's been separated before and indeed has more normally been separated. So I wouldn't want to read too much into it. So I don't have any, any concerns about the politicisation of the Civil Service. And indeed, you know, I talk to politicians and special advisers, of course as part of my day to day work, and what they would say is we want a more effective Civil Service. We want a Civil Service that's ready for these huge challenges that we face. I've never seen any, heard anybody say we want a Civil Services, more party political that's just not been part of the conversation at all.

So can I ask you to say a little bit more about your assessment of the relationship between civil servants and this new administration of ministers? They're not new anymore. Actually. They've been here a year.

Yeah, I think it's been pretty intense I think is the reality. If you think about, you know, the administration that was returned on the manifesto, obviously, you know, very focused on leaving the EU as we did at the end of January, and then, you know, had hardly begun on this very ambitious set of reforms, you know, around levelling up and addressing, you know, some issues around homelessness, for example. And then this, this virus hits us and so I think that the, the interworking between civil servants, and politicians and advisors, made necessary by the virus has been, you know, absolutely intense and I've seen at first up, you know, from dawn until dusk, people working in intermix teams just to try and make the best decisions on the best available evidence. So has probably been more intense than ever. Like any intensity, it brings its pressures, you know, that's not always comfortable. There's areas for debate, for disagreement, but you'd expect that. So on the whole, I think relations have been good. And I've really enjoyed, particularly if I could say, you know, working with Michael Gove and the team in the Cabinet Office, in trying to design this whole Civil Service reform effort to try and make sure that it's something which is not done to the Civil Service or purely by the Civil Service, but is a kind of co invention and co delivery model. Can I add something to that?

Which is, I think that Sharon, I think that just building on what Alex has said it's really key for any good leaders, good organisations to, to want expertise and objective challenge. And that's what every

government gets when they are working with civil servants. That's fundamental to our values of honesty, integrity objectivity and impartiality. And I'd really encourage people actually to, and I'm sure we'll talk about it tomorrow, to look at Michael Gove Ditchley speech where he talks about the importance of capability and, and expertise. And I think that is fundamentally linked to impartiality and to what civil servants, the public, and actually the rest of the world value and admire in civil servants.

Thanks. And final question on this theme, and I know you both work closely with Dominic Cummings. The question is, is Dominic as big a threat to the Civil Service as the media would have us believe?

No, he's not, I'm very happy to say so. As you'd expect, I see a fair amount of Dom Cummings and I mean, maybe just to kind of bring it open. If you were, if you'd been a member of the Government Digital Services, GDS, then Dominic and I've shared a platform together talking to all staff groups, such as we have in any department, any function and he couldn't have been more praising of the efforts of GDS staff, more appreciative of what they've been doing. And, you know, those those are civil servants, same as any other. I mean, Dom is, you know, impatient for better, he is pretty unrelenting in his own focus and work. But that is is not out of any kind of disaffection for civil servants who he is working with very successfully every minute of every day. So, I really don't I don't accept that media version of events.

Okay, we will move on to the second most popular topic, which is around public sector pay. Can Alex give his view of what the prospects for pay for civil servants will be over the next 10 years and then I'll go to Rupert.

The prospects of pay gosh, well, I would hope that they will, will improve. You know, I understand, you know, like, everybody, everyone would like to be better paid. And, you know, I think about the all the time that I've been in the Civil Service There's been ups and downs, but we've struggled to be competitive with the private sector. I think we're probably at this point in time, we've just obviously had the, you know, small increases one and a half to two and a half percent. And that's not that's not huge, but by any stretch, but then I compare that with the private sector, and I see a lot of people there are worrying about having any employment at all, obviously, facing into potentially very large scale redundancies in the latter part of this year. So I think, you know, when you look at the overall package, that is a reminder that steady increases and a high level of job security is worth is worth something to all of us. I think the other thing that is really striking is that we're very unusual now as an employer and having a defined benefits scheme and one in which the employer contribution is very significant. So, you know, recognising that most people live a long life now, the value of that pension is is very substantial and you know, is part of the overall package. So what I think looking forward, I, you know, I would expect us to have pay progression, especially, you know, reflecting improvements in our capabilities and skills, which is what we hope to get. And I think that will be necessary. We've got to be competitive, we want to the work we do is incredibly difficult. It's very demanding. It really matters, as I've just been saying in the speech. So we have to recognise that in the overall package that we give to people.

