

So, this is our regular Wednesday Morning Colleagues meeting but it's irregular in a couple of ways, partly because you've got me in the chair today, as Mark, as you know, is in Paris, on NATO business. Also because rather than having just permanent secretaries here we are joined by four reform champions, Civil Service Reform champions. So please join me in welcoming Roxanne and Jessica Blakely, Carmen Suarez and Gerri Clement.

Also, it's unusual in that we've got many thousands of our colleagues around the Civil Service to join us. So that is great. And I hope that we will do justice to their expectations. Let me say a couple of things upfront about Civil Service Live just from the first day. I know lots of you have been participating on panels as part of that. Just been doing a Q&A session with Richard who I see is just joining us here online.

Themes that we are getting, particularly on the first day, very strongly interested in diversity and inclusion as you'd expect in the year of inclusion, and a lot of questions I think about the impartiality of Civil Service and about whether that still holds firm, which it does, the of course, interest in remote working and and the balance between working from home compared to work in the office for many people, as ever questions about pay, about skills about the interoperability of technology and a lot of interest, a lot of enthusiasm in the kind of reform agenda, which we're really going to focus on today in our discussion. And that also was something which we launched yesterday, online with our new prospectus, The Civil Service Reform; Shaping our Future. And I hope you've seen that. Also the speech setting out some of that is now on GOV.UK. So just before we get into discussing that, I should just also, as we normally do, note a couple of major events in the last few days. I think probably the two that I wanted to call out were, first of all, the launch of the EU exit transition: 'Let's get going' campaign to try and help businesses and individuals across the country to make sure they take the necessary steps they need to be ready for when we complete the transition process at the end of the year. So that got started beginning of this week, you've probably seen a lot of the billboards and other advertising there. Secondly, you'll have seen that the DCMS Secretary of State made a statement yesterday in the House of Commons about Huawei and about the terms on which Huawei technology can be used in future in 5G and 4G networks. So those were two, I think, sort of prominent things just to make sure everyone was aware of. Anything else that people wanted to highlight up front of the stage? Looking at the raise hand functionality, or you can shake your head, no? Sounds like no. In which case, let's get into the sort of main topic, which is really trying to I think reflect on the various Intense experiences we've had across the Civil Service in dealing with COVID-19, and trying to sort of extract from that, what that really tells us about ourselves and about the future shape of the Civil Service and reform efforts. So, and I think the, excuse me, the first person lined up to talk about that is Jonathan Jones, who is the chair of the Civil Service People Board and Head of the Government Legal Department. So Jonathan, if you want to kick off

Hi, yes. Can you hear me?

Great. Well, thanks. He wants me to talk quickly about emerging from COVID, which we all obviously hope to do. And the first thing perhaps, is to say how amazingly well and with what speed and resourcefulness the Civil Service has responded to the challenges of COVID. And I know you talked about that in your speech yesterday, and we're going to get examples of that. How basically the country

couldn't have coped without us. We should really be proud of what we've done. And we've innovated and created these structures and changed the ways we work. But the question is, how do we learn from that and build on what we have done? There's obviously a lively debate going on about that, about what a post COVID world might look like. And, for example, how quickly people will return to the office. So all of that is still very live. But in a piece of work that we did in a group of heads of department, we identified a handful of themes, which I thought I just quickly share, and they touch on some of the things you've already mentioned Alex. First of all, that we will need to continue to make better use of new technologies, science and data, both in the way we operate and in how we make and implement policy. Secondly, in fact, on this too, we'll need to continue to upskill our people and give them whatever tools that they need to perform the levels that we've seen throughout the crisis, and that will continue to be needed. Whatever the exact balance we end up with between office working and remote work, it does seem inevitable that there will be more about working. And we should embrace that. And that will play into the agenda on location, because it should make it easier for civil servants to work and progress in their careers without having to be in, or to come to London. So I think one way or another, we will definitely see more remote working. We should continue to work across boundaries between different departments and different parts of the public sector. Again, the crisis shows we can do that very successfully when we have to. We should be sensitive to the interests of different communities and sections of society, including minorities, both in our own workforce and in the public we serve. And then the last thing is we should continue to look after the wellbeing of our people.

All of treatment, everybody's been affected in different ways. By COVID and by lockdown, some of whom have been struggling, some will embrace the opportunities to change in the works in different ways. Others will need lots of support, and we must make sure that nobody gets left out. So those are the themes that we identified that we think will be relevant to emerging from COVID.

Brilliant, thanks, Jonathan. I'm going to keep moving because the lots of lots of people who I know will want to come in so perhaps they could invite David Williams next from the Department of Health, obviously right at the centre of the response to COVID. David, what points would you like to bring up?

