

Thursday, 24 November 2022

1
 2 (10.00 am)
 3 **MR BEER:** Good morning, sir, can you see and hear me?
 4 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** I can indeed, thank you.
 5 **MR BEER:** Can I call Stephen Byers, please.
 6 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes.
 7 **STEPHEN BYERS (affirmed)**
 8 **Questioned by MR BEER**
 9 **MR BEER:** Good morning, Mr Byers.
 10 **A.** Good morning.
 11 **Q.** I'm Jason Beer, I ask questions on behalf of the
 12 Inquiry. Can we thank you for the statement that you
 13 have provided us and for coming to the Inquiry today to
 14 assist us with our investigation. Can you give us your
 15 full name, please?
 16 **A.** Stephen John Byers.
 17 **Q.** In front of you there should be a witness statement of
 18 35 pages.
 19 **A.** Yes.
 20 **Q.** On the 32nd page there should be a signature; is that
 21 your signature?
 22 **A.** It is.
 23 **Q.** Are the contents of that witness statement true to the
 24 best of your knowledge and belief?
 25 **A.** They are.

1

1 Chief Secretary to the Treasury, July 1998 until
 2 December 1998, and then, secondly, Secretary of State
 3 for Trade and Industry, December 1998 until June 2001.
 4 Dealing with the first of those posts first, can you
 5 explain in very summary terms, please, which of your
 6 responsibilities as Chief Secretary for the Treasury for
 7 that five-month period were particularly relevant to the
 8 issues which this Inquiry is examining?
 9 **A.** Well, as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the main
 10 responsibility is public expenditure, that was the main
 11 focus of my work as chief secretary. I also, as one of
 12 the further responsibilities had a sort of overview of
 13 the whole sort of PFI/PPP regime, Private Finance
 14 Initiatives, Private Public Partnerships, and that
 15 obviously had an implication because the Horizon project
 16 was an example of a PFI project that we inherited from
 17 the previous administration.
 18 **Q.** You, therefore, I think, had oversight of what you
 19 describe as the Treasury PFI taskforce led by Adrian
 20 Montague?
 21 **A.** That's correct.
 22 **Q.** You say in paragraph 7 of your witness statement, if we
 23 can just turn that up, WITN03580100, at page 3 --
 24 thank you:
 25 "The Taskforce had been set up on the recommendation

3

1 **Q.** For the transcript, that's WITN03580100.
 2 Can I start, please, with some questions about your
 3 background and experience.
 4 You were part, I think, of the Labour Government
 5 that came into power following the general election on
 6 1 May 1997?
 7 **A.** That's correct.
 8 **Q.** You were initially a minister at the Department for
 9 Education and Employment?
 10 **A.** Yes.
 11 **Q.** You held that role for 15 months, I think, until on
 12 27 July 1998 you became Chief Secretary to the Treasury?
 13 **A.** That's right.
 14 **Q.** You held that post for five months until, on
 15 23 December 1998, when Peter Mandelson resigned, you
 16 took up his job as Secretary of State for Trade and
 17 Industry?
 18 **A.** That's true.
 19 **Q.** You held that post for two and a half years until, on
 20 8 June 2001, you took up a post as Secretary of State
 21 for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which
 22 you held for just under a year when you too resigned?
 23 **A.** That's right.
 24 **Q.** I think it follows that the two posts that you occupied,
 25 which are of most interest to the Inquiry are, firstly,

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1 of a review in 1997 by Sir Malcolm Bates and its role
 2 was to support government departments with PFI ...
 3 contracts ..."
 4 Then moving on:
 5 "Given the size and scale of the project, and the
 6 obviously dysfunctional relationships between the
 7 parties involved, Horizon was one of the contracts which
 8 the Taskforce came to review."
 9 Why were there dysfunctional relationships between
 10 the parties involved?
 11 **A.** I think the main difficulty was that the two clients, if
 12 I can put it that way, of the contract, which would be
 13 the Benefits Agency and Post Office Counters, to be
 14 blunt, their interests were not aligned at all. They
 15 had two quite different objectives, for the
 16 Benefits Agency it was to see benefit claimants moving
 17 onto ACT, whereas for Post Office Counters it was
 18 a desire to ensure the future of the Post Office
 19 network, and those two goals actually were not aligned
 20 with each other.
 21 I think the other problem was that both those
 22 entities had quite different cultures, if I can put it
 23 that way. The Post Office was trying to be more
 24 business like, more entrepreneurial, more market driven,
 25 and I think the Benefits Agency was very much a part of

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1 the Department of Social Security, it was a government
2 agency and it had its own rules and procedures that it
3 had to follow.

4 So they were two quite different entities trying to
5 achieve two quite different objectives.

6 **Q.** That doesn't necessarily lead to a dysfunctional
7 relationship, having different objectives --

8 **A.** Well, it did in this case, I'm afraid.

9 **Q.** Why did it lead to, in your view, an obviously
10 dysfunctional relationship, having different objectives?

11 **A.** I think there may be some -- the individuals concerned
12 may have found it difficult to work with each other --

13 **Q.** Which individuals?

14 **A.** I can't remember any particular individuals, no.

15 **Q.** You were, I think, going on to say something else?

16 **A.** And also, I think, the relationship with ICL, as the
17 contractor, was not a good one either. Now, whether ICL
18 found it difficult because they were trying to service
19 the needs of two quite different clients, I don't know,
20 that could be an explanation.

21 **Q.** Was it obvious to you from the very start that these
22 differing objectives, as you put them, or describe them,
23 led to the dysfunctional relationship?

24 **A.** I think it made it very difficult and I think, looking
25 back, it was a sort of fundamental flaw in the contract

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1 policy, and that was the way --

2 **Q.** I'll explore that in a moment, if we may.

3 **A.** Yeah. So the overview of the Post Office, and then also
4 a responsibility sort of for foreign direct investment,
5 inward investment from overseas into -- into the UK.

6 **Q.** Thank you.

7 In relation to the former of those roles, overall
8 responsibility for the Post Office, can you describe in
9 general terms how that responsibility was exercised at
10 this time with the Post Office being a statutory
11 corporation?

12 **A.** Particularly in relation to Horizon or more --

13 **Q.** No, generally, please.

14 **A.** Generally speaking.

15 Well, the role was to -- the Secretary of State
16 nominated the Chair and the board members --

17 **Q.** When you say "nominated", you mean appointed?

18 **A.** Appointed, yes, yes. We had responsibility for
19 commercialisation of the Post Office, so overall
20 direction of the Post Office. It was a monopoly and we
21 were looking at whether we should change that
22 relationship, whether we should bring in more private
23 sector involvement. So the whole sort of area of
24 sort of demand, meeting new needs was certainly a policy
25 area that I was responsible for as Secretary of State.

7

1 itself, I think.

2 **Q.** You were, secondly, Secretary of State for Trade and
3 Industry from December 1998 until June 2001. Again, in
4 very summary terms, can you please describe for the
5 Inquiry which of your responsibilities were particularly
6 relevant to the issues which we are examining?

7 **A.** Well, I think for the purpose of this Inquiry there are
8 probably two main elements of the responsibilities I had
9 at the time. First was --

10 **Q.** Sorry, the witness statement can come down, thank you.

11 **A.** First was in relation to the Post Office, the Department
12 of Trade and Industry was the sort of sponsoring
13 department for the Post Office.

14 **Q.** You say in your witness statement, just pausing there,
15 Mr Byers, that you had overall ministerial
16 responsibility for the Post Office --

17 **A.** Yes.

18 **Q.** -- is that right?

19 **A.** But working very much with a Minister of State who has
20 more sort of hands-on responsibility, if I can put it
21 that way. I mean, the relationship between the
22 Secretary of State as a cabinet minister is very often
23 as a sort of overview, whereas a Minister of State will
24 have almost more sort of almost day-to-day
25 responsibilities for a particular very discrete area of

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1 Then within that, there is then the more detailed
2 work to do, for example, with the Post Office network
3 and the political pressures that come from that.

4 I mean, I think at the time it was the sort of biggest
5 retail network in the whole of Europe, very important
6 for individual communities, but facing great challenges,
7 so it was how we could respond to that in a positive
8 way.

9 **Q.** Breaking that down a little bit, if we may. Did you
10 have a junior minister with specific responsibility for
11 the Post Office?

12 **A.** Yes, there was a Minister of State who had specific
13 responsibility for the Post Office, and it was
14 Ian McCartney, and then when Ian got moved it was
15 Alan Johnson.

16 **Q.** How were responsibilities divided between the Minister
17 of State with responsibility for the Post Office and the
18 Secretary of State, you, with overall responsibility for
19 the Post Office?

20 **A.** I probably think -- as I said a bit earlier, I think the
21 Minister of State had almost day-to-day responsibility,
22 so would be looking at things in much more detail --

23 **Q.** Just pausing there, and apologies for interrupting you
24 as we go along, when you say day-to-day responsibility,
25 do you mean literally he or she may be -- in this case

8

1 a he -- dealing with Post Office issues on a daily
2 basis, or is that a phrase intended to describe more
3 involvement than you had?

4 **A.** Certainly more involvement than I had. I think it
5 probably depends on the individual. It wouldn't
6 surprise me, and I think I saw on the witness list
7 Ian McCartney is going to give his own evidence.

8 **Q.** Yes.

9 **A.** It wouldn't surprise me if Ian was involved almost on
10 a daily basis. What I think I do mean, to be more
11 precise, is that he would have been on top of the detail
12 to a far greater extent than I would have been.

13 **Q.** How do you exercise oversight over him? Do you wait for
14 him to come to you with issues? Do you wait for
15 a ministerial submission, Secretary of State submission,
16 to come up to you, or was there any other mechanism for
17 exercising any oversight?

18 **A. (Pause)**

19 I'm delaying, because I'm thinking back 22 years to
20 sort of identify how things worked in practice. What
21 would very often happen is, if there was an issue,
22 for example -- I'll do it in two bits, if I can.

23 If there was an element -- and this is particularly
24 relevant to the Horizon project. If there was
25 a particular issue that, for example, Alistair Darling,

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1 remember any telephone calls with the Chairman, but it
2 would be done in that rather formal way and there would
3 be requests for sort of *ad hoc* meetings.

4 **Q.** And they could come in either direction, from you or
5 from him?

6 **A.** I can't recall myself requesting a meeting with the
7 Chairman.

8 **Q.** As for the board, you've said that, I think, as well as
9 appointing the Chairman you appointed members of the
10 board?

11 **A.** Yes, that's my recollection.

12 **Q.** Did Government have a seat on the board in any way, to
13 your recollection?

14 **A.** I don't think we did but I'm not altogether sure.

15 **Q.** If I was to ask the general question: who was your point
16 of contact on the Post Office board, who would you say?

17 **A.** It would be with the Chairman.

18 **Q.** We know that Post Office Counters Limited, POCL, was
19 created as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Post Office
20 in 1987. What responsibilities or oversight or
21 governance arrangements did you have in relation to Post
22 Office Counters Limited, as Secretary of State?

23 **A.** I don't recall, I'm afraid.

24 **Q.** You don't recall or you don't recall any?

25 **A.** No, no.

11

1 as Secretary of State for Benefits and Social Security
2 was concerned about, I then, as another Secretary of
3 State would deal with Alistair, it was that sort of
4 relationship, and it wouldn't often be the case that the
5 Minister of State would have a dialogue with a Secretary
6 of State. So that would be my involvement. So it would
7 be something coming in from outside the Department,
8 another Secretary of State.

9 If there was then internally -- if there's
10 particularly a political issue that I would be concerned
11 about, to do with the Post Office, I would then raise it
12 directly with the Minister of State. If there are
13 issues that the Minister of State was dealing with in
14 a more detailed way, that he felt needed some sort of
15 political clearance or discussion, then that would come
16 up to me from Ian or Alan Johnson.

17 **Q.** You have explained that there was a Post Office board
18 and a chairman of the Post Office?

19 **A.** Yes.

20 **Q.** What means of communication was there between the
21 Chairman and you?

22 **A.** There was no formal process, so it wasn't that there was
23 a sort of three monthly meeting or anything of that
24 nature. So there would be communication by -- probably
25 in those days, by letter rather than email. I can't

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1 **Q.** No. Can you recall what contact, if any, you had with
2 that separate legal entity, Post Office Counters
3 Limited, given, in this case, it was one of the
4 contracting parties to the contract with ICL Pathway?

5 **A.** I wouldn't have had, as Secretary of State, any direct
6 contact with POCL.

7 **Q.** You've explained, I think, that there were no scheduled
8 governance meetings between you as Secretary of State
9 and the board or the Chairman of the board; is that
10 right?

11 **A.** That's correct.

12 **Q.** Would you habitually see minutes of board meetings from
13 the Post Office?

14 **A.** No.

15 **Q.** Do you know whether anyone amongst the ministerial team,
16 in particular Mr McCartney, did or not?

17 **A.** I would have thought that it would be officials, so
18 civil servants would be receiving board minutes and they
19 would probably alert Ian to anything that they felt was
20 particularly relevant, but I wouldn't see them as
21 Secretary of State.

22 **Q.** Was there, to your knowledge, any government framework
23 document in place that explained the relationships that
24 we're now talking about?

25 **A.** Not to my recollection.

12

1 Q. Thank you.
 2 You tell us in paragraph 42 of your witness
 3 statement, if we can turn that up, please, it's on
 4 page 16 -- it will come up on the screen for you,
 5 Mr Byers -- at the top of the page:
 6 "My overall attitude towards the project remained
 7 the same [the 'project' being the Horizon project] but
 8 clearly my responsibility within government had
 9 changed ..."
 10 You're talking about here the point at which you
 11 moved from being Chief Secretary to Secretary of
 12 State --
 13 A. Yes.
 14 Q. -- for Trade and Industry:
 15 "... I now had to have the interests of the Post
 16 Office network, and inward investment into the UK, at
 17 the centre of my concerns."
 18 Did that remain the case throughout the duration of
 19 your time as Secretary of State up until June 2001?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. We know that at least one subpostmistress was
 22 interviewed by Post Office investigators in March 2001
 23 and went to a Magistrates Court in November 2001, and
 24 that other investigations and prosecutions of
 25 subpostmasters and mistresses started in 2000 and 2001.