Rupert.

Thanks, Sharon. I think that several things when we're thinking about about pay and about the, the offer we get as civil servants. The first is, it is important that pay is fair. And I think that's particularly linked to point that Alex referenced, which is if we're looking at the way in which we want pay in the Civil Service to evolve, it would need to be, needs to be looking at recognising that as people progress in their jobs, they acquire more skills, more capability, become more productive. And that should be should be recognised. I think that's a very important theme as we look over the next decade about reward, not just in the Civil Service, but more but more generally, but something that we need to focus on. And Alex has referenced the fact that our rewards are actually slightly different for most people in the economy. If you've got a an employer contribution equivalent of 27% of your salary, and almost three quarters of the rest of the UK population are only getting contributions between two and 8%, then that's really quite a significant difference. And that needs to be that needs to be factored in. As do things like job security at relative to other parts of the economy and the way in which hopefully we can offer more flexible ways of working. But all that needs to be considered in the round. And one of the really important things I think is part of the prospectus that Alex mentioned in his speech is how do we want this to evolve to be as effective as possible? How do we encourage people to stay in their roles and get recognised and rewarded for that? How do we encourage people to come in and out of the Civil Service and between departments in the easiest possible, the easiest possible way? So quite a lot of things for us to talk about and develop, I think over over the coming years.

Thank you. Again, quite a few questions around representation from Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues in senior levels of the Civil Service, but also a question about representation of speakers of these events over the next two days, and I'll turn to Alex first. What will the Civil Service be doing actively to promote diversity and inclusion at all levels?

Great, thanks. Look, I really welcome the question. I mentioned already that I am the Diversity and Inclusion champion for Civil Service and I was really keen to take that role on as part of the COO position because I think it's so important to everything that we do. I think that, you know, when I look at the the progress the Civil Service has made, I think it's up to about now 12.7%, I think of civil servants from memory have come from BAME background, which is, you know, obviously much better than it was a decade ago, which was less than nine I think then.

But it's still not yet fully representative of the country.

And as your question says,

Sharon, which you read out, is particularly unrepresentative at the top, and that is a huge issue. And I think that it's, it's 6.6%, I think, at the end of last year was the BAME proportion of the senior Civil Service. And that is, I suppose that, you know, there's twice as good as it used to be, but half as good as it needs to be and there's a, you know, a big programme, which I must say I take very seriously, I know Rupert and all the HR colleagues do. Every single Permanent Secretary leader, we've discussed this a lot every member of the Civil Service Leadership Group really recognised this is incredibly important to prove representation because we cannot afford not to make the best use of all the talent in our midst that in the whole country, and at the moment, we're not making full use. So that is something that we need to be really, really focused on achieving and changing. I think in terms of representation at

Civil Service Live, I mean, I'm on a panel later with BAME colleagues, and I think actually, half the panels are BAME represented, I think. There also, there's a gender balance there. There's, you know, as you'd expect, a lot of thought has gone to make sure that the the topics and themes and speakers are from a very representative group, but also what's important is not just who's doing the talking, but what's, what's being discussed and what actions flow from that.

Rupert. Can I bring you in? And yeah, absolutely. I mean, what do you what do you think we should be doing more of?