Alex, thanks. I just want to talk a bit about innovation at speed, really building on some of the points that Jonathan's brought out. And it shouldn't be a surprise to us that innovation has been at the heart of our response really across the board, to COVID. From cutting edge research into the disease itself, as a potential vaccine, a material shift in our use of technology to support remote GP appointments and outpatient appointments. With our rapid development of population-scale testing and contact-tracing enterprise, and helping UK industry shift its focus to design and make ventilators and personal protective equipment. Lots of examples of innovation at pace. I want to highlight one particular example around the Nightingale hospitals. In my normal job, I oversee the government's manifesto commitment for building 14 new hospitals. And one of the frequent challenges from from Number 10 is the time it takes to plan and build them, on average over five years to build a single hospital. In April, we delivered for Nightingale hospitals with over 2000 critical care beds in just 17 days, and more than followed. 234 kilometres of cabling and wiring, 30 kilometres of walls and partitions which is about the length of London Underground Circle Line. Really, really good work and great examples of partnership working across organisations and professions. Really good example of the importance of a clear goal and empower teams to deliver it, a clear focus on the user, whether it's the patient or staff. And the

decision of the layouts, particularly around flow around the facilities, and great use of modern construction techniques, modular construction, offsite fabrication to deliver at pace. And just a fantastic example of how the Civil Service, the wider public sector, and our colleagues in the Armed Forces can really shift into gear when needed. And to final quick points from me just on innovation in the way that we as civil servants have responded. Firstly, I think the disease has challenged us to think differently about how we frame policy and in particular picking up on your points beginning, I'm thinking here about the spotlight on inequalities and race, from the reports by Kevin Fenton and Yvonne Doyle, and we clearly need to respond to that. And it's challenges over how we work, even in the DHSC being in the thick of things, over 90% of our people have been working from home. New teams have formed from the broadest range of backgrounds imaginable. And I'm immensely proud and appreciative of the resilience, the agility, flexibility and dedication that are our people have shown. Thanks.

And thank you so much, David. That's great examples there of innovating at speed. Tamara Finkelstein from Defra, perhaps you'd like to come in now.

Thanks. Really inspiring to hear that from Dave and echo lots of what he said about what we've seen in in our people. And in Defra, we've been learning a huge amount as everyone has from the from the COVID experience, including how we can work better across our multiple locations across the UK. So actually, the majority of our colleagues are located outside of London and the southeast, but that is not matched by our culture, or the balance of all of senior roles and so colleagues spend their time in normal time travelling to and staying in London and finding it much harder to build a career. So two things that come out of COVID relevant to this, two big learning points. The first I mentioned before is that with the right IT, location isn't relevant. When we started to build and built our EU exit emergency team for no deal, being in London was a prerequisite. But within a week, we had to move, as others did, our Emergency team for COVID remotely, offered lots of opportunities to people out of London and building an incredibly effective team and the same as it has been true, as for others, for the big meetings people used to travel for. So that with the right IT, location wasn't relevant. But the other big learning was location is very relevant in meeting our customer and citizen needs. So we've benefited from having colleagues who are really grounded in their communities. Just taking the example of a rural payments agency colleagues based in Carlisle, making payments to farmers. If you go to an all-staff session there in Carlisle, at least half the questions will actually be about agricultural reform because people are really grounded in their communities. In fact, they go home from work, and many of our colleagues are feeding the sheep. And what impact did that have? Well, when COVID hit, we were really fast to change arrangements for payment for farmers, extending deadlines, and providing a service for farmers with poor IT skills; we usually use agents and couldn't. We did it fast because people understand the communities in which they're living and are located. And we had that good connection to make that happen. So I think the learning that we take from that is that we've got to build on this way of working, and this way of listening, and not snap back which will be all too easy, and we need to be committed to continuing the shift of our centre of gravity further out of London, as part of Places for Growth where we all are committed to make that shift as part of the reform programme.

Excellent. Thank you, Tamara. I think next up is Peter Schofield, who is Perm Sec at DWP. And Peter, I'm looking at your background, you might be possibly in the Benefits Office at the moment. Is that right?

Yeah, I'm in my local job centre, which is where I've been working for a lot of the time through the pandemic, which is great, feel connected, and also, I'm not travelling on public transport into London on a regular basis. Using the power of technology, which I guess is part of the theme. I wanted to bring out really adapting and innovating delivery at pace, which is the theme that we are, we are all sharing I think, through these reflections this morning. I mean all across the Civil Service, we've seen the benefit of working digitally and investing in technology. In our case in DWP, over the first three months of the pandemic, we saw more than 2 million claims for Universal Credit, and on some days, we had 10 times a normal number of claims. Now, frankly, if we had the old system of six separate benefits, where you filled in forms, the forms had to be processed manually, we simply wouldn't have coped and people would have been waiting for their money. That would have been the big story, I think, of the pandemic period, people waiting for the support from government. But Universal Credit is a digital system, which meant that we could scale it up. It was flexible and resilient. Also colleagues could work on the system from home. And it also produces great data, which meant that we could forecast demand and put our resources where they were needed ahead of time. So it was a great example. But we've seen this all across the Civil Service, particularly in service delivery, operational delivery roles. The challenge of responding to COVID has encouraged us to push further and faster on digital transformation. You see, the thing is that machines can do the repetitive processing activities that machines do best, and that enables people to do the things that only people can do. Empathy, getting alongside the people we serve, helping us to provide a better service to the public. So really, I just want to say how much we can celebrate about the way the Civil Service has adapted, using technology alongside everything else, to provide support to people when they most needed our help. It's great to celebrate all that we've achieved over the last three months.