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1 expect officials to do in relation to that?
 2 A. If it was in the early stages of the Horizon project,
 3 when we essentially were still learning how it was
 4 operating in practice, then if there were a number of
 5 prosecutions and there seemed to be a sort of systematic
 6 failure in the programme, then I would have thought that
 7 ministers would have been alerted to that.
 8 Q. Is that the kind of relationship that departmental
 9 officials had with the Post Office, ie exercising some
 10 sort of watching or oversight function on it?
 11 A. I think the officials will be better placed to answer
 12 that than I am, I'm afraid.
 13 Q. Is that because you would only know if something was
 14 escalated up to you through a ministerial submission?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. And we know that that didn't happen?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. Thank you.
 19 Can I turn, with that background, then, please, to
 20 look at the Montague report. This is POL00028094.
 21 Thank you.
 22 We can see that, on its face, it's dated July 1998,
 23 and we know from other evidence that it was produced or
 24 available from 22 July 1998. I think that would be
 25 five days before you took up office as the Chief

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1 You were Secretary of State until 8 June 2001. Were you
 2 ever aware that prosecutions of subpostmasters and
 3 mistresses were taking place on the basis of evidence
 4 generated by the Horizon system?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. But were you aware of whether there were any discussions
 7 or approval of such decisions at Post Office board
 8 level?
 9 A. No, I was unaware of that.
 10 Q. From your knowledge of the board, are you able to
 11 comment as to whether these are matters that would have
 12 been discussed at Post Office board level?
 13 A. I wouldn't know, I'm afraid.
 14 Q. You wouldn't know one way or the other?
 15 A. No.
 16 Q. If the matters had been discussed at board level, is
 17 that something that the Department would have been aware
 18 of through its sight of the minutes of the board
 19 meetings?
 20 A. I would have thought so, yes.
 21 Q. Can you help us explain the relationship or the balance
 22 of power or responsibility here? What would you expect
 23 of your officials if, for example, a minute recorded, or
 24 a board minute recorded, "We're now prosecuting people
 25 on the basis of the Horizon system"? What would you

14

1 Secretary to the Treasury, on the 27th?
 2 A. That's correct, yeah.
 3 Q. So this report is quite fresh as you start your new job.
 4 A. Yeah.
 5 Q. But I take it it's the kind of report that, with
 6 responsibility for the taskforce, as you've explained,
 7 you would have read --
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. -- in particular, because I think that this PFI project
 10 was, I think, being badged up as the largest PFI project
 11 of its age?
 12 A. That's correct.
 13 Q. Now, if we just take that down for a moment and go back
 14 to your witness statement at paragraph 12, please, you
 15 say the panel, that's the three co-authors of the
 16 Montague report --
 17 Sorry, it's page 5, paragraph 12.
 18 A. Yeah.
 19 Q. You say:
 20 "The panel [that's the three co-authors of the
 21 Montague report] made two recommendations for a possible
 22 way forward: [one] a full restructuring of the project;
 23 or [two] a partial restructuring. Termination of the
 24 project was ruled out, as was continuing the project as
 25 planned or simply extending the contract."

16

1 Now, it's certainly right that the report made two
2 recommendations for a possible way forward, so a full or
3 a partial restructuring of the project, but you say that
4 termination of the project was ruled out.

5 Are you saying, by that sentence in the witness
6 statement, that the Montague report ruled out
7 termination of the project?

8 **A.** My recollection is that was the implication of the
9 Montague report. It may not have been expressly stated,
10 but I think that was the -- I think the conclusions that
11 one would draw from the recommendations, whether that
12 was something that he was -- a route he was not going
13 down.

14 **Q.** If we can just then look back at the report, please, to
15 see whether it's expressly stated, or whether it's by
16 implication, or came from another source, that
17 termination was being ruled out. Can we look at the
18 executive summary, please, on page 3. Just before we
19 get into this, can you help us, as a Secretary of State,
20 to what extent would you have just read executive
21 summaries, or would you have got into the weeds of the
22 detail?

23 **A.** I honestly cannot remember on this occasion.

24 **Q.** No, I wouldn't expect you to.

25 **A.** No.

17

1 You can see here, and I don't think there's anything
2 in the detail of the report that is different to this,
3 that the authors do not address the issue of terminating
4 the project, less still do they themselves rule out that
5 option.

6 Do you say, therefore, that because they were
7 talking about a full or partial restructuring of the
8 project, you took it that by implication they had ruled
9 out termination? Or do you think the full -- the option
10 of termination and ruling it out came from elsewhere,
11 thinking back?

12 **A.** I think ... I think any reasonable person would conclude
13 from the "Findings" and the "Possible way forward" that
14 cancellation or termination had effectively been ruled
15 out by the Montague report.

16 **Q.** Because they were only speaking about partial or full
17 restructuring?

18 **A.** And they don't even address the issue of termination or
19 cancellation.

20 **Q.** You take that to mean or took that to mean a ruling out
21 by them?

22 **A.** By the Montague report. I hadn't ruled it out in my own
23 mind, as Chief Secretary.

24 **Q.** Why hadn't you ruled it out in your own mind?

25 **A.** So I came in on 28 July --

19

1 **Q.** But as a matter of generality?

2 **A.** I would expect my officials to do me a summary of the
3 report. So I wouldn't have relied on the report itself.
4 My officials would have given me advice based on the
5 report.

6 **Q.** Looking --

7 **A.** I'd have received this as Chief Secretary, not Secretary
8 of State.

9 **Q.** Yes, I'm so sorry.

10 **A.** Yeah.

11 **Q.** Looking at the executive summary, then, we can ignore
12 the first three bullet points, because they're
13 background. If we scroll down to "Findings", then,
14 please.

15 If you scan through those, I think you will have
16 read these more recently.

17 **A.** Yes, I have.

18 **Q.** The document's been provided. Then go over the page,
19 please to "Possible way forward", if you just scan
20 through those.

21 **(Pause)**

22 So the second bullet point is essentially the full
23 restructuring; the third bullet point is the partial
24 restructuring that you spoke about in paragraph 12.

25 **(Pause)**

18

1 **Q.** Yes.

2 **A.** -- and there were certainly a couple of occasions, as
3 things developed, and I could see basically the mess
4 that the Horizon project was in, that we would have to
5 consider the possibility of cancellation, and that was
6 a live consideration during my time.

7 **Q.** Was it always a live consideration when you were both
8 Chief Secretary and Secretary of State?

9 **A.** I think -- I think when I became Secretary of State --
10 well, two things. I think by the time I left the
11 Treasury in December, having reviewed the option of
12 cancellation, I'd come round to the view that actually
13 that was not going to be possible.

14 **Q.** Was there any direction from Number 10 that termination
15 as an option should be ruled out, that this project was
16 going to go ahead?

17 **A.** Not that I can recall.

18 **Q.** Can we look then at the report in some more detail, and
19 go to page 6, please, and look at the "Terms of
20 Reference". Again, there is some background in
21 paragraph 1. Paragraph 2 tells us that the panel was
22 set up and chaired by the head of the Treasury
23 taskforce, that's Adrian Montague.

24 To your knowledge, did Adrian Montague have any
25 technical expertise himself?

20

1 A. No, I don't think he did.

2 Q. Then the other two members, if we just go back to the
3 first page of the report, they're listed -- if we scroll
4 down, thank you.

5 Bill Robins, he was head of the Northern Ireland
6 Social Security Agency; do you remember that?

7 A. I honestly don't know.

8 Q. Okay. So you wouldn't be able to help us whether he had
9 any technical expertise or knowledge in IT himself?

10 A. The panel was appointed before I became Chief Secretary,
11 so ...

12 Q. Alec Wylie was Director General of Communications and
13 Information Services in the Ministry of Defence. Again,
14 you wouldn't be able to help us, I suspect, given your
15 previous answers, with whether he had any technical
16 expertise in IT projects?

17 A. I'm sorry, I just don't know.

18 Q. Okay. Can we go back to page 6, then, please, at
19 paragraph 3, essentially the "Terms of Reference":
20 "... we, the Panel, were asked to assess:
21 "whether the project can deliver a fully functioning
22 system which meets the project specification, and
23 integrates fully with BA and POCL computer systems;
24 "whether the timetable for completing the systems
25 development, and starting and completing rollout, is

21

1 Q. What did you understand that to mean, "Our view is that
2 the programme is technically viable"?

3 A. I think we knew it was a very challenging programme and,
4 in some respects, breaking new ground, and I think we
5 would need to be assured that, actually, it could be
6 delivered in practice.

7 Q. Would you agree that, in the way that the issue is
8 approached, it means "feasible", the project is
9 feasible, ie that the system proposed can, from
10 a technological point of view, be feasibly delivered and
11 built?

12 A. Yes, I think combined with the point made in bullet 3
13 about future proofing, yes, that would be my conclusion.

14 Q. I'm going to come to bullet 3 --

15 A. Sorry, apologies.

16 Q. -- in a moment. That's all right. The reason for
17 exploring this, I should say in advance, is in a number
18 of places you rely on the phrase "We were told by
19 Montague that the project is technically viable" --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- and subsequently that phrase is used within
22 government a lot as meaning -- or it might be taken to
23 mean -- something rather different, ie the project, the
24 system is, in fact, robust and has integrity, which is
25 why I'm exploring --

23

1 deliverable and whether the necessary managerial and
2 organisational structures are in place;
3 "the likely costs of delivery, under current
4 contract dates and with extension; and
5 "in each of these areas, the risks associated with
6 these assessments, and whether robust monitoring
7 arrangements and disciplines are in place."

8 So that's the terms of reference, and it's the first
9 one that I'm particularly interested in, whether the
10 project can deliver a fully functioning system which
11 meets the project specification, and integrates with the
12 existing systems.

13 Can we go back, please, to page 3, the "Executive
14 Summary" and the "Findings". The second bullet point,
15 I think, addresses this:
16 "Our view is that the programme is technically
17 viable. There must be some risk around scalability and
18 robustness because the system has had to be tested at
19 the level of component parts, but we are satisfied these
20 risks are being well managed by Pathway."
21 Just looking at that at the moment, do you
22 understand that to be the answer to the question in the
23 terms of reference as to whether the project can deliver
24 a fully functioning system?

25 A. Yes, I think so.

22

1 A. I'm with you. Yeah, I get it.

2 Q. Would you agree that that doesn't mean that the Montague
3 report -- that paragraph does not mean or you didn't
4 take it to mean that the system was, as it stood,
5 necessarily robust and had integrity?

6 A. It wasn't a sort of blank cheque going forward, I'd
7 accept that.

8 Q. Can we just look at the body of the report to see if
9 that helps us any further. Page 11, please.

10 At the foot of the page under "Solution Design and
11 Fitness for Purpose", paragraph 24:
12 "We believe the programme can deliver the contracted
13 functionality. The technical architecture is
14 necessarily highly complex: systems must be separated
15 for contractual reasons; they [over the page] have to
16 have high levels of resilience and security; and they
17 employ a number of different computing platforms. These
18 factors have been well considered in the design and
19 structuring of the project and technical architecture."
20 Then 25:
21 "The main architectural issues are scalability and
22 robustness. We are advised that a solution of this
23 scale and scope with so many different platforms and
24 [problems] has, as far as PA [that was a consulting
25 agency] is aware, no precedent. We are satisfied that

24

1 Pathway's approach to design, development and
 2 performance testing is sufficiently rigorous for such
 3 a major undertaking. At this stage of development,
 4 testing has to be based on the component parts rather
 5 than the entire system. We believe this has been
 6 completed in an appropriately structured way; indeed it
 7 is a strength of the modular nature of the architecture
 8 that this approach [has been] taken. Significant
 9 attention is being given to testing at the
 10 correspondence server level where the highest risk of
 11 congestion occurs."

12 Did you understand at this point that there had been
 13 no end-to-end testing of the system, it was only of the
 14 component parts?

15 **A.** I don't think that level of detail was drawn to my
 16 attention.

17 **Q.** I understand.

18 Then if we look at 26:

19 "Given the size of the system, there is
 20 an unavoidable risk that it cannot have all been tested
 21 end to end in earnest. However we are satisfied that
 22 Pathway has contingency plans to upgrade individual
 23 components of the architecture, should that prove
 24 necessary, we. Therefore assess the risk of the entire
 25 solution failing to operate as expected to be as low as

25

1 Then if we go over the page, please, in 33 you say:

2 "... the financial consequences of any decision ...
 3 were a crucial consideration. Cancelling the project
 4 would have meant writing off hundreds of millions of
 5 pounds of public and private investment in a project
 6 which [and then you say this] (as we had been advised by
 7 the Montague report) was technically viable."

8 The question you were being asked was about issues
 9 concerning the technical integrity and robustness of the
 10 system and you answer the question about integrity and
 11 robustness by reference to the Montague report's
 12 conclusion on technical viability; do you see what
 13 I mean?

14 **A.** Yes, yes.

15 **Q.** In your mind, were they the same things or different, or
 16 didn't you address them?

17 **A.** I certainly didn't address them at the time I was Chief
 18 Secretary.

19 **Q.** Thank you. Then a little further down at 35, when
 20 you're addressing that third point, (iii) of the
 21 Inquiry's question, you say:

22 "As for the technical integrity and robustness of
 23 Horizon, the Montague report in July 1998 had assured us
 24 that the project was technically viable and showed good
 25 evidence of future-proofing."

27

1 could be achieved in the circumstances."

2 What did you understand that last point to mean in
 3 the last sentence there? What guarantee or what
 4 conclusion was being drawn?

5 **A.** I think the conclusion I would draw is that we would
 6 have to -- we'd have to test it in real life practical
 7 situations.

8 **Q.** The risk being addressed in that sentence, would you
 9 agree, is the entire thing failing --

10 **A.** Yes.

11 **Q.** -- rather than an assessment of whether the system is
 12 robust and has integrity?

13 **A.** No, I'll accept that, but also it does refer to Pathway
 14 having contingency plans to upgrade those individual
 15 components.

16 **Q.** The reason for asking you this is: if we look, please,
 17 at your witness statement, and if we look at page 12 of
 18 your witness statement, then at the foot of the page
 19 a question in italics that the Inquiry asked:

20 "To what extent were the interdepartmental
 21 discussions about the future of the Horizon project
 22 influenced, at this stage, by", a number of things.

23 Then the third point is:

24 "... issues concerning the technical integrity and
 25 robustness of Horizon."

26

1 That future-proofing is the third bullet point we're
 2 going come back to in a moment.

3 **A.** Yes.

4 **Q.** Again, that tends to suggest, and you've written this in
 5 a way that was referring to your state of knowledge back
 6 in 1998, that you equated the technical integrity and
 7 robustness of the system with what Montague had said
 8 about its technical viability; do you see?

9 **A.** Yes, I understand that point.

10 **Q.** In your mind, were they one and the same thing?

11 **A.** Yes, I think I probably did take that view.

12 **Q.** Sir Adrian Montague, as he now is, has made a witness
 13 statement to the Inquiry saying, about his review, that:

14 "It was not possible to test Horizon for real. The
 15 review focused on whether, at a high level, the project
 16 could be delivered successfully rather than whether it
 17 was operating or indeed could operate in accordance with
 18 its contractual specification. Of course, this meant
 19 that none of the shortcomings in the Horizon system in
 20 operation that came to dog the project in later years
 21 was or could have been evident at this stage."