This, I think this is something which we need to put a lot of energy into. I mean, just on the, on the point of pushing the level of senior representation, which is which is so important, we need to be representative at every level of the Civil Service, of all dimensions of the UK where people are based, what their backgrounds were, what type of skills they have, and particularly gender and the, the ethnic group that people come from. And that is not at an acceptable level at the most senior levels, as Alex has said, it's got better but it's got a lot further to do. And that's why to go, and that's why I think having the targets which we have now are particularly particularly important. It's not just about representation, though, it's about what happens when people get into the room. And, and how, how people interact. And one of the reasons why we focus not just on representation, but also on inclusion, and the experience that people have and actually there are colleagues and underrepresented groups who don't have the experiences which I think we would all want people to have in the workplace. So I'll actually just like to suggest two practical things on this point. One is when, when we go into a room, and we're in a meeting or on a conference call, just ask ourselves, is this actually a representative group that I'm in? I think now that people would actually increasingly feel a bit weird if they were going into a room and a meeting, which was only one gender. And I think people need to feel the same way about the diversity of the groups they're in, generally. And the other the other point is around applying for jobs. If you, if you're constructing a job ad, and this becomes important at every level but including to more senior levels, have you really honed it down to the true essential criteria, what's really required. Not anything extraneous. And if you are looking at a job ad and you're wondering, can I actually do that job. Have a look at it and challenge whether you think that it's criteria are, are actually what's needed for it. And that's somewhere where our networks are doing great work as well.

Thanks. And the final pre submitted questions, although there are quite a few coming in on this topic is around, working from home and being able to demonstrate that we are just as productive working from home throughout the pandemic. So the question I will ask is, do you see this as the new normal working from home? And if not, what are the timescales for people returning fully back to the workplace? I'll start with Alex on that one.

Great, thank you, a great question. I really understand why people are asking that. And I suppose the first thing to do is to recognise that Civil Service is actually quite a mixed experience for people there because you've got people like prison officers or people working in benefits offices who have been not working from home at all have been working in their usual place of work, and we're most grateful to them for doing so. Other departments including actually my own department, Cabinet Office, we've been able to have quite a high proportion of people working successfully from home. I think the early evidence we've got from that is that that has been extremely sustainable. We've actually had 92% of our

workforce have been able to work on that basis, which is, which is good. And it's also a great testimony to the, both the technology that we have now and the platforms we work off. But also, you know, frankly, as ever, to the amazing resilience and adaptability of civil servants. I think, you know, when I talk to people, I do recognise that there are some, you know, some welfare issues there, not everybody is happy about working from home, it suits some people very much, they're happy to avoid the travel, they find it convenient. They like to mix it with their family life, great. Other people don't want to work from home at all, find it difficult place to work for any number of reasons, some very serious ones. So I think when we think about our, you know, our return to some kind of kind of new post-Covid reality it'll be different from what we had before. I don't think we'll ever go back to what we had before. But I don't think we will keep the same levels of working from home that we have now. I think it'll be a mixed economy model. It will vary between different departments, different functions. I hope we'll be able to give a lot of weight not only to productivity questions, but also to welfare questions, people who want to work from an office type environment. I also hope that we can be a lot more flexible, it's not just one place of work, you could work in a government office, a number of different ones that's part of the potential of you know, reducing the dependence on the on London particularly. And I think that the value of this for us you know, if we get it right is that again, it will make us a very attractive employer and make us able to provide a fantastic service as we do now to the public and to ministers, but in a much more flexibly, flexible way.

You have anything to add to that Rupert?

Just building on what Alex has said, I think that the the two, from the survey's which we done and thanks to everyone who's participated in those about working remotely.

I think people generally feel about, it's productive.

The area, which is and Alex alluded to it, is a concern is just making sure that we're taking into account the wellbeing that face to face contact actually does does involve. I'm actually with Alex, I think that we're going to move to a much more mixed economy about about how we work when we come out of this.

Thank you. And I'm going to change tack and move to the iPad where questions are coming in live. We have a question here on bullying and harassment. And the question is basically year after year, it doesn't get dealt with what are we going to do about it? I'm going to start with Rupert on this one.