Thank you, Peter. I think next up is Richard, and Richard as well as being Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice. He's also Race Champion across the Civil Service.

Yeah, thanks, sir. Thanks, Alex. I was going to say a word about D&I. And I'm really pleased that the themes we've mentioned already by colleagues, and I think was, what I was going to start by saying was that sometimes in the past years, D&I has struggled to earn its place around serious tables. It's been sort of the subject of fringe activity and specialists and enthusiasts and diversity lanyards and all that and I think during COVID, it's come to life in a real sense, and it is impossible to think or measure our response to COVID, or to think about what we might do next time around without thinking about equalities. So on the inclusion side of D&I. This has been an extraordinary time for all of our people, individuals, families, teams, professional groups, whether you've been working at home or working in a prison or working the benefits centre. It's just been difficult. It's been hard. And teams have got through it by talking to each other, asking questions of each other. How are you? How's your mum? How is it for you? Caring about each other understanding that we're all responding to this differently. And that has been inclusion in a real lived sense. And I think it's been wonderful. And where we've been successful, we have done it in the most profoundly inclusive way. The diversity side of the story, I think, is a bit harder edged, and it's been mentioned by David and others. We have responded in policy in operational terms to a pandemic which affects different groups very, very differently. Different communities, as Jonathan mentioned, as well, as different sections of society. And it's our job, therefore, to understand that effect, to be ahead of it, to know how to respond to it, in everything, from

designing schools' policies, to literally designing a bit of PPE equipment to cover your face. Understanding different communities and different needs is important, incredibly important, otherwise, we will simply fail and our fundamental duty, and that requires us to get this, to understand different communities, not to wait for PHE reports telling us what we should have probably known before, certainly to be alive to data and to understand the different needs and the different ways of life and different groups in society. And the the tough bit of this is that I don't think we come through this with a clean bill of health. I don't think we've done as well as we should have done, but we have a great chance to do much better, for God forbid a second wave. And that includes not just understanding communities, but it includes being profoundly more diverse than we currently are, in responding to this and planning a response, and that's from this team, and it's through to middle management, it's through to everyone who's engaged in designing response, we have to profoundly understand and therefore represent the very, very different groups who are suffering from this pandemic. And that's been quite a tough learning exercise, I think for all of us. But when we have learned, as I say, in time for a second wave.

Great, well said, as ever, Richard,

I'm going to ask now, Bernadette Kelly, from Department of Transport to come in, because Transport has been hugely affected by lockdown and social distancing. How have you and your colleagues cope with that Bernadette? That thanks, Alex.

So people might remember a moment right at the beginning of lockdown when there was quite a lot of speculation about whether what we should do was shut down the transport network and stop people travelling to minimise risks. And actually for a day or two, that seemed like a sort of real option. I think we quickly decided that that was absolutely the wrong thing to do, not least because if we wanted key workers in the NHS and elsewhere to be able to get to their jobs, we needed a transport network that was still running because we know those people overwhelmingly do rely on public transport to get to work. So our focus throughout the crisis really has been on working with the industry to keep the trains and the buses and the and the tubes running. Even though at the height of lockdown, the number of people using public transport in particular has been down by over 95%, so a lot of those trains and buses have been pretty empty. Now, what we're starting to see is obviously people travel again. And that's a really positive thing because it's part of our economic recovery. It's part of our easing of lockdown, that people need to be able to get around again to their jobs, and to shop and do other things. But I think there are some quite big challenges ahead, which I think will also reflect on how we work in the Civil Service. Obviously, the first is how we allow more people to travel whilst ensuring that transport remains safe and that social distancing can continue to be observed. And I think the schools reopening in September is going to be a big moment, Jonathan Slater, and colleagues in DfE, and DfT, are working really closely together, to make sure that we've got buses and transport working to get all those kids back to school. But I think this is also going to mean for us, getting the right balance between working from home and working in the office. And also, it's going to mean that we need businesses, employers and schools, including ourselves wherever we can to be more flexible, and more staggered in the hours and the way we work, so that everybody isn't going to try and use the transport network at the same time. Now I have to say there's been fantastic cross government working on this with colleagues in BEIS, DfE, MHCLG, it's been a great example of how we can work across the whole

economy to help manage these challenges, and that will need to continue. And the second is how we look in positive change for the future. So we know that four in 10, people are saying that they will walk in cycle in future in journeys they wouldn't have otherwise done. That's great for health, and it's great for the environment. About the same number though were saying they'd rather drive than use other forms of transport. And that has some downside impacts obviously, on net zero, and on health. So I think the challenge for us in the Civil Service as an employer is how we help our people to lock in those positive changes and those good habits around travel, and also the choices that we make individually as well in how we choose to get to work and around our daily lives. But a big challenge for my department, but I think something we can all help and support too.