22 Thinking back, did you understand that, that what
 23 the Montague report was about was not against
 24 a background of having tested the Horizon system in
 25 operation; it was all about whether the project could,

28

1 in theory, be technically deliverable successfully?

2 **A.** Yes, and I think that's why we insisted as ministers
3 that there had to be live trials of Horizon. It had to
4 be tested in a real working environment, and that's
5 not -- Adrian couldn't address that at the time of his
6 report.

7 **Q.** Can we go back to the Montague report, please -- thank
8 you -- and then if we can look at page 3, and go back to
9 the bullet point that we were about to turn to under
10 "Findings", third bullet point. So we're looking at the
11 paragraph underneath the one we were previously looking
12 at:

13 "There is good evidence of future proofing at all
14 levels. The basic infrastructure is very robust for the
15 future and, in the main, industry standard products have
16 been used. The system should allow POCL to compete for
17 new business in a variety of markets ... New
18 applications based on smartcard technology should be
19 relatively straightforward and economic. If online
20 applications are required, they may take longer and
21 require more investment."

22 Did you or do you take anything from that conclusion
23 as to the existing robustness of the system or whether
24 this is instead looking at the future?

25 **A.** I think -- I think here his finding is looking to the
29

1 I think, despite their differences:

2 "All of the government departments were agreed that
3 it was essential that Horizon undergo a live testing
4 programme (rather than acceptance on the basis of
5 'laboratory testing', as ICL with were pushing for)."

6 That's something that you've mentioned this morning:
7 "The DSS in particular had had a bad experience with
8 an IT project which had been accepted in a test
9 environment which had failed when actually rolled out."

10 You say that was a priority concern for them. Can
11 you recall who the supplier was there, whether it was,
12 in fact, ICL?

13 **A.** I can't recall, I'm afraid.

14 **Q.** Can you recall, or do you remember, the DSS being in
15 litigation with ICL at this time?

16 **A.** I can't recall that.

17 **Q.** One thing we don't see in the Montague report is
18 a reference back to any of the issues that had been
19 raised or concerns raised about the Pathway proposals in
20 the course of the procurement exercise. To what extent,
21 as a member of the new Government, did you have sight of
22 issues and concerns raised about the technical viability
23 of the Pathway proposal?

24 **A.** I think it's one of the great frustrations we had as
25 ministers in the new administration. We were not -- we

1 future.

2 **Q.** To what extent can you now recall whether there was
3 reliance within government on what had been said by
4 Montague, generally, as to the technical viability of
5 the product or the system as meaning that it was
6 a robust system?

7 **A.** I think we did take that from the Montague report. It
8 would be helpful -- and I have to admit that I haven't
9 seen it -- to see the work that PA Consulting did
10 because they would have been the entity that would have
11 addressed the technical issues around how robust Horizon
12 actually was at this stage.

13 **Q.** Can you recall what had led to -- I'll put that in
14 another way.

15 Can you recall how Montague went about his work,
16 ie what level of deep dive into the operation of the
17 system he undertook?

18 **A.** I think Sir Adrian's going to be in a better position to
19 address that.

20 **Q.** Would you agree that it is logical that the report could
21 not offer a view on the existing integrity or robustness
22 of the system because it had not been built yet?

23 **A.** That would be a sensible conclusion.

24 **Q.** You tell us in your witness statement, if we can go back
25 to that, please, at paragraph 19, it's on page 7, that,
30

1 were not provided with any detailed information about
2 the difficulties that may have been experienced with
3 Pathway during the tendering process. That was all
4 denied to us, and there is a well established protocol
5 that members of a new government administration cannot
6 see the documents or the policy papers that were
7 provided to the previous administration.

8 So we were -- we were blindsided, and I can
9 understand why, for political reasons, one is not
10 allowed to sort of delve into why particular political
11 decisions were taken, but I cannot see why, if technical
12 weaknesses and problems had been identified under
13 a previous administration, why we couldn't have been
14 alerted to those. And we were not.

15 **Q.** That's a convention of our administration of politics.

16 **A.** Yeah. Well, of government, not just of --

17 **Q.** Of government.

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** What is your understanding of the limit of it, or the
20 limits of it? What are you denied access to?

21 **A.** Well, on this occasion, everything. You know, we had,
22 we had four key questions as ministers that we wanted
23 answered about this functional, fatally-flawed contract
24 that was Horizon. We wanted to know who decided it
25 should be a Benefit Payment Card, and not a smartcard;

1 why did they arrive at the decision it should be a PFI
 2 contract, when, in fact, this was a fantastically
 3 complicated contract; was PFI the right approach -- we
 4 didn't have the details of the tendering process, but
 5 I think the Inquiry may have sort of delved into that;
 6 and, finally, why did they end up with, basically, two
 7 clients in the Benefits Agency and POCL whose interests
 8 were not aligned?

9 Now, we were denied any of that information, as the
 10 new administration. As I said earlier, I can understand
 11 why we can't delve into the political decisions, the
 12 party political decisions, if you like. I can
 13 understand why we were not shown the sort of details the
 14 Inquiry's now had about our decision-making process
 15 during this period. But I would have thought that if
 16 flaws in the system had been identified at an early
 17 stage, there's no reason why that couldn't be disclosed
 18 to an incoming administration. It would have helped us
 19 enormously if, as ministers, we'd been told that these
 20 problems had been identified.

21 **Q.** So just testing that at a more general level, are you
 22 denied all previous papers of the past administration?

23 **A.** Yes.

24 **Q.** What does "all previous papers" mean?

25 **A.** From my recollection, when we would enquire from our

33

1 to your knowledge in the convention that would prevent
 2 or would have prevented him from seeing that previous
 3 technical assessment of the Horizon proposal by
 4 ICL Pathway?

5 **A.** It's such a long time ago, I honestly can't recall the
 6 detail of the convention now.

7 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Mr Byers, who would be the arbiter of the
 8 convention? Assuming -- forget Horizon. Assuming that
 9 you as an incoming Chief Secretary were really anxious
 10 to see a particular document, which you knew must have
 11 existed, for example, who would actually say "You are
 12 denied", so to speak?

13 **A.** Well, it would probably -- I'm trying to recall, Chair,
 14 if it happened in my time. It would be, first of all,
 15 a request to your own private office, so your principal
 16 private secretary, and if he or she said "I'm really
 17 sorry, we can't disclose that information" and if I felt
 18 very strongly about it, I would then go to the
 19 Permanent Secretary, the head of the Department, and
 20 they would rule one way or the other.

21 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right, thank you very much.

22 **MR BEER:** Can you recall that issue arising in relation to
 23 Horizon about technical issues, or was it limited for
 24 more political issues that you had mentioned a moment
 25 ago?

35

1 civil servants, who would have been part of that
 2 process, what happened, what was the reasoning behind
 3 it, there was a -- there was a veil that we couldn't
 4 lift.

5 **Q.** To use this as an case study, one could understand why
 6 you wouldn't be able to see submissions to ministers,
 7 agreed?

8 **A.** Yes. No, I understand -- yes, I understand that.

9 **Q.** One could understand why you couldn't see
 10 inter-ministerial or inter-Secretary of State
 11 correspondence?

12 **A.** Yes, I mean, to be honest, much of the information
 13 that's before the Inquiry around our decision making
 14 process as ministers --

15 **Q.** Yes.

16 **A.** -- I wouldn't have expected to see that.

17 **Q.** No. If you were the next administration after yours,
 18 no.

19 But if technical reports had been prepared, is there
 20 anything, to your understanding, in the convention that
 21 would have prevented them from being seen by Adrian
 22 Montague?

23 **A.** It would be interesting to know if Adrian had that
 24 information. I don't know the answer to that.

25 **Q.** The question was slightly different: is there anything

34

1 **A.** I can't remember any specific request around the
 2 technical questions.

3 **Q.** Because the Inquiry, you may know, has received a vast
 4 body of evidence concerning issues and concerns raised
 5 over the ICL Pathway proposals in the course of the
 6 tendering process, each stage of the procurement
 7 exercise, and that knowledge gained doesn't appear to
 8 have featured in any of your decision-making or indeed
 9 in Adrian Montague's report?

10 **A.** Or was drawn to our attention. I mean, there's no
 11 documents that refer to those discoveries.

12 **Q.** No.

13 Can we move on, then, please, and go back to the
 14 Montague report and look at page 4, please. That's
 15 POL00028094. We can see from the last bullet point one
 16 of the recommendations was the appointment of a "neutral
 17 troubleshooter":

18 "... directly responsible to Ministers and with
 19 their full confidence ... to ensure all the parties give
 20 their full commitment to implementation of the programme
 21 and that rollout is completed at the earliest agreed
 22 date."

23 Was that recommendation, the appointment of
 24 a neutral troubleshooter, accepted by you?

25 **A.** Yes, it was.

36

1 Q. I just want to see what happened after the report was
2 delivered. Can we look at HMT00000055. If we just see,
3 this is a letter dated 10 September 1998.

4 If we go to the last page, please, page 3, and
5 scroll down, we can see that, from page 1, it was
6 addressed to Alistair Darling -- he was then the
7 Secretary of State for the DSS -- and copied to the
8 Prime Minister; Jack Cunningham, I think he was then the
9 Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the
10 Duchy of Lancaster.

11 A. That's right, yeah.

12 Q. Peter Mandelson, who was then the Secretary of State for
13 Trade and Industry. That was the job that you were soon
14 to be taking up but didn't know it yet.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Ian McCartney, I think his formal title was Minister of
17 State for Competitiveness, does that ring a bell?

18 A. It does, but within that overall brief he had specific
19 responsibility for the Post Office.

20 Q. And Sir Richard Wilson, who I think was the Cabinet
21 Secretary and the Head of the Civil Service?

22 A. He was at that time.

23 Q. Okay, if we go back to page 1, please. It's clear from
24 paragraph 1 that you've met with three others the
25 previous day, you say "three streams of work", and you

37

1 "To facilitate this process, I am proposing to
2 appoint an adviser to work with the parties towards
3 finding a solution. He will report [directly] to me,
4 and I expect him to be given full co-operation by all
5 the parties. His terms of reference are attached.

6 "To provide a satisfactory outcome, the conclusion
7 of the discussions must meet a number of basic criteria
8 which include:

9 "any adjustment to the contracts must of course be
10 compatible with procurement law;

11 "[two] the contract must provide a firm date after
12 which the Benefits Agency will have no further
13 commitment to using the Benefit Payment Card."

14 A general point is made to avoid misunderstanding:

15 "ICL Pathway entered into these contracts on PFI
16 terms which entail accepting significant risks. It
17 should be clear at the outset, therefore, that the
18 discussions are not posited on an outcome which would
19 ensure ICL Pathway a positive return on the project."

20 Can you just decode what you mean there? I think he
21 know what you mean, but ...

22 A. It was a general principle under PFI that risk
23 transferred to the private sector and, therefore, if
24 there was a loss to be made by ICL that was a risk that
25 they'd taken by agreeing to the PFI contract.

39

1 say, first, in paragraph 3, there must be a negotiation
2 between the parties to the contract. You would propose
3 to write to ICL in the terms at annex A to set the
4 framework.

5 Can we just look at that, please, and that's pages 4
6 and 5 of the document. So this is a draft letter from
7 you to ICL Pathway. We will see in due course that it
8 was sent in these terms:

9 "As you know, Ministers have been reviewing the
10 future of this project in view of the serious delays to
11 the implementation timetable, and ICL Pathway's failure
12 to deliver a key contractual milestone for which
13 ICL Pathway has been placed in breach of contract.

14 "We remain seriously concerned by the slow rate of
15 progress on this project which was originally scheduled
16 to be fully operational by October 1998."

17 Of course, that's the date at which you're writing
18 this or a month before.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. "However, we have decided to allow a period of one month
21 for discussion between the parties to see whether
22 satisfactory commercial terms can be agreed for
23 continuing the project, outstanding differences on the
24 timetable can be resolved, and a credible programme for
25 full implementation can be agreed.

38

1 Q. So this was a condition to entering into the process
2 that you were proposing?

3 A. Yes, and I think there may have been an indication --
4 this is a presumption, I'm sorry, but I think there may
5 have been an indication from ICL Pathway before, that if
6 they were not going to get a positive return, then they
7 would -- they would have difficulty proceeding.

8 Q. You outlined some other conditions, "agreement that":

9 "no party will issue legal proceedings against any
10 other while the discussions are being conducted;

11 "discussions will be conducted in strictest
12 confidence and without prejudice; and

13 "work on the project will continue in accordance
14 with the existing contracts while discussions are
15 continuing."

16 You ask them whether they're prepared to accept.

17 Can we go back to page 2 of the letter, please, and
18 paragraph 4. You say:

19 "... we will need [this is to your colleagues in
20 Government] to appoint a troubleshooter to facilitate
21 the process."

22 You annex at B proposed terms of reference, you're
23 considering who might be a suitable appointment for this
24 important position.

25 Was Graham Corbett, in due course, appointed as that

40

1 neutral troubleshooter to that important position?
 2 **A.** Yes, he was.
 3 **Q.** And was he chosen by you?
 4 **A.** On the recommendation of, I think, Steve Robson, who was
 5 second Permanent Secretary in the Treasury.
 6 **Q.** In your statement you say -- the cross reference is
 7 paragraph 22 to your statement -- that it was on the
 8 recommendation of Adrian Montague?
 9 **A.** Ah, you could be right. I -- that must be the case --
 10 **Q.** It's more important for you to be right.
 11 **A.** Yes, of course, of course, I apologise.
 12 **Q.** No, that's all right. Do you want to just look at what
 13 you said in your statement?
 14 **A.** Please do --
 15 **Q.** So it's paragraph 22 of your statement.
 16 **A.** Because thinking about it now I'm sure that Steve Robson
 17 had some role, but I could be wrong, and I'm sure that
 18 in preparing my witness statement I'd have
 19 double-checked on --
 20 **Q.** You're quite right, you do say "and another HMT
 21 official, Steve Robson", so it's both?
 22 **A.** That would be it.
 23 **Q.** Why was he chosen?
 24 **A.** He had -- his expertise was, he was very much a sort of
 25 a finance man, and --

41

1 **Q.** Can we go back to HMT00000055, please, and turn to
 2 page 6, please, which are the terms of reference for the
 3 troubleshooter. Skipping the first paragraph:
 4 "The adviser will report to Ministers via the Chief
 5 Secretary to the Treasury [you]."
 6 Was that deliberate, that it was to your level
 7 rather than to the ministers under you such as
 8 Mr McCartney?
 9 **A.** Well, at this stage I was chief secretary to the
 10 Treasury, so --
 11 **Q.** I'm so sorry.
 12 **A.** -- so I was under Gordon Brown, would be the way it
 13 would work, but Gordon wasn't involved in this, he was
 14 later. I was in the middle of, I think I describe in my
 15 witness statement, a bit like a spider's web, so I was
 16 trying to get government departments, Trade and
 17 Industry, Social Security -- so Peter Mandelson and
 18 Alistair Darling -- to work together and to agree to
 19 this process. So I was the -- I was trying to be the
 20 sort of matchmaker in this whole thing. And that's
 21 a role actually the chief secretary often plays, because
 22 having responsibility for public spending, you cabinet
 23 colleagues are always very keen to be sort of quite
 24 friendly with you, because you decide if they're going
 25 to get money or not.