Well, any any bullying and harassment is completely unacceptable. And if I start with a slight glass half full view, there are places quite intense work environments in government where it's close to zero. So we know it can be achieved. And that's why I think the approach of zero tolerance to it is, is really important. And it's very distressing for me personally to see in in parts of my areas where I see scores, which I think are, are unacceptable. Each one of those is an individual story of someone who is feeling upset and unwelcome and uninvolved at work. So I think it's really important that people take advantage of the channels that are available to raise the issues. I think people also need to be thinking about the unconscious message, we all send unconscious messages, which can be misinterpreted as well. So there's that sort of that one end of the spectrum, but also some really unacceptable behaviours

that can happen and they happen in workplaces all over the world, but we want the Civil Service to be one of the best places to work in the world. And that means, I think, absolutely zero tolerance for that, and I believe that we can, we can get there.

Thanks, Alex, I know we've discussed this a lot in our board meeting. Yeah. And can you say something about the tangible things you want to see happen to eradicate this across the workplace?

Yeah. So I think, you know, first of all, it's really important that it should be safe for people to challenge and and not feel there are consequences. So that's something which we're improving our kind of whistleblowing type type support there. And also the the counselling and the discreet support for individuals who are affected by it. So that is one part of it. I think the bigger thing really, for us in terms of changing it though, is to really hold people accountable at management level for what's happening in their units. And we've been doing that, as you say Sharon, within the Cabinet Office. We've had a real focus on this. We're looking both at individual units where they've got brilliant BHD scores and say what are you doing that everyone else can learn from, but also frankly, looking at the other end of that spectrum and saying these ones where it's totally unacceptable and you need to fix that and holding individual Directors General, Directors DDs, to bring it down to DD level, responsible for making sure that their people working in that area do not experience BHD because that's really where, where the change needs to happen.

Thanks. And I will take one on bandwidth and prioritisation. So the question was how can we engage constructively with ministers on what we stopped pause or delay to reprioritize in these unprecedented times?

Great, it's, it's always it's always a question. And I've also been, you know, in a kind of, you know, people agree to prioritisation in theory, but not in practice, they often want to add more things to it. And of course, we all recognise in politics it can be difficult to get out of an area to say you're gonna do something and then not do it and see the opposition challenge you on that but if we're ever going to prioritise now it does seem to be the time and I think there's a real willingness to do that at the centre. I've been really impressed by that, the new administration, obviously it's it's required a great focus to deliver, EU exit and then to complete the transition at the end of this year. COVID has required a phenomenal focus. And kind of as I said, in Mark's words, the main effort from the government. Levelling up this hugely ambitious agenda there. I mean, those those three things on their own are really big and important, but we're doing a big international review of global security. So when we look at the sheer capacity of the system this has to be prioritised, and prioritised. Excuse

me. Alex used a great phrase actually, you can't have two main efforts. I think there's just about an, I think one of the things that we saw last week that the Infrastructure and Projects Authority, IPA produced its annual report, it's really to see how far we've come actually over the past decade. And in thinking about prioritisation and and projects and project discipline, and the more that we practice that in everything however small the projects are I think the better.

Yeah. So I think I mean, for civil servants watching this, I mean, don't be shy in coming forward with ideas. If you can see things which you think, look, it's just not possible to do all of this, or this particular

thing is not realistic within that timeframe or that resource, then do share that with your managers. Because I do think that this, this government recognises in a pretty unique situation, and we do need to focus.

Thanks. And this one has had 163 likes so I better read it out. So it said at last year's opening address, both John and Mark discussed aiming the jobs at getting them out of London and senior jobs out of London. It's just nothing's changed. When will they see progress?

Yeah, I can I can, I come in on that?

So this is this is really important. And I go back to I said before about being representative across across the UK. So I'm really pleased to say that we're now working within Civil Service HR. We used to actually to be in this building that we're in in central London, we're in the process of moving our HQ to to Manchester. We will still have people spread around the country in other places. We've got people and teams in Leeds and Sheffield and Newcastle. And that really should be the should be the norm. So I think that work is happening. And I also think that what's happened over the past months has really, is going to accelerate that, if I think almost 16 years of cultural change has probably been compressed into less than six months. And we need to take advantage of that.