Great, thank you so much, but I got to take a pause now from hearing from Permanent Secretary colleagues, just to invite some of our reform champions who've joined us for this meeting to come in with their views and reactions, and Roxanne, I think you're first up.

Thanks, Alex. And I just want to say that actually just hearing all the feedback, what's been working well, I've never felt so proud to be a civil servant. Actually, some of what I've been hearing from the conversations on Civil Service Live and unfortunately I haven't been able to hear all of them, but I've had lots of colleagues sending me WhatsApp messages. And I've been seeing great comments on Twitter, about the conversations we've been having. And actually, I've been really proud over the last few months. I've actually had the Civil Service has come together. My team at the National Leadership centre tomorrow, we are bringing together public sector leaders across the whole country, from lots of different sectors, all talking about what we need to do and what action we need to take around COVID-19 and how we can reflect. But actually when we bring those leaders together, they are not reflecting the communities that we serve. So even though we've made great strides on diversity and inclusion, there are no nowhere near enough women in our top 200 to DG and Perm Sec level, and as a black woman, there is nobody, there's no one who's black at Perm Sec or DG level. And actually what COVID-19 has done is it's really highlighted and exacerbated the inequalities that exist in our society, around ethnicity, but also around other vulnerable communities. One of the reasons that I joined the Civil Service was because of the inequalities that I experienced, and I saw when I was growing up, and I wanted to be part of that change. And actually, I've been a bit disappointed that we haven't gone further. But I am really enthused, and I'm really hopeful that we can do so much more. And I think we've shown over the last few months, what we can do, even when we're working from home. So actually as a reform champion, we've been able to bring together people from different departments, from different sectors, it's been an amazing leveller in terms of grade, in terms of bringing people in some different functions. And I thought we were making positive strides. As civil servants we are great for having conversations, we're amazing at writing papers. But I think the test will be the action that we take, what will be different in six months, what will be different in 18 months, what will be different with different when my children during the Civil Service, maybe in 10 or 15 years, I remain hopeful. So actually, my challenge is, we've done amazing things, we all came to the Civil Service because we wanted to make a difference, as trite as it may sound, and actually we've shown that we can. And on inequalities, the the inequality that our citizens are facing cut across so many different departments. And I think we have shown particularly in the work that we're doing on the reform, that we can all come together and that we can act. So the challenge, I feel, is for us to do more on representation in our governance structures, using technology to make sure that we are levelling the conversations we're having on decision making,

on policy, because actually, we've shown that we can do that and we're showing that we can do it well. We've shown that we can work quickly. And I'm hoping that now this is an opportunity for us to overcome some of those barriers on those really entrenched inequalities. And that as a result of the conversations we're having now, things will be different in future and that the next time there is any other big major and national crisis, that we we're actually already in the best position, and we're not caught out by inequalities that have been existing for decades. If it's okay, Alex, I also just want to say something because I am the co chair of the network that represents ethnic minority senior civil servants with my colleague, Jazz at BEIS. And Richard spoke earlier, and he is, as Alex said, a Race champion, and unfortunately, he's going to be stepping down. So I just wanted also to use this opportunity to say thank you to him for the work that he's been doing because of race champion. I've been really fortunate before to observe Wednesday Morning Colleagues, and I've seen Richard like the Leadership and Talent board, and most recently I also got to observe a conversation on COVID-19 with colleagues at Civil Service Leadership Group, and Richard has gone beyond just being an ally, and being a champion. He's also been positively disruptive when it's been needed. I'd like to say thank you for that, because I've seen him kind of nudge, and push and ask those difficult conversations of his Perm Sec colleagues, which I hope will continue. And also Alex and nudge, that is going to be a great loss in Richard stepping down. And obviously, we feel that he's completely irreplaceable. But actually, race continues to be an important issue. And I would hope actually when our network met on Monday, in addition to expressing our thanks to Richard, we also hope Alex, you will move at speed to make sure that we have a strong replacement, with a fair and open competition. Thank you.

Brilliant. Well said. I thank you, I mean, it's absolutely right and proper to bear tribute to Richard's brilliant work not only as Permanent Secretary, but as right champion. But I should also just recognise that you've been brilliant yourself, for example, and in providing that kind of sometimes disruptive challenge that sometimes always kind of very positive, always very constructive, always trying to help us all create a better working environment for everybody. And thank you for doing that on top of your day job, all the work that you do for the Race to the Top network and as a reform champion. Very good. I think next up, we've got Carmen, who is on loan from from BEIS to the transition to the Task Force Europe, and has been again, a great, great source of challenge and support to us thinking about reform, so Carmen, over to you please.

Can't hear you at the moment.

I'm afraid we can't hear you Carmen.