43

1 **Q.** The statement can come down, thank you.
 2 **A.** Yeah. And he also -- he was a pretty robust character,
 3 and I think we'd got to the stage where we probably
 4 needed heads knocked together, and I think the view was
 5 that he would be -- he would be a good person to do
 6 that.
 7 **Q.** Yes, that can come down as well, thank you. There is
 8 some reference to that in the papers, that heads needed
 9 to be knocked together. Was it the robustness of his
 10 personality that led you to believe --
 11 **A.** He had -- I think he had a reputation for, in a very
 12 appropriate way, of being -- not in a bullying or
 13 intimidating way -- but a way of being sort of assertive
 14 and pointing out to people that they had
 15 responsibilities and they should be doing, doing the
 16 right thing.
 17 And I think that applied -- and I think this is
 18 covered in that note, because I'm saying to people like
 19 Peter Mandelson and Alistair Darling that they had
 20 responsibilities to make sure that their respective
 21 teams were entering into this process in a positive way.
 22 **Q.** So it wasn't just ICL Pathway that needed to have its
 23 head knocked?
 24 **A.** No, there were quite a few heads that needed to be
 25 knocked.

42

1 So you have a sort of role to play, and when there's
 2 a particular problem, which we had here, involving
 3 several government departments then, and I think this is
 4 still the case today, the chief secretary is often the
 5 person who actually brokers deals between departments.
 6 **Q.** That's why you're the web and each of those men are
 7 spiders?
 8 **A.** Yes, I was reflecting yesterday evening on whether that
 9 was quite a very -- not a very appropriate description,
 10 but hopefully the Inquiry gets my meaning.
 11 **Q.** Yes, I think -- well, at least I do.
 12 You will see the objectives set out:
 13 "The immediate objective will be to report to
 14 Ministers within one month on:
 15 "whether there is a commercial basis for proceeding
 16 with the project which is acceptable to the parties;
 17 "whether there is in place a satisfactory
 18 implementation plan with a detailed timetable for
 19 completing the project;
 20 "any further action which would need to be taken to
 21 ensure successful delivery of the project."
 22 Then scrolling down:
 23 "The role of the adviser will be to:
 24 "convene and chair discussions between the parties;
 25 "commission papers and proposals from the

44

1 parties ..."

2 Then, over the page:

3 "independently appraise the parties' claims and

4 contributions;

5 "produce compromise proposals ...

6 "take such other action as he [sees] fit to

7 establish an acceptable basis for continuation;

8 "ensure the parties provide information necessary

9 for the analysis of alternative options.

10 "The adviser will have no power to bind the

11 parties ..."

12 Then lastly this:

13 "If the project continues there is likely to be

14 a continuing role for the adviser in facilitating

15 [process]."

16 So that last paragraph made it clear that there

17 ought to be a continuing role for the troubleshooter; is

18 that right?

19 **A.** Yes.

20 **Q.** Now, I think you secured some broad consensus for these

21 proposals?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** If we look at what was said, HMT00000052.

24 **(Pause)**

25 I'm just counting my 0s. Yes, thank you.

45

1 with ICL:

2 "the Government's view of the strength of its

3 negotiating position with ICL ..."

4 If you just read that to yourself, what he said.

5 **(Pause)**

6 **A.** Okay.

7 **Q.** Second bullet point:

8 "... discussion of any option to continue, is

9 clearly presented at all times against a backdrop of

10 Government's right to terminate ..."

11 That's self-explanatory:

12 "[and] agreement on the legal and financial

13 parameters of the negotiations; in particular that the

14 contract cannot safely be carried on beyond 2007 and

15 that prices cannot be significantly increased."

16 Then the last paragraph on that page:

17 "[He welcomes] your assurance at the meeting that

18 [Treasury] would be prepared to provide the additional

19 requirement if it fell to my budget."

20 I think that's an example of the kind of thing you

21 were just mentioning?

22 **A.** Mm.

23 **Q.** So decoding what Alistair Darling is saying there, would

24 you agree this is a cautious but conditional "yes"?

25 **A.** It's a very Alistair Darling letter, which is --

47

1 This is a letter from Alistair Darling at the DSS to

2 you, 14 September, thanking you for your letter of the

3 10th.

4 Scroll down, please. He is grateful to you for the

5 more detailed account you've now provided of the

6 proposed way forwards:

7 "... it is important for there to be a rigorous

8 process, at the end of which it would be clear that the

9 route forward produced better value for money for

10 Government. And on this basis I agree with what is

11 proposed. I particularly support what you say about the

12 need to provide sufficient analysis of the three main

13 options to allow us to judge, at the conclusion of the

14 discussions with ... Pathway, whether the outcome of the

15 negotiations offers [us] best value for money for the

16 public sector as a whole.

17 "There is one specific point [that he would like to

18 see included in the letter to ICL] ... that this

19 Department's ability to migrate to an ACT-based system,

20 in preparation for the end of card usage by contract end

21 date, should be [apparent] to ICL. We are working on

22 a strategy ..."

23 Then continue, please:

24 "More generally, there are some important points we

25 need to establish before we take forward discussions

46

1 **Q.** We don't know what that means.

2 **A.** Just as you've expressed it, it's cautious but

3 a lukewarm "yes". And he's laying -- he is doing what

4 a good Secretary of State does, he's laying down clear

5 sort of conditions and parameters for the discussion,

6 and some red lines as well, I think, as to -- and he's

7 looking after the interests of his Department.

8 **Q.** One of the things I'm going to come back to, when we

9 look at all this correspondence as a whole run, is

10 whether that's what people were doing, looking after the

11 interests of their department, and sight was lost of the

12 subpostmasters in the process. You understand?

13 **A.** I do.

14 **Q.** Can we look at the reply from Peter Mandelson, then

15 Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, at

16 HMT00000048.

17 I think we're going to find, but I'd like you to

18 confirm, that this reply is a more fulsome "yes":

19 "Thank you for your letter of 10 September ..."

20 Scrolling down:

21 "I confirm that I am content with what you have

22 proposed. In particular I accept the remit set out in

23 paragraph 5 of your letter. My objective within the

24 initial timescale of one month will be as a minimum to

25 agree with the Post Office Board the actions that need

48

1 to be taken on each of the items listed; to ensure that
2 practical measures are put in place as quickly as
3 possible to take these actions forward; to institute
4 arrangements to monitor progress on a regular basis; and
5 to be in a position to report back to colleagues such
6 substantive progress as may have been proved possible on
7 each by the end of the first month.

8 "[He is] pleased to see that you envisage a role for
9 the troubleshooter which extends beyond the initial
10 negotiation and that this is reflected in the draft
11 terms of reference ..."

12 That was that last paragraph of the annex that we
13 read?

14 **A.** Yeah.

15 **Q.** "This will be important in minimising the
16 misunderstandings and disagreements between the parties
17 which have undoubtedly contributed to delays in the
18 past."

19 Then over the page, finally he agrees with the
20 suggestion -- I didn't in fact read this in your
21 proposal -- of an interdepartmental working group
22 including the policy unit.

23 Again, could you decode or translate how you read
24 his letter as a whole --

25 **A.** Yes.

49

1 continue, and are prepared, without prejudice to our
2 legal rights, to agree to the one month period of
3 discussion for the purpose and on the terms which you
4 suggest."

5 He is satisfied with the terms of reference for the
6 independent adviser and will give him "our full
7 co-operation":

8 "Regarding the conditions for opening discussion
9 mentioned in paragraph 6 ... we confirm that we will
10 accept them for the relevant period of one month."

11 Then scrolling down:

12 "We would make the point that paragraphs 4 and 5 of
13 your letter cause ... some concern ... any adjustments
14 to the contract must be compatible with procurement law,
15 we have already sent to the parties and the Treasury our
16 legal opinion that a commercial settlement of our
17 differences will cause no difficulty ...

18 "So far as the other matters ... are concerned, in
19 our view it is not helpful to the process of full and
20 frank discussion and negotiation to set any
21 preconditions as to the components of a commercial
22 settlement ... these are matters that have to be
23 discussed as part of the negotiations in order to reach
24 a settlement."

25 So those conditions, you remember there were four of

51

1 **Q.** -- because I characterised it as a more fulsome "yes"?

2 **A.** I think it's a positive agreement to the work of
3 a troubleshooter, yeah.

4 **Q.** Then the third party in this, ICL Pathway, replying to
5 that letter that you saw in draft?

6 **A.** Yeah.

7 **Q.** I'm not going to go to the version in fact sent. That's
8 BEIS0000283.

9 **(Pause)**

10 Thank you. A letter to you from -- if you just
11 scroll down on the right-hand side, please, scroll
12 down -- from Keith Todd, can you see that, chief
13 executive?

14 **A.** Yes, yes.

15 **Q.** Just going back up, please, he thanks you for your
16 letter of 15 September:

17 "We reject the allegation that ICL Pathway is in
18 breach of contract ... you will be aware that we have
19 already taken serious exception to the attempts by the
20 DSS to establish this position in their correspondence
21 to us.

22 "... we continue to believe that this programme
23 offers major long-term benefits to both the Benefits
24 Agency and the Post Office as well as wider Government
25 aspects ... therefore, keen to see this project

50

1 them that you were setting out, he's saying "No, they
2 need to be part of the discussion" rather than
3 preconditions for entering into a discussion?

4 **A.** Yeah.

5 **Q.** Then continuing, he asks for details of the independent
6 adviser.

7 So characterising that as a whole, would you say
8 relatively frosty but willing to engage in the process?

9 **A.** Yes, and I think trying to protect their position as
10 a company.

11 **MR BEER:** Sir, although we're part-way through this run of
12 correspondence, 11.15 now, that might be an appropriate
13 moment to take a break until 11.30.

14 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes, Mr Beer.

15 But while it's fresh in my mind I would just like to
16 ask Mr Byers one or two other questions about this
17 convention, which is the first time that I've heard it
18 in this Inquiry, at least, Mr Byers.

19 Can I ask some basic questions: is this
20 a convention, ie that you don't get information about
21 what the previous Government has been up to, which
22 operates only if there's a change of government which
23 includes a change of government of political persuasion?

24 **A.** I'd always assumed so, and given what has happened over
25 recent months, it would be a bit chaotic if the fourth

52

1 Chancellor in nine months can't be told what --

2 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right, fine. That's what I would have
3 expected, but I just wanted to be clear about that.

4 But there must be a number of instances, Horizon
5 being one of them, where a project begins under one
6 government but is obviously intended or at least might
7 continue under another?

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** On the face of it, trying to be
10 objective, I would have thought that knowing what went
11 on about technical aspects relating to a project like
12 Horizon before you become the Government might assist in
13 helping you to make decisions after you've become the
14 Government?

15 **A.** The officials in the Department will have had that
16 information.

17 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Sure.

18 **A.** So they will be aware of it.

19 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes.

20 **A.** They clearly feel constrained to let the new
21 administration know. Now, I can understand -- as I was
22 saying to Mr Beer, I can understand if it's a sort of
23 party political issue why we wouldn't be told. I think
24 everybody would go along with that. I think if there
25 are technical problems which have been identified within

53

1 **A.** Good luck with that one! Yes.

2 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Because, on the face of it, the best
3 people to provide information about, say, the
4 procurement or evaluation process are the evaluers, and
5 they were the Post Office and other civil servants, yes?

6 **A.** Yes, and they would be the same people. I mean, they
7 didn't change, and I think you'll hear evidence from,
8 you know, the relevant civil servant who was in charge
9 of the Post Office for a number of years, under
10 successive administrations.

11 But, in this case, I can't see anywhere, and I can't
12 remember, and I haven't seen anything in the documents
13 that have been provided to the Inquiry, to show that, as
14 ministers or certainly myself as Secretary of State, was
15 alerted to the problems that were identified in the
16 tendering process which has been referred to by counsel
17 to the Tribunal.

18 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** All right, thank you. It becomes more
19 and more intriguing, this aspect. Thanks very much.

20 Let's have our break. Shall we now break until
21 11.35, or what?

22 **MR BEER:** Yes, thank you very much, sir.

23 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right, thanks.

(11.20 am)

(A short break)

55

1 a project like Horizon, then I don't see why we couldn't
2 be told or alerted to the fact there may be weaknesses,
3 because then we would have constructed something in
4 a way which would have addressed them.

5 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Right. But, as a matter of fact, in this
6 instance, you weren't told, I think is your evidence,
7 yes?

8 **A.** That's correct, yeah.

9 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes.

10 Now, in this particular instance, there's
11 a variation that I wanted you to consider, and that is
12 that one of the parties to the contract which was
13 concluded in 1996 was the statutory corporation, namely
14 the Post Office.

15 **A.** Post Office.

16 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** So what would be preventing -- and I'm
17 not saying this in any critical sense, I'm just trying
18 to understand it -- what would prevent an incoming
19 relevant minister from simply asking the Post Office
20 what went on?

21 **A.** That's a very good question. I'm afraid I don't have
22 the answer, Chair.

23 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** All right. Because, as you'll
24 understand, I have to try and make sense of governance
25 issues.

54

1 (11.35 am)

2 **MR BEER:** Good morning, again, sir. Can you hear and see
3 us?

4 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes, I can, thank you.

5 **MR BEER:** Sir, just to explain to you, we are in possession,
6 in the Inquiry of the Ministerial Code, the Cabinet
7 Manual from the time that we're talking about, and the
8 directory of Civil Service guidance, which sits
9 underneath the Cabinet Manual, each of which contain, to
10 a greater or lesser extent, guidance on the parameters
11 of the convention that we have been discussing.

12 But given Mr Byers' answers earlier about given the
13 length of time that has elapsed since he held relevant
14 office, I haven't thought it appropriate to use Mr Byers
15 as a witness to explore any further the convention and,
16 instead, we're going to leave his answers where they
17 stand.

18 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Well, I'm perfectly happy with that,
19 Mr Beer, because, as usual, you appear to be ahead of
20 me. But I was just interested in what Mr Byers was
21 saying.

22 **MR BEER:** Thank you very much, sir.