Yeah. And just to add and I have discussed this with the Prime Minister, you know, directly he is an enormous enthusiast for the presence of the UK Government right through the whole of the UK, cities and towns and in every in every part, in all the devolved administration's as well. He rightly thinks that having that presence will be very good both for local economic activity, but also for perspective, to make sure that people really connect with local communities. As a former mayor, you know, he really gets that. So I think there's very strong leadership from the top there. To Rupert's point I think COVID has broken the kind of myth that we can't work remotely, that we need to be always present. I think that is really good. And I've seen, obviously any number of ministers, senior officials getting used to working, as we all have been on our Zoom calls and everything else. So that has really made a big difference. The third thing, I think, is just that there's no point in just willing it without the capacity and we have now invested in a major programme for places for growth, there are 14 hubs capable of of housing 49,000 civil servants will be ready in the next two years. So that is going to bring about a big change in the shape and distribution of the Civil Service, which I'm enormously positive about.

I've been to one of those hubs, and they're great.

Trying to group themes here, so there's some on skills and some on recruitment, and especially, so there's one here, which is worth pointing out, are we going to change our recruitment practices to draw on experience rather than how well somebody can sell themselves?

Yeah. So if I can just to say, absolutely. And I think one of the big changes that we've made over the past few years has been the introduction of Success Profiles, I'd really encourage people to have a look at those and see how they operate. What we used to have and it was always raised about four, three or four years ago in Civil Service Live sessions like this, where people said your competency based recruitment is too narrow. It's not letting me as a as an experienced individual, show what I've, what I've

got and my strengths. And that was, that was one reason why I bought in Success Profiles. So absolutely. And ultimately, as well linking our reward system to that. Yeah.

And I just add that the Ditchley lecture that Rupert mentioned before by Michael Gove was really strong about that. It's really recognising the value of deep domain knowledge. And also, you know, frankly, recognising people for their record of achievement.

And and building on that I know, in the Ditchley speech, Michael Gove mentioned deep expertise, and there's a question here, I'm going to link it. There's a question on how are we going to help people get these deep expertise And then there's another question further down about how can we help people learn and develop in a home working situation as well and doing home, learning from home? I guess?

Well, if you haven't, we've got about 200,000 of us are logged on to our new learning platform for government, those departments where it's been rolled, rolled out. So taking advantage of that platform, and the online opportunities that exist, and we'll we'll continue to, to build on that, as well as other face to face and on the job learning opportunities. And but this is a big feature for, for us and for this government to really make sure that people have the opportunity to learn deeply and broadly and become highly capable, as Alex has said, in their roles. And we've got the platforms for that now, through professions, through functions, through particular departmental programmes, we're really going to be building that up. So so that's actually a watch this, watch this space one because we've got some really exciting things coming in the coming months and over the next year. Yeah. And I'd

like to, you know, just add two things about that. One is that there is a lot of expertise in the Civil Service. We don't always make them make the most of it. But there is a lot of deep expertise and those incredible feats I was mentioning earlier in the speech about, you know, the Coronavirus job retention scheme and the, the standing up, you know, 1.8 million Universal Credit applicants in a few weeks, I mean, those those things reflect deep expertise and knowledge of systems and how and what can be done. And so isn't it's not just hard work. It's actually deep knowledge that enables us to do that. I think the other thing is that, you know, when I compare us with the sort of the best organisations in the world, we probably don't invest as much time and effort in training each other and in building up deep knowledge. So I'd like that to be a real a real feature of the reform effort that we're all engaging in and for that, and obviously requires some investment of time and money to do that. But I think if we don't do that, and we'll be under skilled and less expert that we need to be for the tremendous challenges we face. So I think that's a vital thing for us to do.

We've got time for two more questions. The first one's going to be on reform. And it basically says, if we're so brilliant, and all of the thanks that you've given today, why do we need such fundamental reform?

Okay, so I think we, we are brilliant at our best, we are really, really, you know, as good as anybody maybe better. And there's a lot of evidence in support of that, if you can see the trust we get from the public, the international recognition, various benchmarks we do, but we're not great in every possible respect. And I think the times we live in, you know, people really expect a lot from government, they, they're dependent on government and public services are not always brilliantly delivered. There's no

question about that. You know, we don't we're not always efficient. We're not always able to do what we want to in a very agile and quick fashion. And if you're a citizen trying to access services, that's not always possible to do quickly and well. So we are a brilliant Civil Service but we need to redouble our efforts to be better again, because the times we live in require that.