<audio interrupted>

Do you want to...Carmen, as we can't hear you? Can I suggest that you dial off and dial back in? And then I'll give you a chance to come back. Okay. Great. Thanks. Thanks for Carmen. Sorry for the tech glitch. This is a live event. These things happen. So let me turn to Gerri Clement. Gerri, I can see you there, hopefully we'll be able to hear you as well. Gerri, who works in Civil Service HR, Gerri.

Can you hear me?

Okay, so I was thinking that from my experience of what's been going on in COVID, there are two things really that struck me that I want us to be able to maintain, and both have to do with agility. And the first one is agility of us as individuals, and then the second is agility of us as an employer. And thinking about them as individuals, early on in the COVID pandemic, I was responsible for moving people from their existing roles into new roles. And I was really struck by the willingness of so many colleagues to up sticks from their regular area of expertise to work on emerging priorities, both within Cabinet Office and across government. And it struck me that we've got tremendous motivation to use our transferable skills to serve the public good. And that agility of mindset, I think, is something that we need to maintain, and the desire to maximise the effective use of public funds. So I would say, as a part of that agility, I would encourage people not to be afraid of the new ways of working and as we embrace more intelligent technology and artificial intelligence, I think it's a really exciting time to be a civil servant. And in terms of the agility of us as an employer, I know it's not a case for everybody, for frontline workers, it's not been the case that they can work from home, but the distributed models that we have now demonstrates the flexibility and agility that the Civil Service has as an organisation, which is, I think, a really strong characteristic of ours that isn't always replicated elsewhere. And if we allow people to be flexible about the way they work, we have a tremendous plus point in the way that we can deliver services for the government of the day. I know that some disabled colleagues have already indicated that this model has been a great leveller in the way that they've been able to feel included. And it's been a tremendous accelerator in terms of trust that we've shown to our staff, to our colleagues, that there isn't always a physical need to be in the office. And now that I've moved into the Civil Service HR location programme, that drive to demonstrate flexibility in the way that we deliver, the way that we can maintain productivity, in the way that we use space, I think it's something that we could keep going after the COVID is finished.

And honestly, and to use a phrase that was used before, we don't want to 'snap back' - it's very important to make sure that we really take all the benefits from the experience and make them part of the new normal. And we get given a chance to for Carmen to come in, and it sounds like we're going to be successful this time. Carmen over to you.

I hope so. I think you can hear me now. Wonderful. Thank you very much, Alex. So, crisis can be daunting. And I can tell you about that. My jobshare partner and I started a new job, just as COVID was hitting, we're faced with the challenge of trying to master resources in a very challenging environment. But crisis quite clearly can be a catalyst for change as well. And what we have learned through this crisis, and I think that picking up from what other people have said, what we have collectively learned, is that, when compelled, we can do things differently. And we're quite good and can be quite good at questioning the 'what' and also questioning the 'how' we do things. We have a wide portfolio of things that we do within our Directorate, that range from EU negotiations to guaranteeing the subsidy control that we provide, is in accordance with EU legislation. We started this crisis thinking that part of our portfolio was going to be incredibly big, and another part was going to be much smaller. We had to rearrange resources. We learned through these that we can be flexible, both in terms of the allocation of resources, but also in terms of taking advantage of the synergies between different types of work that we do. Location, how people adapt to new technologies, and working across boundaries and working across government departments. Location becomes less important, which building you actually sit in, becomes less important. So there is a big learning around flexibility. There's a big learning also, I think

around wellbeing. I think that this crisis, separate differently to other crisis, had put wellbeing, including diversity and inclusion at the centre of how we go about doing things, and that refers not only to the people within our team and the focus on their wellbeing, but also wellbeing on diversity and inclusion when it comes to the recipients of the policy choices that that we put forward. The third theme is around managing uncertainty. I think that sometimes we look in quite a scary way at uncertainty. But we need to realise that we have been getting much better as a Civil Service at managing uncertainty. I would say that Brexit has been quite a nice learning opportunity for that, on that front. So probably, don't shy away from the uncertainty and embrace the uncertainty. And the fourth thing, I think that is quite important is that infrastructure is key. And what I mean by infrastructure is not only the transport infrastructure that Bernadette was talking about, which is obviously very important to get key workers to the workplace, but also the IT infrastructure has been vital. I know that a number of you around the table have been for years focusing very much on IT provision in the public service, making sure that it works efficiently, and that work has really paid off. Now, human resource infrastructure is absolutely key. How we look after our people, how we look after, how people are looked after and the team infrastructure and that I would mention, the strong values. openness, and strong communication channels is very, very important in taking us through this crisis. So when we have to do things, we do them. Now the challenge for us is, when we don't have a crisis on us, will we continue learning from those lessons? And will we transform these lessons learned in a time of crisis into actions that we can take for what will hopefully be a crisis that is not so severe?

Brilliant and you certainly have really embraced uncertainty in the last few Carmen, and thank you very much for all of you. And <audio interrupted> pressure

And returning out to Permanent Secretary colleagues, and thank you very much for those interventions, which really helped I think, give us a strong perspective from colleagues across the service. Next up, I think, to take maybe a bit more international view, Antonia, if you could come in perhaps to talk to the DIT perspective.