23 Can we look, please, at POL00028098, and go to
24 page 3, please. We have been looking, before the break,
25 Mr Byers, at the outfall from the Montague report, one

56

1 of which recommendations was the appointment of the
2 neutral troubleshooter, the appointment of Graham
3 Corbett and his terms of reference, and this is the
4 product of the appointment of Graham Corbett in the role
5 that we have seen.

6 It's a letter to you dated 18 October 1998. In the
7 first paragraph he records that he was appointed by you
8 on 17 September and was required to report by 16 October
9 1998, so within a month.

10 Can we go to page 4, please, over the page. I think
11 you've seen this document as part of your
12 preparations --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- for giving evidence today. In the interests of time,
15 I'm not going to go through it paragraph by paragraph,
16 but if we just look at the heading there:

17 "The discussions which I held with the parties, and
18 the information developed for those discussions, were
19 all without prejudice and confidential ..."

20 That was one of the conditions, I think, that was
21 set. Then under the heading, "The Path of the
22 Discussions -- Commercial". He sets out, over the rest
23 of that page -- if we just scan through it and scroll
24 down, and then on to the next page -- essentially
25 a chronological account of the attempts that he had made

57

1 Q. Would that be consistent with Mr Corbett's appointment,
2 that he was brought to knock commercial heads together,
3 rather than knock technical heads together?

4 A. That's an accurate reflection of the role we expected
5 Corbett to take, yeah.

6 Q. Then scroll down, please, to "The Way Forward". If you
7 just read that first paragraph to yourself, please.

8 (Pause)

9 Then over the page, please. He's:

10 "... profoundly disappointed that we have been able
11 to reach our primary objective and will continue to hope
12 that some way of bringing this project to fruition may
13 yet be found ... In the meantime, progress made or
14 programme issues will be of real and enduring benefit if
15 the project continues ..."

16 Then he pays tribute to the hard work that others
17 involved in the project have given?

18 A. Mr Beer, could we possibly go back to the end of the
19 preceding page?

20 Q. Yes, of course. That's it. To the "running sores
21 list"?

22 A. No, it's the bottom bit:

23 "I would also urge that as soon as BA can be
24 satisfied that it has a ..."

25 Because I think that's quite -- that's referring to

59

1 to negotiate between the three parties: BA on the one
2 hand, Post Office on the other and ICL on the third.

3 Then over the page again, please, and he concludes:

4 "There was no further change in the position between
5 the parties when the without prejudice discussion month
6 came to an end at midday on 16 October."

7 Then he turns to "The Path of Discussions --
8 Programme and Project Management Issues", narrating that
9 a working group was established of the programme
10 directors from each of the parties under the
11 chairmanship of the director of the Horizon Programme
12 Office and with PA Consulting keeping close to and
13 guiding their discussions. He annexes PA Consulting's
14 report.

15 Then if we scroll on, please, there is a narration
16 of the parties' views in the first two main paragraphs
17 on that page.

18 So, so far, we've had discussion about seeking to
19 resolve at a commercial and essentially contractual
20 level the dispute between the parties. It's right,
21 I think, that there's nothing to do with issues of
22 technical reassurance or the integrity or reliability of
23 the system that might be produced as part of this
24 exercise; is that right?

25 A. That's correct, yes.

58

1 the ability --

2 Q. "I would urge that as soon as BA can be satisfied that
3 it has a ..."

4 Then over the page.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. "... system which works both on test and in practice,
7 consideration should be given to reshaping the contracts
8 so as to take BA out of the contractual loop and
9 position them as a POCL client."

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. What was the significance of that that you wish to draw
12 to our attention?

13 A. I think I mentioned earlier that the -- one of the big
14 problems we had was effectively having two clients, BA
15 and POCL, and this is the first sort of indication that
16 we should be looking at a much more streamlined approach
17 where there is only really one client, which is POCL,
18 and that we take BA out of the equation.

19 This is saying that, provided BA have a system which
20 they're satisfied with, it works both in test and in
21 practice, then we could remove them from the sort of
22 contractual arrangement and just have one client which
23 would be POCL.

24 So we're trying to remedy some of the major
25 deficiencies in the contract that we inherited from the

60

1 previous administration.

2 **Q.** What was your view overall of the outcome of the Corbett
3 attempt?

4 **A.** To be honest, I didn't make as much progress as I -- as
5 we would have wanted, the parties were still not working
6 together, I think Graham himself -- I'm trying to
7 recall -- I think he said to me that he wasn't sure
8 there was a continuing role for him to play.

9 **Q.** That's what I was about to ask you about.

10 **A.** Sorry.

11 **Q.** That document can come down now. What continuing role
12 did Mr Corbett, in fact, play, as envisaged by the terms
13 of reference of his appointment?

14 **A.** To the best of my recollection, I think Graham told me
15 that he'd got as far as he could with the parties.
16 That's my recollection.

17 **Q.** Is it right that he didn't have any further role,
18 contrary to what had been envisaged by the terms of
19 reference?

20 **A.** Yeah. That's correct, that's correct.

21 **Q.** Why did he think he'd got no further role to play?

22 **A.** I think he'd got as far as he could with the parties and
23 he couldn't see that his continued involvement would add
24 value to what we were trying to achieve.

25 **Q.** The terms of reference thought that there should be

61

1 I'm not going to take you to your letter of the 20th.
2 You had written to the parties and set a deadline to
3 arrive at heads of agreement, and you were looking to
4 ICL to make what was described as a speedy and decisive
5 move.

6 Do you remember that?

7 **A.** Yes, I think the letter of the 20th followed on from the
8 Corbett proposals or recommendations.

9 **Q.** Was that a different way of attempting to break the
10 deadlock?

11 **A.** I think so.

12 **Q.** It's been suggested in some of the evidence that the
13 Inquiry's received that it was Government that was
14 responsible for the deadlock here and that 1998 was
15 essentially a lost year because of the internecine
16 squabbling between two departments of State, DSS and
17 DTI. Does that reflect your recollection?

18 **A.** I wouldn't -- there ... there were clearly disagreements
19 between those two entities, whether I would describe it
20 in quite the way that you have, I'm not sure I would,
21 but there were clearly disagreements, yes, and this goes
22 back to the point about having two clients to the
23 contract with quite different objectives and, you know,
24 different cultures.

25 **Q.** If you can just scan through the letter --

63

1 a continuing role for the independent --

2 **A.** Yeah.

3 **Q.** -- troubleshooter, in the event that the project
4 proceeded.

5 **A.** Yeah.

6 **Q.** Was that role taken up by him or anyone else when --

7 **A.** No.

8 **Q.** -- the project did proceed?

9 **A.** No.

10 **Q.** Do you remember why that was?

11 **A.** I --

12 **Q.** Sort of an honest broker?

13 **A.** Yeah, I think the view was that sort of troubleshooter
14 role, we'd tried it and it hadn't really been that
15 effective.

16 **Q.** Thank you.

17 Can we turn to December 1998, please, and look at
18 CBO00100001. Thank you. If we can just enlarge that to
19 make it a bit clearer. Yes, sorry, I should have said
20 at 76. Thank you. That's better, thank you, and again
21 enlarge it, please. Thank you.

22 This is a letter from Keith Todd -- if we just
23 scroll down, on the right, again, we can see that, back
24 up, please -- to you of 9 December.

25 So a letter from the chief executive of ICL to you.

62

1 **A.** I should also add, by the way, that it's not helped by
2 the fact that ICL were overbudget and way behind
3 schedule.

4 **Q.** They had suggested in turn that was because of the delay
5 and that delay itself in making a decision was causing
6 them to lose millions on a monthly basis.

7 **A.** I think ICL had a lot of responsibility.

8 **Q.** They say ICL in the end of the second paragraph:
9 "... in the interests of resolving the impasse I am
10 prepared to make a 'speedy and decisive move'.

11 "A major criticism of ICL's proposals ... appears to
12 have been that ICL sought ..."

13 I should just stop there. I haven't, in the
14 interests of time, taken you to the immediate November
15 exchanges --

16 **A.** Sure.

17 **Q.** -- that immediately postdated the Corbett --

18 **A.** Corbett, yeah, I get that.

19 **Q.** "... to transfer risk back to the public sector. The
20 impression was also created that Fujitsu was in the
21 process of withdrawing its support from the Pathway
22 project. There was also a view that the ICL proposals
23 in the Commercial and Contractual paper representing
24 unacceptable price increases."

25 Then they say they're going to address these points.

64

1 He says that he has discussed this with Fujitsu and
2 the chairman of the ICL Plc board, "both support my
3 proposal", it's our best offer:

4 "I have no hope of persuading my shareholder or my
5 Board to give me further room to move.

6 "First [Fujitsu] is prepared to fund the whole
7 project. This represents an investment of
8 £600 [million]."

9 Of what significance was that?

10 **A.** I can't recall.

11 **Q.** Scrolling down, please:

12 "... we have revised and restructured our commercial
13 proposals", with the last iteration of the Corbett
14 proposals in the second column and then ICL's proposal
15 in the third.

16 Then that's the amount that the public sector would
17 contribute, and you will see that there's
18 £90-odd million difference between them in the totals at
19 the foot of the page.

20 **A.** Yeah.

21 **Q.** Then over the page, please, "ICL" -- after the
22 footnotes -- sorry, after the bullet points:

23 "ICL is also prepared to accept an even higher
24 degree of risk. Under ... ICL's NPV loss has increased
25 to £118 [million]."

65

1 **Q.** And consulted in the sense that their views might be
2 taken into account but, ultimately, the decision rested
3 with Government?

4 **A.** That would be the case, yeah.

5 **Q.** Why was that the case, given that POCL was
6 an independent company, limited by guarantee?

7 **A.** Two principal reasons, I think. First, that we
8 wouldn't -- we wouldn't want, under a PFI contract, for
9 risk to be transferred back to the public sector. It
10 had to remain with the contractor. That's the whole
11 point of PFI contracts. And, secondly, in the end there
12 would be a call on the public purse and therefore it
13 would be right that the Government took responsibility
14 for that and we'd have to sign off on it.

15 **Q.** Over the page, please, at the foot of the page, under
16 "Acceptance":

17 "Following detailed discussions, progress has been
18 made on Acceptance. The parties have agreed that
19 Acceptance will be completed prior to the start of
20 National Rollout and is not linked to NR2+."

21 What did you understand acceptance to be or to mean?

22 **A.** I can't remember now.

23 **Q.** So would it follow that if I ask you what the
24 significance of an agreement that acceptance would be
25 completed before national rollout, you wouldn't be able

67

1 Then scroll down, please:

2 "The other main features of our offer are as
3 follows ..."

4 He then sets them out:

5 "This offer represents an enormous commitment for
6 ICL and one that can only be justified if we have
7 confidence in the contractual arrangements, and the
8 commitment of ministers, moving forward."

9 Just stopping there, the impression that's given by
10 this slew of correspondence is that this has been taken
11 out of the POCL board's hands; is that right? This is
12 direct communication between/negotiation between
13 a contractor and a Secretary of State?

14 **A.** Yes, I think the effect of appointing Corbett to conduct
15 his review meant that, ultimately, it would be -- the
16 chief secretary would be looking at the various funding
17 requirements, whether risk was being transferred from
18 ICL to the public sector or whether risk was going to
19 remain with the contractor. So I think that's true. We
20 would consult the POCL board, obviously, but the
21 ultimate decision would be taken by government.

22 **Q.** That's what I wanted to ask you about. How would the
23 POCL board be consulted?

24 **A.** I think our officials would be engaged in dialogue,
25 correspondence with them, talking to them.

66

1 to assist?

2 **A.** What I can recall is that we would not have -- we wanted
3 to make sure, and this was through the live trials, that
4 the system worked in practice. Now, whether that's
5 relevant to this particular paragraph I'm not sure.
6 I can't recall.

7 **Q.** I understand. Can we move forwards, then, please,
8 because there's a follow-up letter nine days later,
9 HMT00000001, please.

10 **(Pause)**

11 I'm getting a shake of the head. I'll count my Os
12 again. Yes, HMT00000001. Good.

13 Can we just read through this. So this is
14 a follow-up letter, this is 18 December now, nine days
15 later:

16 "Since my letter to you ..."

17 I should have said this is from Keith Todd again to
18 you:

19 "... there have been a number of meetings as
20 a result of which ICL has clarified and refined its
21 proposal as set out in that letter."

22 So it turned out that the statement that "this is
23 now our last and best offer" was superseded:

24 "Accordingly, since I believe a decision by
25 Ministers on that proposal is imminent, I felt it would

68

1 be useful to write to you today to summarise the current
2 status of our proposal.

3 "First, POCL requested clarification of the nature
4 and extent of Fujitsu's support for ICL. We have
5 confirmed that this will be delivered by way of
6 a legally enforceable performance guarantee from Fujitsu
7 (in favour of the Sponsors) covering all of ICL's
8 obligations in relation to the project, including the
9 provision of all necessary funding.

10 "Second, we have held further discussions to clarify
11 the issues surrounding our proposals on Acceptance. We
12 have reached complete agreement on all issues relating
13 to Acceptance with POCL. This agreement is embodied in
14 a detailed paper, a copy of which is with your
15 officials. This paper has been discussed with BA, but
16 has not been agreed with them."

17 To what extent, at this stage, did you understand
18 that ICL was negotiating with the two separate elements,
19 POCL and BA, separately from Government?

20 **A.** Yes, I mean, I think we were expecting that, because the
21 contract was between those three parties.

22 **Q.** Would you or your officials have a way of checking back
23 whether what is said in these letters to you was
24 accurate?

25 **A.** Yes, I would have thought so.

69

1 Can we go to that, please, it's on page 3 of this
2 document?

3 **A.** Mr Beer, before we move on from this letter, I think
4 there was an important element linked to the £8 million
5 concession.

6 **Q.** Yes.

7 **A.** And the condition was that the Secretary of State for
8 Social Security would then be prepared to sign off or be
9 positive about the whole Horizon thing.

10 **Q.** Yes, that's at the foot of page 1 --

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** -- on to page 2?

13 **A.** I think that's important because Alistair Darling was
14 very strong, and this links back to the acceptance
15 point, I think, about the importance of live trials. If
16 I remember correctly, I think the Department of Social
17 Security had had a contract with another contractor
18 which had gone badly wrong and Alistair didn't want to
19 repeat those mistakes. So this was an attempt, I think,
20 to try and get Alistair to withdraw some of his
21 conditions, to give it approval.

22 And that context, I think, is important in terms of
23 how ICL were looking at this, because they were never
24 keen on live trials for Horizon.

25 **Q.** That context that you've just referred to, is that the

71

1 **Q.** That would have been done at official level, would it --

2 **A.** Yes.