We've been through two massive and are in two massive learning experiences for our whole systems. And being able to build on to build on that and become a true learning organisation I think is really critical for us. Thank you. Have we lost the signal?

And then finally, I guess you know, we're going through a period of change some people find it unsettling. Can both of you, I'll start with Alex, say something about the opportunities for the Civil Service and civil servants over the next year or two?

Well, I think this is going to

I completely agree with what Alex has said. And actually, I think we're going to enter a really interesting period where people will look at what's happening in government and the Civil Service and public service more generally, from outside and see there are massive lessons to learn. Think about all the work that's happened from the MOD and the forces in, and the NHS in setting up the Nightingale hospitals and that's an amazing an amazing feat, what Alex mentioned about HMRC and furlough, and DWP and benefits, people can look at what's happening, what we're all doing in the Civil Service and see that as actually quite inspiring, and something that they can learn from, as well. And we're gonna learn a lot more over the coming, over the coming years. It's a really exciting time, I think, to be working in government.

be a great time to work in government. I mean, it's uh, you know, it's it's a tough time because of so many things we're trying to do but I think that the, you know, with us coming out of the European Union, with us dealing with this incredible pandemic, with us trying to find our own way again in the world, with us taking advantage of the amazing, amazing digital transformation taking place. I mean, this is a brilliant and exciting time to be working in government, again, a time when our fellow citizens really depend on us for doing a great job, where I think we have learned to be ever more collaborative and to appreciate each other and, and to be very good at working together. So, I mean, I think it's going to be full of opportunities. I think taking it at a more kind of individual level as well. You know, part of our proposition is, look, work where you want to work, don't feel you need to be pulled down to work in London, or necessarily even to work in an office, work on things that you think are important or exciting and matter. We will we will support you in your journey of change and development as you want to acquire new skills and learn about new things. And we'll support you as well when you bring challenge to us and say look, try something new. Here's some innovations, have you thought about that? So I think that really is, you know, should be, should make it for all of us a really exciting time to be working in the Civil Service.

Thank you. I'm going to use my privilege to ask the audience a question. Then I'm going to ask the panel the same question and I'm just interested to know how you found the digital online experience of

Civil Service Live, so please leave us feedback and do do the feedback forms. I'm also going to ask the panel do you think this is the way forward, digital engagement? I'll start with Alex on that one? Well, to

tell the truth, I mean, you'll remember Sharon that when I joined the Cabinet Office just three months ago, one of the questions was, should we do Civil Service Live this year? Because we, you know, we're in the middle of the virus, we thought people would be very distracted. And it obviously, wasn't going to be possible to meet physically and, you know, we talked about and we said, well, let's, let's make a virtual of it. Let's do it online. And like, with 39,000 people registered for this event, that's a pretty good, pretty good turnout. So so I'm positive about it. And I think what probably isn't the scope for is the kind of informal connections where you sort of, you know, bump into people in the in the queue for coffee as it were. Also, you know, I recognise that, you know, and I appreciate people listening to this. I can't see you, I can't hear you. It feels a bit less interactive like that. I know you're getting a lot of questions on your, your iPad Sharon. So I think on the whole, I would hope, a good experience. But you know, we're just starting it. We've got two days to go. So we'll get our feedback. And we'll draw conclusions at the end of that, by the way, just in case I don't get a chance thank you, Sharon, for chairing this. You're doing great.

Yeah. Thanks, Sharon. And I think that it's actually, it's going to be one of the channels that we should be be using. And I absolutely agree with Alex about having the opportunity for chat, as well, the networking. But if people have got questions or things they want to raise individually, then do please email us as well.

Well, thank you very both. I have to say I miss the applause. Can we have an applause machine next time?

Let's give a virtual applause to the panel. Thank you very

much. Thank you.