Great thanks, Alex, and just to say, I completely agree with everything that was just said. And I want to pick up on Carmen's point about flexibility. So I'm going to talk about what the international networks did, not just DIT at the beginning of the crisis, which I think is a really good example of how overseas often the organisation to work together as one nation overseas can be more flexible, and agile working together. So we immediately realised, well, DHSC and others immediately realised, that what we needed to do was to source additional, both ventilators then PPE gear, then medical supplies, and the overseas team, starting with the China embassy, but swiftly moving elsewhere in Asia and also in Europe and the US, were able to, operating together, seek to procure additional gear, I mean, over 30 billion items of PPE have been have been secured so far. So really excellent joined up working. And of course, what this was, was a great example of the system just working together and collecting around a problem and then working across Whitehall, overseas in this case, to get things done. We now as you know, are undertaking a new project called Project Defend, which is your overall resilience of all critical goods supplier chain. So one of the lessons that we've learned from the original work to source more PPE gear from overseas is the importance of agility. So you can never really know exactly what you're going to need to prepare for. But when you're looking at economic resilience, what you've got to do, there's a massive premium to designing-in agility and flexibility into the system. So no matter what hits

you next time, whether it's pandemic or Sars type, flu, whatever other crisis it might be, and you put you're ready and able to respond to it. And the final point to make is one of the really difficult things to do when looking at resilience is to ensure you don't immediately head to the signing, you've got to on-shore everything yourself in the UK. So there's got to be a balance struck because obviously we very much remain a free-trading nation champion of free trade around the world, and our intention to keep that free trade flowing. So ensure that we have diverse supply chains on critical goods, medical and non-medical as well as, in some cases, looking at the things that we must do in country ourselves.

Brilliant and you, as well as mentioning the embassy in China, it's probably right to to recognise that the whole of the FCO and DfID have also contributed as well as DIT to the response. Let me turn now to Jeremy Pocklington, particularly, maybe Jeremy, to hear about how you've worked with, at a local level, with local authorities and other members of local resilience fora.

Thanks, Alex. So we've got a theme here of agility and flexibility. I think as part of that, that also has driven greater collaboration and partnership-working which has underpinned everything that we've been doing in MHCLG. We are responsible for working with local resilience forums, which are 38 partnerships across England that bring together local governments, the NHS, police, fire and others who have really overseen the local response to the COVID crisis. Close engagement, real communication. And key in this crisis has been better use of data and digital techniques to get real time information and situational awareness on a shared basis between local partners and central government. And that's really helped drive quick responses on the ground. We've also, I think, being good at breaking down barriers at pace, something that we've led on has been the introduction of the shielding programme, to provide support for the clinically, extremely vulnerable as part of the crisis and we've now delivered, I think over three and a half million food parcels have been delivered at the heart of this programme. That's been a real joint effort across government working with Tamara in Defra on the food delivery side with yourself Alex on the digital side, Peter provided a call centre at different DWP contracts and resources within a matter of days. We've broken down barriers in days that would normally take the Civil Service past months or even years really, if we're honest, to pull together real lessons for the future about the speed we can work when the mission and the cause is strong enough. And that also pertains to our relationship with local governments, which has come into the fore in this crisis. And we've developed even stronger relationships with local government, often consulting partners on the ground in real time as policy has been developed on shielding. For example, but also crucially with David and colleagues from the Department for Health, on our response on Adult Social Care, and our social care strategies that were were introduced in the last in the last few months, real lessons about the importance of engagement but also the need to engage quickly and at speed and with trust with our with our wider public sector partners.

Thanks, Alex.

Thank you, Jeremy. And turning now from working with local authorities be great to hear maybe from you Shan Morgan to give us a perspective from a devolved administration, in your case, Wales.

Alex, I think the crisis is probably highlighted some differences between the devolved administrations in the UK government in for example, the way that we've lifted the lockdown and that's reflected different

political choices, different levels of virus transmission and public opinion. I like to say that now there's probably higher awareness than ever of devolved administration responsibilities and powers and the need to respect those. And I've also, though, throughout this crisis seen very extensive UK wide engagement and collaboration amongst officials, particularly especially health officials, and we've also worked with some new partners, and our military colleagues, for example, have added fantastic value to what we're doing. We're really grateful to them. So I think thanks to the crisis, and there's been a lot of good practice to build on, it will be really important to maintain those close relationships across the whole of the Civil Service for the future. And it's going to be essential for Brexit as well. I'm personally extremely proud of the way that the Welsh Government staff have responded to the crisis and the way that they've worked with all of you. We and our ministers are very committed to a four nations approach to deliver the best possible for the UK that's what really matters. And that's why we need to keep working together as trusted partners across the whole of the UK.

Thank you, Shan. And since you mentioned the Armed Forces, maybe I could just bring Stephen Lovegrove in, Permanent Secretary at the MOD to talk about that, Stephen.