3 **Q.** -- by going back to POCL and BA?

4 **A.** Yes.

5 **Q.** "Third, we have held further discussions with POCL to
6 clarify issues relating to our commercial proposals.
7 Again, we have reached agreement with POCL, on the
8 fundamental principles which will allow us to develop
9 a definitive, detailed, legally binding agreement with
10 them in due course. The agreement has imposed increased
11 volume ... on ICL.

12 "Fourth, although we have not had any direct
13 discussions with BA, I think it is helpful to state
14 ICL's position ... The proposal of 9 December ...
15 included an increase of £8 [million] over the Corbett
16 proposal. In the interests of reaching a speedy
17 conclusion, I have reluctantly agreed to renounce that
18 increase."

19 So a giveaway, essentially, by ICL of £8 million.

20 Then over the page, please:

21 "Fifth, ICL has done some further work on the
22 proposals ... to use the Horizon infrastructure for the
23 delivery of 'Better Government' ... We have written
24 a further paper, copies of which are with your
25 officials. I attach a copy for your reference."

70

1 same issue that you mentioned right at the outset when
2 I asked you questions, of the DSS being in dispute with
3 a contractor over the provision of IT?

4 **A.** Whether that was the same contract, I'm not sure, but
5 there certainly was an issue, because I remember in some
6 correspondence Alistair refers specifically to a problem
7 they've had with a particular contract which he
8 identifies. I think it may be in the bundle of
9 documents somewhere.

10 **Q.** We'll chase that down. You can't remember whether that
11 was ICL or not?

12 **A.** No, I can't recall.

13 **Q.** Can we look at the attached paper. Thank you. This is
14 the paper that Mr Todd was providing you with. Can we
15 look at "The Pathway Infrastructure":

16 "Pathway technology [this is what ICL say] is based
17 on the latest specification PCs with Microsoft NT
18 operating system, running in a highly secure
19 high-capacity managed network reaching the 19,000 Post
20 Offices. The PCs are equipped with barcode, smartcard
21 and magstripe card readers and receipt printers from
22 first installation, and are driven by icon-based menu
23 systems accessed via touchscreens. All these
24 technologies have been in successful use in 200 pilot
25 Post Offices over the last year."

72

1 Just stopping there, "all of these technologies have
2 been in successful use in 200 pilot post offices over
3 the last year", did you know whether that was accurate
4 or not?

5 **A.** I was going to ask you the question: is that correct?

6 **Q.** What was your state of knowledge at that point, that
7 there had been --

8 **A.** I don't think it's --

9 **Q.** -- all of those technologies in successful use in
10 200 pilot post offices over the last year?

11 **A.** I'm not sure that's a fair reflection of the reality.

12 **Q.** To what extent would a statement like this from ICL to
13 you and to Government have influenced it?

14 **A.** Not very much.

15 **Q.** They continue:

16 "The applications software is the world leader for
17 new generation counter automation and is web enabled,
18 allowing straightforward addition of further
19 internet/intranet services. The central hub systems
20 provide data routing, information management, client
21 gateways and security management, including Card
22 Management Services ... Military levels of security
23 including Postmaster Smartcard log-on and data
24 encryption ... lead to high levels of confidentiality
25 and trust. Touchscreens, icons and user driven menus

73

1 been provided with a copy of the first letter --

2 **A.** Yes.

3 **Q.** -- from Mr Todd, the 9 December one.

4 If we just go to the second page, please, and the
5 second paragraph:

6 "On the specific conditions that the proposals seem
7 to involve, I could not agree to the proposed approach
8 to 'acceptance testing'. ICL persist in asking for
9 acceptance on the basis of a laboratory test of the
10 systems, as opposed to a live trial -- particularly
11 important when for our customers it is the service that
12 is the crucial end product. In fact, the approach being
13 suggested by ICL is almost exactly that followed under
14 the NIRS2 project, where the system was fully accepted
15 in a test environment but did not work in the field.
16 I am not prepared to sign up to another NIRS2
17 experience! In any event, when we are talking about
18 a system which is affecting around 15 million people,
19 many of whom are dependent on timely and accurate
20 payment of their benefits for their livelihoods, the
21 political risks are huge if the system is not tested
22 properly beforehand to make sure it works. This is
23 a risk I am not prepared to take."

24 Is that the reference to the past bad experience to
25 which you were referring?

75

1 generate ease of use and staff and customer confidence."

2 Now, to what extent would this kind of narrative
3 influence you or would you write it off as sort of
4 advertising puff?

5 **A.** That's exactly the words I was going to use, Mr Beer.

6 It's ... it's straight out of the PR department for the
7 company, I'd have thought.

8 **Q.** What, if you thought it was advertising puff, would you
9 take from it that it is being given to the chief
10 secretary to the Treasury in all seriousness by
11 a contractor?

12 **A.** I ... I would have -- I would have seen it as
13 overpromoting what they could deliver, but I think the
14 context was that ICL wanted to become the sort of IT
15 provider of choice for the Government in relation to --
16 we had a sort of government modernisation programme, and
17 it was called "Modernising Government" actually, and
18 companies like ICL wanted to be part of that, and to
19 play a role because, obviously, commercially, it would
20 be very valuable for them, and this is a sort of -- it's
21 a promotional paper to show how they can assist in what
22 the Government is trying to achieve as part of that
23 wider agenda of modernising government.

24 **Q.** Can we look, please, at BEIS0000417. We can see that
25 this is a letter to you from Alistair Darling, he having

74

1 **A.** Yes, that was the project I was trying to recall, yeah.

2 But I don't know whether that's an ICL project, though.

3 **Q.** No.

4 So what was your view, then, of the paper that had
5 been delivered to you by Mr Todd, the "Modern
6 Government" paper? I mean, I haven't read to you all
7 six pages.

8 **A.** I think I'm grateful. I mean, the important point here,
9 from -- and this is why Alistair was absolutely right,
10 is that we could not countenance proceeding without live
11 trials and the reality -- if you then read across to the
12 paragraph that you've drawn the Inquiry's attention to,
13 you know, we did not have the examples that they gave in
14 that paragraph at the time that that publication was
15 made.

16 **Q.** Thank you. Can we go to paragraph 33 of your witness
17 statement, please, which is, I should have said, on
18 page 13. You say:

19 "... the financial consequences of any decision made
20 as to the future of Horizon were a crucial
21 consideration. Cancelling the project would have meant
22 writing off hundreds of millions of pounds of public and
23 private investment in a project which ... was
24 technically viable. There was also the risk of
25 protracted and costly litigation with ICL if the project

76

1 was cancelled."

2 Now, we know now through, amongst other things, the
3 decision of the High Court and the Court of Appeal in
4 this case, that the system that was eventually rolled
5 out was not remotely robust and a number of
6 subpostmasters have given evidence to the Inquiry in
7 February to May of this year to the effect that the
8 Horizon system produced multiple unexplained shortfalls
9 which they were unable effectively to check or to
10 dispute. They've said that they received inadequate
11 training and assistance provided by the Horizon
12 helpline.

13 Looking at the matter now, with the benefit of
14 hindsight, do you think that the financial consequences
15 of terminating the project were prioritised over the
16 need to ensure that, if the project did survive, it
17 would be properly suited to the needs of the
18 subpostmasters who were required to operate it on the
19 ground?

20 **A.** I think there are two things I'd like to say to address
21 that. Firstly, that the possibility of cancelling the
22 project was certainly a live consideration that I had
23 when I was chief secretary, and that I looked at in some
24 detail, and concluded that, actually, cancellation would
25 not be the right way forward.

77

1 Group, consisting of all the relevant parties, including
2 the subpostmasters, so that we, as ministers, could be
3 alerted if there were problems with the rollout and then
4 we could act accordingly.

5 **Q.** The Inquiry's heard evidence that, because of the nature
6 of the PFI agreement, which was in operation and
7 effective up until May 1999, Post Office Counters
8 Limited had very limited visibility from Pathway on the
9 technical details of the high or low level design of the
10 Horizon system. It's been suggested that Pathway
11 insisted that, so long as they delivered the outcomes
12 that were required by the specification, it was not
13 a concern of the Post Office as to how those outcomes
14 were delivered.

15 When the contract was renegotiated in May 1999, do
16 you remember that issue being brought to the
17 Government's attention?

18 **A.** I don't think it was.

19 **Q.** It's been suggested that a trick was missed in that, in
20 the renegotiation, there was a failure to ensure that
21 the technical information that had been denied to them
22 was now provided to POCL. Was that an issue that you in
23 government were made aware of?

24 **A.** We were not made aware of that.

25 **Q.** Coming, then, to May 1999 -- and I realise I've moved

79

1 And I probably felt that even more strongly when
2 I became the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry,
3 given the responsibilities I had there.

4 In proceeding with ICL -- and we had no indication,
5 as ministers, of the sort of operational difficulties
6 that you've referred to, Mr Beer, they were never drawn
7 to our attention. What I think we did do, which was
8 right in the circumstances, bearing in mind that we were
9 breaking new ground and it was a very ambitious
10 project -- it was ambitious for the Post Office network
11 and I think that was right in the circumstances.

12 When we got the settlement, I think it was in
13 May 1999 in the end --

14 **Q.** Yes, it is.

15 **A.** -- when we tried to sort of reconfigure the whole thing,
16 you know, we dropped the Benefit Payment Card; got one
17 client, as it were, which was POCL; we moved away from
18 a PFI to a more traditional standard design and build
19 project. So we're trying to remedy some of the faults
20 in the contract we inherited from the previous
21 administration. But, because we were breaking new
22 ground, we wanted to make sure that as the live trials
23 were continuing that we would be alerted to problems
24 that may occur, which is why we set up, under the
25 chairmanship of Ian McCartney, the Horizon Working

78

1 forward at some pace -- can we look, please, at
2 POL00028610. If we can just look at the next page,
3 please, at the foot of the page, you will see that it's
4 from you but has been approved in your -- or signed in
5 your absence but approved by you.

6 Back to the first page, please. There isn't a date
7 but, in the top right, if we just scroll up a little
8 bit, "Received: Sunday, 23 May", that's 1999.

9 It's to Dr Bain of the Post Office, can you just
10 read through it with me. You say:

11 "... there has been a long and detailed examination
12 of the project. My Ministerial colleagues and
13 I consider that the right way forward is to reconfigure
14 the project without the Benefit Payment Card rather than
15 to terminate it. The attached documents set out the
16 core elements of such a reconfigured project.

17 "You will ... be aware that Fujitsu have made clear
18 that they are only prepared to hold ... the offer in
19 these documents until midnight today ... 23 May [it
20 being a Sunday]. The offer would involve them taking
21 a significant provision in their Accounts which will be
22 published on 25 May. If the offer is not accepted
23 today, their provision will be larger and they have said
24 that, in these circumstances, they would only be
25 prepared to reconfigure the project in this way on the

80

1 basis of a considerably higher price than that currently
2 on offer.

3 "My colleagues and I believe it is desirable that
4 the Post Office signs the deal on offer today. It
5 offers early automation of post offices and a platform
6 from which to carry forward [POCL] strategy of network
7 banking and modern government services.

8 "In your letter of [the 18th] you raised certain
9 issues ...

10 "First, the timing of the move by the Benefits
11 Agency to compulsory ACT. [This] offers substantial
12 efficiency savings to the Benefits Agency and the impact
13 of delay is very costly. Despite this I have agreed
14 with my colleagues that, if the Post Office were to sign
15 the deal on offer today, the move would not start until
16 2003 and [it's difficult to read] there would be no
17 change in the present arrangements under which the
18 benefit recipients can freely choose the payments method
19 which best suits their needs unless a change has the
20 prior agreement of the Post Office.

21 "Second, funding and income. The cost of the
22 reconfigured project is expected to have a significant
23 impact on the finances of POCL in the next few years.
24 In recognition of this, the Government would be willing
25 to agree that £480 million of the cash investments,

81

1 This appears to have been received at 4.19 by fax
2 from the Treasury, "Re: signing", the next day --
3 a Sunday, for signing on the Monday.

4 Was this you putting POL under a degree of pressure?

5 **A.** Under time pressure, yes. It's a generous offer.

6 **Q.** It's a general ...?

7 **A.** Generous offer to POCL. I remember some very detailed
8 conversations with the Treasury about being allowed to
9 provide this £480 million of cover.

10 **Q.** The £480 million in gilts?

11 **A.** Yeah.

12 **Q.** What's the significance of the gilts?

13 **A.** That's money they can -- that allows them to borrow on.

14 And the issue with the Treasury, if I remember
15 correctly, was that -- because I think this ran to
16 2003 --

17 **Q.** Yes, that's right.

18 **A.** -- was that I think it was quite lumpy, in terms of
19 which years bits of money fell in and we're trying to
20 even it out over a period, make it easier financially.

21 **Q.** You refer in the letter to the prospect of increased
22 costs in the event of delay, you refer to the inducement
23 or what I'm describing as an inducement of other work
24 post automation, you refer to the £480 million in gilts.

25 As well as time pressure, was that pressure, or just

83

1 including gilts, held by the Post Office should be
2 transferred to POCL on the signing of the Codified
3 Agreement in July. POCL could draw down the
4 £480 million at their discretion ... This money would
5 otherwise pass to the Government together with the rest
6 of the £2 billion plus of these investments in
7 2002-2003 ...

8 "No doubt POCL would seek to exploit automation to
9 attract new business and income. The more successful
10 they are in this regard, the longer the £480 million
11 would, of course, last.

12 "Third, the use of the infrastructure for Government
13 services. It is clearly the hope of Ministers that the
14 Post Office will be successful in retaining and winning
15 business on merit. We firmly believe that competition
16 for this business should be on the basis of a level
17 playing field ... We do not believe that it is in the
18 interests of delivering efficient and effective services
19 to customers that competition should be biased ... The
20 Post Office should do well in such environment in view
21 of its unrivalled national network and the public
22 trust ... it enjoys.

23 "Against this background I hope that your Board will
24 be willing to sign the enclosed letter and schedules
25 today."

82

1 sort of advocacy?

2 **A.** I think it made -- should have made it an attractive
3 proposition for the POCL board, yeah --

4 **Q.** I don't think you will have had the opportunity to study
5 Lord Darling's witness statement to the Inquiry.

6 **A.** No.

7 **Q.** In it -- we needn't look at it, the cross-reference is
8 WITN04200100 at paragraph 63, page 22; and paragraph 101
9 on page 34.

10 These suggest that the letter that you wrote to
11 Dr Bain wasn't fully reflective of your personal view,
12 because you believed initially that Horizon was the
13 wrong decision in the first place.

14 **A.** Yeah.

15 **Q.** Is that accurate?