Thank you, Alex. Yes. It's been a very interesting exercise, actually, we put on standby 20,000 people pretty immediately. And what actually happened was that only 3,000 of them were used. And actually there was a very big mixture of civil servants in there as well. And the reason for that, actually, was that the lesson that we learned about the way the government responded was that it was more about the planning skills that the military in particular, and some of our defence civil servants, have which were at a real premium. I mean, that was the case with the Nightingale hospital where there is a sort of there's a sense that there were lots of Armed Forces going around building that it wasn't actually the case at all. They were helping on the planning, the private sector was capable of really mobilising incredibly well, as long as everything was directed properly. And I think that, for us, has been one of the big lessons. I mean, in terms of what we're thinking about now in the department, we've, we've obviously got a very, very big building in Whitehall, which I don't think will ever be filled up in quite the same way ever again. So I suspect that there's going to be quite a lot of, you know, infrastructure changes to the way the centre of the Civil Service works if we're getting on to at the moment and I think that may well be an opportunity to shrink our footprint a bit and be able to get departments working closer together, which as many colleagues have mentioned over the last few minutes has been one of the really good features of of the crisis. Thanks.

Thank you, Stephen. And mentioning the private sector in the way you did, naturally brings me to the Department for Business and Sam Beckett, Sam, please come in.

Thanks, Alex. I thought the the story that I would mention is one of how BEIS was involved in creating this very detailed a guidance for safer workplaces has enabled the vast majority of businesses to get open again, in a safe way over the last few weeks. Obviously this was an exercise where we needed extensive, really hands-on and detailed operational knowledge of what was involved in delivering these sort of goods and services out in the economy, you know, everything from pubs to hairdressers to operating a laboratory. So we really needed to build this guidance in and outward looking and collaborative way. So we were engaged, you know, right from the start with businesses, with the trade unions, with industry bodies, obviously with Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive

and a lot of other government departments, colleagues, from DfT, DfE, MHCLG, and so on, so it was this massive, collaborative effort. But I think what I'd like to pause on was kind of the learning from the external part of the consultation, because obviously, we were putting a first draft of guidance out, to try and generate that conversation to kind of build the detail at businesses would need. And inevitably, that led to a lot of a lot of noise, a lot of noise in the in the media and elsewhere about, you know, the unreadiness of the guidance, which obviously it was un-ready because, you know, this was the start of the process of building something that was actually usable and operational. So, I mean, a lot of people were sort of saying, 'Oh, is this a leak that we've read about this guidance', and we really had to kind of hold our nerve and see that really as a necessary and valuable part of this exercise in getting guidance that businesses could actually use. So I mean, I think my lesson is really one of holding our nerve in being more outward looking and collaborative with external stakeholders and just accepting some of the noise that that brings. I mean, Carmen talked about embracing the uncertainty, I think we've had to embrace the noise around our guidance. And obviously we continue to do that, as the guidance needs to evolve as, you know, our scientific knowledge changes, as knowledge of the virus changes and we're continuing to do that under the spotlight. But it's all about that dialogue and gaining that buy-in and ultimately that sort of trust that we're creating safe environments. So I think the message there is really about, you know, the possibility of evolving into a more collaborative, more outward looking process of of policymaking in government post the crisis.

Brilliant, thank you, Sam. And talking about performing under the spotlight does bring me to Patrick Vallance, the Chief Scientific Adviser. Also Chris Whitty. The two of you, when you took up your roles could not possibly have expected to spend quite so much time before the full glare of the media. But I'd say I think you've done it absolutely, brilliantly. But also, what you both said when you started your roles was how important scientific input is. And my gosh, we have seen, that have we not? So over to you, Patrick, perhaps just to say a word there.

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks. No, didn't expect it. And yes, it's been heavily difficult under the spotlight. A few things to raise. First, I just want to go back to point this made earlier on, one of the things is virus has done is absolutely exposed inequalities and exaggerated inequalities. And we need to be incredibly aware of that. And that's a real lesson and a real important thing to focus on going forward. We've been at this from the science since January. We're now actually very focused on what comes next in terms of winter and so on. It's been a brilliant cross government effort and it's been a brilliant effort working across the devolved as well. And I want to thank everybody for what they've done and also the generosity of departments to lend people at pace to us when we need it. It was really impressive. The other thing about working in the spotlight and many people in science have felt this, is it brings a lot of pressures. And I have to say, the second thing I wanted to raise is the way the Civil Service has been absolutely brilliant colleagues just helping lending a sort of word of support. And generally being there if you need them. It's impressive and it matters. It's helped a lot of people. The third is the agility point, which has been raised. I mean, boy, we have to test the agility. And it's been impressive to see how that's swung into action. People have done things they wouldn't normally do. People have come from other departments and helped out. People have rolled their sleeves up, done jobs that they weren't expecting to do, and it's worked. And then the fourth general point is, there's been a lot of noise around this and one of the challenges has been to drown out the cacophony and focus on what's important. And prioritisation is not always an easy thing to do. And it's been a real lesson in prioritisation, and how

focusing on things that really matter gets you to the better place. Science links to policy and operations have been an area that have worked in a way that needs to work during peacetime as well. I mean, the link between science into departments and the way policy and operations can build off it. And the other general lesson, which I think is an incredibly important one, is the thing you really noticed during an emergency like this is data. Where's the data coming from? Where the data flows? Who owns the data? How can you get hold of it? How do you join up across government? And I think one of the things we really need to look at after this is, are we in the right position? How do we get in the right position in a modern Civil Service for data flows to be as quick efficient and open as they need to be during an emergency but also other times.

Great Patrick. And that was something which I know the cabinet was discussing this very week. So it is a top priority to improve data flows across government. I'd like to turn now to colleagues from the Treasury, Tom Scholar, and Jim Harra. And probably a lot of people watching this will have heard the Prime Minister two weeks ago in his speech in Dudley praising the problem solving fury of colleagues across Treasury and HMRC. So, Tom, over to you.

Thanks, Alex.

Well, it's kind of the Prime Minister to say what he did. And I know all of the very, very hard working staff in the Treasury have been really working around the clock for the last couple of months. We're really grateful and appreciative for that. And we're actually discussing this in our executive team just before coming on to this call, and we were discussing, in particular, the partnership that we have struck between the Treasury and lots of other departments. Because obviously, the big announcements have been made in the first instance by the Chancellor of all the big support schemes, the furlough scheme to help people in employment, the various business loan schemes, and so on. And they've been Treasury policy decisions, but they've been the product of completely joint work. On the policy front, in the case of the furlough scheme between the Treasury and HMRC, we actually have a thing called a policy partnership where we have teams of officials just working completely seamlessly together. And the delivery, of course, has been, you know, HMRC are the real heroes on that. And it's been, I think, a completely extraordinary achievement to have delivered that here. Huge scheme in in such record time. So I'd like to give Jim a moment to talk about that. And I'd also like to say that BEIS and the British Business Bank have done the same on the business schemes, the Bank of England have done the same on their schemes. DWP have done an amazing job on support through job centres and helping people to find work. So it's been, you know, collaboration is one of the Treasury's values. It's one of the things that we always tried to do. And I think we've really seen it come to the fore in the last few months, but Jim, tell us about HMRC's work.

Thanks, Tom. I mean, I would say first of all, you know, we have reaped benefits from investing in some capability. First of all, in technical capability, we had to move from 88% of our people working in the office to fewer than 6% working in the office. And we were only able to do that within a week because we've already invested in some technical capabilities and we were able to move really fast and of course, a very long piece we've invested in a partnership with Treasury, which enabled us again to move very fast because one feature of these big policies like the furlough scheme, is the policy only any good if you can deliver that volume and that speed. One of the things I think we did in partnership

with the Treasury was really made sure that embedded in the policy design was the simplicity that enabled us to deliver that, that fast even though the Chancellor knew that that meant there were some rough edges in that policy that he was going to have to defend. So there's been real practical policy - delivery-based policymaking brought to bear there. And obviously I'm very, very proud of everything that my colleagues and HMRC have achieved, you know, to the scary point that we're paying the wages of about a quarter of all the employees in the UK at its peak. When I reckon flat out on the plan for jobs, including making sure that everyone can go out and eat in restaurants with a 50% discount, Monday to Wednesday throughout August, making sure that we can pay that furlough bonus in January, also implementing the stamp duty holiday for everyone and a reduction of VAT for tourism and the hospitality industry. So that work continues. I think picking up Patrick's point, one big learning for us is about the importance of data. If HMRC had had better, more up to date data about our customers, we could have done an even better job. We've been running a tax system where we gather data about someone annually 10 months after the event, and that really constrained us in what we could do. So I think for the future, both building on, you know, investing in building our capabilities, because that's what counts when you're in a crisis, but also make sure that we've got the best possible data that we can use to deliver the services will be what we require, but I think the proudest moment for me really, in my entire career, working with colleagues in HMRC through this.

Fantastic, and I think that is a lovely note to end on. I'm sorry, we haven't been able to hear from everybody. But obviously if you could have heard everybody, everyone would have joined in the testimony we've tried to give to the fantastic efforts of colleagues across the Civil Service. I hope those people watching today have got a sense of how proud we are and how appreciative of everything that you have done. And also of our collective appetite to do better again, in future. We really want to learn the lessons of COVID. We want to really make sure that you've heard a lot about making better use of data just now, about the investments in digital technology, about upskilling about working with scientists, the business community, multiple locations, flexibility, agility, innovation, collaboration and a massive focus on citizen needs. Please, join us in passing the word of appreciation congratulation to your colleagues across the Civil Service, but also, in this continuing reform effort, Shaping our Future, it's not just up to the group of leaders you see today and the four reform champions who joined us, it's up to all of us to create a fantastic Civil Service. Thank you for joining us today at Wednesday Morning Colleagues. See you again another time. Bye all.