16 **A.** I think, as I said earlier this morning, I couldn't --
17 I had those four fundamental questions about how we'd
18 ended up with this nightmare of a contract, which
19 I didn't get answers to, and I've taken the Inquiry
20 through them. You know, why was it the Benefit Payment
21 Card? Why was it a PFI? We didn't have details of the
22 tendering process --

23 **Q.** Sorry, by now those things had fallen away.

24 **A.** Well, they were still relevant, and that's why I think,
25 if Alistair Darling is saying -- commenting about my

84

1 view of Horizon, it may well be reflecting those
 2 questions that I think all of us were raising, to be
 3 honest, I think Alistair was raising them as well.
 4 **Q.** Would it be fair, and no criticism is intended of you
 5 here, because you were, of course, bound by the
 6 principle of collective cabinet responsibility, but now
 7 freed from that convention, would you agree that the
 8 project proceeded because of the threat of reputational
 9 harm to Government in losing this cherished contract?
 10 **A.** It proceeded because -- look, there were no good options
 11 available to us, so we had to make the best of a very
 12 difficult situation, which I think is what we tried to
 13 do.
 14 **Q.** It proceeded, would you agree, because of the risk to
 15 inward investment, in particular from Japan, and the
 16 prospect of a diplomatic incident?
 17 **A.** At the time that this was under consideration, the key
 18 issue involving -- and I know this as Secretary of State
 19 for Trade and Industry -- was linked primarily with
 20 Nissan and Toyota, the big car manufacturers. Their
 21 concern was the fact that we were not joining the single
 22 European currency, that was their big issue, and this
 23 would be a very minor factor in that -- for their
 24 consideration. So I think too much could be made of
 25 that, actually.

85

1 I'm going to have to adjourn for two or three minutes.
 2 I know that's very inconvenient at this moment but will
 3 you bear with me, please?
 4 **MR BEER:** Yes, of course, sir. We will just simply turn
 5 your camera off at this end and we will remain in the
 6 room.
 7 **(Pause)**
 8 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** By way of explanation, the weather is
 9 extremely bad at the moment, which had set our alarm
 10 off, and I wanted to ensure that you didn't get an alarm
 11 going off in the middle of proceedings, Mr Beer.
 12 **MR BEER:** Thank you very much, sir. Are you now ready to
 13 proceed?
 14 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** As ready as I'll ever be, yes.
 15 **MR BEER:** Thank you very much.
 16 Lastly, can I suggest that the project proceeded
 17 because of the wish to avoid litigation?
 18 **A.** That would be one of the factors as well, yes.
 19 **Q.** I'll ask again: was the quality of the system to be
 20 delivered, its reliability and integrity, ever
 21 consciously taken into account in the decision-making,
 22 as at May 1999?
 23 **A.** I think we wouldn't have proceeded had we -- had it been
 24 a system that wasn't going to function properly and
 25 deliver what we wanted for the Post Office. Now, as

87

1 **Q.** It proceeded because of the level of sunk costs and the
 2 harm that would be caused to Government and its
 3 reputation by the loss of those sunk costs?
 4 **A.** That was one of the reasons. The other reason, which
 5 I think is important for the Inquiry to be aware of, was
 6 it would have had a devastating impact on the Post
 7 Office network. You know, we had postmasters and
 8 mistresses who had invested, as we were told, about
 9 £1 billion of their own money in getting the property
 10 and goodwill of post offices. That would have been
 11 devalued overnight had we cancelled the Horizon project.
 12 So there are a number of factors about how -- why it
 13 proceeded.
 14 **Q.** Was one of the factors that it proceeded ever brought
 15 into account that it was a good and reliable system?
 16 **A.** We wanted to ensure it was a system that worked, which
 17 is why we put in place, as ministers, mechanisms and
 18 procedures to alert us to any problems if they arose
 19 during that rollout period.
 20 **Q.** By this time --
 21 **A.** And insisting on --
 22 **Q.** Sorry.
 23 **A.** And insisting on live trials to make sure we could see
 24 how it worked in practice.
 25 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Mr Beer, I'm very sorry to interrupt, but

86

1 ministers, we wouldn't -- we wouldn't be involved in the
 2 sort of operational detail of that. What we could do as
 3 ministers was to set up structures to -- as I think
 4 I may have said earlier, to alert us to any problems if
 5 they arose.
 6 So we had the Horizon Working Group, which had
 7 representatives of the subpostmasters, the CWU union,
 8 and that was meeting and one of its terms of reference
 9 was to report on these matters and how it was being
 10 delivered in practice. And we also had an ongoing
 11 dialogue with the Federation of SubPostmasters, I would
 12 meet their national council, I spoke at their annual
 13 conference in 2001, so there were those sort of
 14 opportunities for ministers to be alerted to problems if
 15 they arose.
 16 **Q.** Did the Federation ever raise problems on behalf of its
 17 members in the operation or integrity of the Horizon
 18 system or did they generally paint a rosy picture to
 19 you?
 20 **A.** They painted a rosy picture and I think, you know, their
 21 evidence to the Select Committee for Trade and Industry,
 22 which was looking at this issue, seemed to say that --
 23 **Q.** Particularly rosy?
 24 **A.** Very positive, and when I'd met their council in,
 25 I think it was March 2000 -- I think the Inquiry's got

88

1 a note of that meeting --

2 **Q.** Yes.

3 **A.** -- there were -- no problems were raised with me.

4 **Q.** No. Was that your route back into the subpostmaster

5 community, through the Federation?

6 **A.** It would be, and I think and all through my constituency

7 work. You know, in North Tyneside, Wallsend, we had

8 postmasters, we had post offices and, occasionally, they

9 would raise issues with me, but this was never raised.

10 **Q.** Can we turn forwards, please -- I am coming towards the

11 end of my questions now -- to February 2001, and look,

12 please, at CBO00000002.

13 This is a letter from you of 9 February to the Prime

14 Minister's private secretary.

15 **A.** It would be from -- it wouldn't be from me, it would be

16 from the head of my private office, I think.

17 **Q.** Yes, your private secretary, I think.

18 **A.** Yeah, yeah.

19 **Q.** What's the distinction to be drawn there?

20 **A.** I would write to the Prime Minister, my private

21 secretary would write to the private secretary of the

22 Prime Minister.

23 **Q.** But this expresses your views?

24 **A.** It would do, yeah.

25 **Q.** Thank you. The emboldened part tells us what the letter

89

1 who probably were -- probably the age I am now, who

2 didn't want to face the prospects of technology that

3 they were unsure of. We had introduced, you know,

4 training sessions and helplines, but I think the whole

5 sort of computerisation was something that perhaps they

6 didn't want to go through.

7 **Q.** So you put it on a -- or you thought about it through

8 a sort of age --

9 **A.** And people not wanting to embrace change, I guess, which

10 can be sort of a bit -- can be challenging and

11 uncomfortable for people.

12 **Q.** Rather than any issues with the system?

13 **A.** That's certainly how I read it at the time, yeah.

14 **Q.** Was it drawn to your attention at this time that

15 a significant number of subpostmasters were having

16 a recurrent serious issue with balancing on a weekly

17 basis?

18 **A.** No, that was never drawn to our attention.

19 **Q.** Can we go forwards, please, to CBO00000001. Again,

20 I think this is from your PPS, Bernadette Kelly, to the

21 private secretary to the Prime Minister, but again your

22 views, essentially.

23 Scroll down, please, so this is six days later:

24 "Your letter ... recorded the Prime Minister's

25 concern at the continuing high rate of Post Office

91

1 is about:

2 "It is probably now inevitable that the number of

3 post office closures in this financial year will reach

4 a record high. This note sets out the causes and what

5 action we are taking to address the problem."

6 I'm going to deal with it briefly. In the first

7 paragraph it says the main reason for the recent

8 increase is the move to payment of benefits by ACT from

9 April 2003 "before we had in place a clear strategy to

10 deal with the impact on the ... network".

11 Then if we go over the page, please, and look at the

12 foot of the page:

13 "From recent research conducted by the Post Office

14 into the reasons for ... resignations it is clear that

15 most close their offices because of personal

16 circumstances and less than 10% cite financial viability

17 as the reason. Analysis of the reasons given for

18 resignation over the last 6 months have been ..."

19 You will see them set out there, and one of them is

20 the Horizon computerisation, 6 per cent of resignations.

21 Was that significant in any way?

22 **A.** Well, it's significant --

23 **Q.** People are resigning because of the computer system that

24 we have introduced?

25 **A.** Yes, I think if I recall correctly the -- it was people

90

1 closures. This letter responds to your requests",

2 et cetera.

3 Then in the third paragraph:

4 "As my letter of 9 February said, net closures for

5 the nine months April to December 2000 were 434. We now

6 have the January figure which is 47 ... If February and

7 March were at the monthly average for the year ... the

8 total net closures for the full year would be 577. The

9 final figure could exceed this, particularly if the

10 completion of the introduction of Horizon (the new IT

11 platform) continues to 'bunch up' retirements and

12 resignations which might have otherwise taken place over

13 a longer period ..."

14 Why would the introduction of the Horizon platform

15 'bunch up' retirements and resignations that would have

16 taken place over a longer period?

17 **A.** I think the final part of that sentence explains that,

18 it says "those who don't want to train to use computers

19 decide to call it a day", and that was information

20 I recall I was being given, that it wasn't because of

21 accounting problems, it was actually that people were

22 not wanting to train up to use computers.

23 **Q.** So does it come to this: that you in Government were

24 never told -- even at this stage, February 2001 -- of

25 continuing problems with the operation on a weekly basis

92

1 of the Horizon system by a significant number of
2 subpostmasters?
3 **A.** We weren't, and we'd actually -- the thing that sort of
4 frustrates me here is that we had deliberately, after
5 the May 1999 new deal, the settlement that we achieved,
6 we set up the Horizon Working Group with the Minister of
7 State responsible for the Post Office chairing it, with
8 representatives of -- well, of POCL, of the Benefits
9 Agency, but also the Federation of SubPostmasters, the
10 CWU, and that was the vehicle that we deliberately --
11 and this is an unusual body to set up in government, to
12 have all of those parties together, and we'd done it
13 deliberately so that if there were problems, as we moved
14 forward, then ministers could be alerted to those
15 problems. And I think, as the minutes and records of
16 the working group show, to my recollection, at no stage
17 were ministers alerted to the problems that you're
18 mentioning.

19 **Q.** That's all the questions I have for you, Mr Byers, save
20 for one: in your statement, at the beginning and at the
21 end, you make statements of a general nature about
22 having reflected on what has occurred and the losses and
23 harms that have been caused. I ought to give you the
24 opportunity to say anything that you wish to say in that
25 regard.

93

1 role when you're in government. And part of that -- and
2 we're fortunate because, although we did it in private,
3 there was a good chance in 1996 that we would form the
4 next government, so we had training to what we should be
5 doing as government ministers and, part of that, was to
6 listen to advice, yes, of course, but to be ready to
7 challenge and disagree where that was necessary.

8 And it may well be that a more structured approach
9 may be of benefit. So that's why I made those sort of
10 final comments at the end.

11 **MR BEER:** Thank you very much, Mr Byers. There will be some
12 more questions for you.

13 **MR STEIN:** Sir, good morning, if it pleases you, I'll
14 proceed with questions on behalf of the group
15 I represent.

16 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes.

Questioned by MR STEIN

18 **MR STEIN:** Mr Byers, I represent a large number of
19 ex-subpostmasters, mistresses and managers, all of whom
20 experienced the problems thrown at them by the Horizon
21 system.

22 Can I just pick up on a point that was raised
23 earlier by Mr Beer this morning, and, sir, for your
24 records it's at point 14.1 in the time recording on our
25 system.

95

1 **A.** Well -- and I don't want to take up the time of the
2 Inquiry, but my comments right at the very end are
3 broader, I think, about -- and they're comments made in
4 the light of what I've seen reported in the press. And
5 what I don't understand in this whole scandal is how
6 government ministers, given they were being alerted to
7 the problems through adjournment debates, through
8 constituency correspondence, parliamentary questions,
9 how they managed to ignore all of that, and it could
10 well be because they'd almost become captured by their
11 department.

12 There is a funny relationship, quite often
13 a difficult relationship, between government ministers
14 and their civil servants, and sometimes government
15 ministers, because they're working with those civil
16 servants day in, day out, may reflect the views of the
17 civil servants. What government ministers have got to
18 do is always to challenge and question and disagree
19 where necessary.

20 And so the points I make at the end is whether --
21 and this just -- this may seem inadequate in the
22 circumstances of this, the awful things that have
23 happened to so many people. Ministers need to be
24 trained to be government ministers. We're Members of
25 Parliament but then you move on to a totally different

94

1 You were asked about the question of whether you
2 were aware that the Horizon system was generating
3 evidence that was being used for the purposes of
4 investigations and prosecutions. I think Mr Beer put it
5 as being prosecutions, but it was being used for
6 investigations and prosecutions.

7 Your answer to that was no. Okay?

8 So, as a starting point, can we just analyse the
9 position that, in a way, you've just discussed with
10 Mr Beer, which is about the operation of the Civil
11 Service and briefings that you were given about this.

12 So can you help from your recollection whether you
13 were given any briefings by the Civil Service as to the
14 operation of the Horizon system and its connection with
15 investigations and prosecutions?

16 **A.** My recollection is that we were provided with no advice
17 or guidance or information relating to those matters.

18 **Q.** Now, the system of being briefed by the Civil Service is
19 often perhaps misunderstood. You, as a minister, are in
20 fact very busy, your diary is controlled entirely; do
21 you agree?

22 **A.** Not controlled. I mean, I think one of the -- one of
23 the lessons that we learnt in our seminars ahead of
24 coming into government, was not to allow your diary to
25 be controlled by your private office, that you take

96

1 control of your diary and you attach your own priorities
 2 to it.
 3 **Q.** Right. The busy part, though, of my question, you'll
 4 agree with: your diary was busy?
 5 **A.** It was -- it's the busiest I have ever been in my life,
 6 being a government minister, yes.
 7 **Q.** That means, in terms of information getting to you, you
 8 are very reliant or entirely reliant upon the briefings
 9 being given to you by the Civil Service?
 10 **A.** That's correct.
 11 **Q.** So this question of not being told that the Horizon
 12 system was going to be used as the basis for
 13 investigations and prosecutions, do you believe now,
 14 looking back, that the Civil Service should have
 15 provided you with information linking the Horizon system
 16 to investigations and prosecutions?
 17 **A.** If they had that information available at the time, I'd
 18 have thought it's something that they would have been
 19 sharing with the relevant minister.
 20 **Q.** Right, so this may, in fact, go back a step to what did
 21 the Civil Service learn, what were they told?
 22 **A.** Yes.
 23 **Q.** Okay.
 24 Now, then let's look at your own set of knowledge.
 25 The Post Office, originally as the Royal Mail, is in

97

1 altogether sure, to be honest. I think it would have
 2 been dealt with at probably a lower level.
 3 **Q.** Right, and this expectation that this would have been
 4 looked at and dealt with by perhaps a more junior
 5 minister, why do you come to that view, sitting there
 6 now, so many years later? What's compelling you to
 7 think about that as being something that should have
 8 been done?
 9 **A.** It's the -- it's the sort of issue that would have --
 10 that would have come across -- that would have been
 11 dealt with at a political level, I think.
 12 **Q.** Yes, forgive me one moment.
 13 **A.** What I'm not sure, I mean, what would be interesting for
 14 the Inquiry, I think, is to find out whether there were
 15 any guidance -- and you may already be aware of this --
 16 whether there was any guidance that had been provided as
 17 to the background for prosecutions.
 18 **Q.** Again, reflecting now on what you mean, do you mean
 19 guidance provided by -- let's go through the parties --
 20 by the Post Office?
 21 **A.** I mean, prosecutions were taking place before Horizon,
 22 for a number of reasons. I'd always believed that the
 23 relationship with the Post Office and the network was
 24 such that there would be -- there would be a -- there'd
 25 almost be a dialogue about how, if there was

99

1 fact, we believe, the oldest prosecution and
 2 investigation body in the world. Did you know that?
 3 **A.** No.
 4 **Q.** When I ask whether you knew that, I ask at the time of
 5 you taking responsibility for these matters.
 6 **A.** I wouldn't have known at the time that it was
 7 a prosecuting authority, no.
 8 **Q.** Because of that, are you saying that you therefore
 9 weren't on notice that you should be asking questions
 10 about it?
 11 **A. (Pause)**
 12 I'm trying to recall what I was told at the time,
 13 which is difficult, you know, we're looking at 22 years
 14 ago. I would have expected -- and this is
 15 an expectation, that we would have -- that there would
 16 have been -- there would have been political oversight
 17 of the approach to prosecutions.
 18 **Q.** By?
 19 **A.** That we would have laid down guidance and some rules.
 20 **Q.** The guidance and some rules, who would they have come
 21 from, who would have issued these guidance and rules.
 22 Would that have been a more junior minister?
 23 **A.** It would have been -- it would -- the detailed work
 24 would have been done by a Minister of State, whether it
 25 would come up to a Secretary of State, I'm not

98

1 a deficiency in the accounts, how that would arise.
 2 You wouldn't immediately move to a prosecution,
 3 you'd try to find out what's gone wrong, what's
 4 happened. And I think it seems to me -- and this may be
 5 sort of going into areas the Inquiry will get onto
 6 later -- that there was almost a change of approach by
 7 the Post Office in terms of how they dealt with
 8 prosecutions. It seemed to be a first port of call
 9 rather than something that would need to be properly
 10 looked into first. I could be wrong, but that's -- and
 11 this is just based on press reports.
 12 **Q.** Right, this is basically what I was going to ask,
 13 whether this was information you'd been provided with or
 14 not?
 15 **A.** No, it's since I left Parliament, since the matters that
 16 are being, you know, that you're -- the people you're
 17 representing, since they have been so badly affected by
 18 what happened, I think there's been a different approach
 19 adopted in terms of prosecutions.
 20 **Q.** One last matter, you have been asked a number of
 21 questions about the Ministerial Code and we know this is
 22 going to be dealt with in greater detail later on. Just
 23 in your experience as a minister, I think that you've
 24 taken over from Mr Mandelson, and I think Mr Darling,
 25 Alistair Darling.

100

1 Did you find that there was a consistency in
2 approach to handover notes, so one minister leaving, you
3 taking over, a handover note setting out that these are
4 the points that we have been dealing with, you may find
5 them useful, and so on. Was there any consistency or,
6 I suppose, a rule in relation to handover notes?

7 **A.** No. No, it was all done differently.

8 **MR STEIN:** Thank you.

9 **Questioned by MS PAGE**

10 **MS PAGE:** Mr Byers, my name is Flora Page, I also represent
11 a number of the former subpostmasters and people who
12 worked for the Post Office.

13 My questions are about the Post Office board, the
14 Post Office management, there's not very many of them.
15 If I may start, please, with correspondence that we've
16 looked at already but which this section of we haven't
17 looked at. First of all, HMT00000055. This is, when it
18 comes up, the letter from you to Mr Mandelson when he
19 was in the post that you subsequently took from him.

20 If we go down, please, to page 2, paragraph 5, this
21 paragraph reads as you, in your HMT role -- "directing"
22 may be too strong a word, but certainly giving a pretty
23 clear indication of what you expect from Mr Mandelson in
24 his role at the DTI, and you say that you look forward
25 to him taking forward with the Post Office:

101

1 we can be much more rigorous in defining what social
2 value added is being bought ..."

3 Does this refer to -- we've seen in some of the
4 correspondence from Mr Darling and, indeed, from
5 yourself in your role at the Treasury, this issue around
6 a sort of a hidden subsidy through the Benefits Agency,
7 and so what you're really referring to there is, if the
8 Post Office needs subsidy to continue to have its social
9 network and give the value that we all expect, then that
10 needs to be transparent rather than hidden through
11 a Benefits Agency cost which is unnecessary from
12 a Benefits Agency point of view; is that what you're
13 getting at?

14 **A.** Yes, one of the -- and there's no documentation to show
15 this, but I was sort of considering a fallback
16 situation. If we had to cancel the project, then we may
17 need to move to a direct subsidy of the Post Office
18 network, and if we were to do that, then I'd need to be
19 able to convince my political colleagues that there was
20 social value in so doing. So I think that's what I'm
21 referring to there.

22 **Q.** Yes. If we could then just look at the response from
23 Mr Mandelson again, which is HMT00000048, and if we can
24 go down to the second paragraph, I think, it says in
25 terms:

103

1 "plans to strengthen POCL's management of the
2 project;

3 "plans to give the management of POCL a much
4 stronger commercial focus;

5 "exploration of possible partnerships between POCL
6 and the private sector;

7 "a strategy for more transparent funding for POCL so
8 we can be much more rigorous in defining what social
9 value added is being bought;

10 "consider possibilities for further development of
11 the system to support social banking and broader
12 account-like services. (The Post Office would need to
13 involve CITU and consult BA on this last point.)"

14 So there's a few different points there, some of
15 which I'll just ask you to explain a little more about.

16 Plans to strengthen POCL as management of the
17 project, did that arise because there were concerns that
18 POCL had not been managing the project?

19 **A.** We had concerns because we were aware of the difficult
20 relationships between POCL and the Benefits Agency and
21 ICL, it's one of the reasons why, you know, the Corbett
22 troubleshooter role was created.

23 **Q.** Then a strategy -- I hope that the second and third
24 points speak for themselves:

25 "a strategy for more transparent funding for POCL so

102

1 "In particular I accept the remit set out in
2 paragraph 5 of your letter. My objective within the
3 initial timescale of one month will be as a minimum to
4 agree with the Post Office Board the actions that need
5 to be taken on each of the items listed; to ensure that
6 practical measures are put in place as quickly as
7 possible to take these actions forwards; to institute
8 arrangements to monitor progress on a regular basis; and
9 to be in a position to report back to colleagues such
10 substantive progress as may have proved possible on each
11 by the end of the first month."

12 Do you have any recollection of that being put into
13 effect, either by Mr Mandelson or indeed by you when you
14 then took over his role?

15 **A.** I have no recollection of any action being taken on
16 these issues ahead of my taking over at the end of
17 December. Some of it would be subsumed in the work,
18 because these letters, I think, are to do with setting
19 up the Corbett troubleshooting role, so I think some of
20 it almost got subsumed into that work. But I don't
21 recall anything further coming from Peter on that.

22 **Q.** And, indeed, then something which you took up, any of
23 these points around stronger management of the project?

24 **A.** I certainly think through our Civil Service we had -- we
25 had POCL on notice that they had to up their game.

104

1 Q. Thank you. That document can be taken down.
 2 What I'd like to do, just as a last issue to deal
 3 with, then, is wind that whole thing much further
 4 forward.
 5 Are we able to take from that that you took the
 6 view, and perhaps others in Government did as well, that
 7 Post Office management was in need of some refreshment,
 8 shall we say?
 9 A. You're being very diplomatic. The Post Office at the
 10 time, and it may still be the case, faced huge
 11 challenges. I mean, it was a world that was moving and
 12 developing dramatically with new technology, and I think
 13 we had reservations about the ability of the board to
 14 deliver.
 15 Q. Yes. Well, then, as I say, going further forward, if
 16 I could ask for NFSP00000058 to be put up, this is
 17 a document from 19 March 2001 and I suspect that this is
 18 what you've alluded to already when you say that you
 19 spoke at NFSP meetings.
 20 A. Mm.
 21 Q. Of course, at this point, you're at the DTI. We can see
 22 from the heading there that this is a report of
 23 a meeting between you and the national executive
 24 council, that's the national executive council of the
 25 NFSP.

105

1 hopefully some progress would be made on that in the
 2 next week or so."
 3 So that's you telling the NFSP that, as far as
 4 you're concerned, the Post Office board doesn't really
 5 have a voice on there, that's putting their concerns at
 6 the heart of the business; is that fair?
 7 A. Yes, if I remember correctly, I think we did -- we did
 8 insist that they made an appointment of a non-executive
 9 board member who had retail experience.
 10 Q. Your hope from that, from what we get here, is that that
 11 person would be an advocate on the board for the network
 12 and for subpostmasters?
 13 A. Because of the retail element, that they'd have retail
 14 experience, yeah.
 15 Q. Did that reflect, at that stage, a concern that the
 16 board was not really listening to the network, was not
 17 really listening to subpostmasters, as they should have
 18 been?
 19 A. I think that's the clear implication of what I'm saying.
 20 MS PAGE: Thank you, those are my questions.
 21 MR BEER: Sir, I believe that's all the questions that any
 22 of the Core Participants wish to ask.
 23 Sir, you're on mute still.
 24 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Beer.
 25 All that remains, Mr Byers, is for me to thank you

107

1 A. This is 2000, yeah.
 2 Q. Oh, I'm so sorry, yes, 2000. What we see, if we go
 3 down, please, to page 3, towards the end of that page,
 4 so we see the paragraph that begins:
 5 "The other thing that he intended [and I think I'm
 6 right in saying the 'he' here is you] to do shortly was
 7 that within the Post Office Board there was not really
 8 a strong non-executive director on the board with retail
 9 experience with responsibility for the Post Office
 10 Network. What he had always thought was that the needs
 11 of the Post Office Network had not always been taken
 12 into account at board level. He did not think that the
 13 Federation and the Network had received the degree of
 14 support, or been treated as a priority, that the
 15 Government felt that they should be as far as the Post
 16 Office board was concerned."
 17 Then:
 18 "Certain requirements had been laid down to the
 19 board in relation to the Network but he thought that
 20 what was needed was to have a Post Office board director
 21 member who had specific responsibility for the Network
 22 and then it would be known that the person on the board
 23 was your advocate. They were looking to recruit a new
 24 person to the board with retail experience as they could
 25 help to understand what the Network could offer and

106

1 for coming to give evidence and answering many questions
 2 about many different and varied aspects of this case.
 3 I'm very grateful to you.
 4 A. Thank you.
 5 MR BEER: Sir.
 6 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Mr Beer, before we actually adjourn, so
 7 that we can have a reasonable lunchtime, what's the
 8 prediction for the witness this afternoon?
 9 MR BEER: Only Ms Hodge knows, because she's taking
 10 Sarah Graham, not me, and I don't know that information.
 11 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: All right. We will assume that taking
 12 an hour is all right; shall we do that?
 13 MR BEER: Yes, if we apply the presumption of rectitude that
 14 we need to finish at 4.15, let's say 2.00, thank you.
 15 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Okay, 2.00 it is, thanks very much.
 16 (1.00 pm)
 17 (The short adjournment)
 18 (2.00 pm)
 19 MS HODGE: Good afternoon, sir, can you see and hear me?
 20 SIR WYN WILLIAMS: Yes, I can, thank you.
 21 MS HODGE: Thank you, our next witness is Dr Graham.
 22 DR SARAH GRAHAM (sworn)
 23 Questioned by MS HODGE
 24 MS HODGE: Good afternoon, Dr Graham. Please give your full
 25 name.

108

1 A. Sarah Vivien Graham.
 2 Q. Thank you. You should have in front of you a witness
 3 statement dated 11 October of this year; is that
 4 correct?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. I believe that statement runs to 19 pages in total.
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. Could I ask you please to turn to page 17 of your
 9 statement. Do you see your signature there at the end?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. Is the content of that statement true to the best of
 12 your knowledge and belief?
 13 A. Since I wrote the statement, there is a small factual
 14 error on page 2, paragraph 5, at the bottom of that
 15 page. I said that the 1 billion Horizon Benefit Payment
 16 Card project was also the first PFI for an IT project to
 17 be attempted. What I should have said, that it was also
 18 one of the earliest and the largest PFI for an IT
 19 project to be attempted.
 20 Q. Thank you. Subject to that correction, is the content
 21 of the statement otherwise true to the best of your
 22 knowledge and belief?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. Thank you very much.
 25 As you know, I ask questions on behalf of the

109

1 right?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. Your first involvement in the Horizon project came in
 4 November 1997; is that correct?
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. That was when you were appointed as the project head of
 7 a special review of benefit payment policy within the
 8 Department of Social Security?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. Can you please describe the circumstances in which that
 11 review had been commissioned?
 12 A. It was, as I think I said in my statement, against
 13 growing concerns within the Benefits Agency and
 14 therefore the Department of Social Security about the
 15 delays and the deliverability of the project, the
 16 overrun in time and also the overrun in budget, and the
 17 need, therefore, to review where we were with the
 18 project.
 19 Q. For the benefit of those following your evidence, can
 20 you please explain the relationship between the
 21 Department of Social Security and the Benefits Agency,
 22 as it then was at the time?
 23 A. Very similar perhaps to what we have nowadays, which
 24 people will know about between the Department of Health
 25 and the NHS, that the Benefits Agency was, as it were,

111

1 Inquiry. Your statement now stands in evidence, and I'd
 2 like to begin, if I may, just by asking you a few brief
 3 questions about your professional background.
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Upon graduating from university you joined the Civil
 6 Service fast stream in 1976; is that right?
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. During your time employed in the Civil Service, you
 9 worked mostly in the area of social welfare; is that
 10 correct?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. Your roles included policy development, business change,
 13 planning and implementation?
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. You've explained that your last role in government,
 16 prior to your retirement from the Civil Service, was as
 17 a director in the Prime Minister's strategy unit; is
 18 that right?
 19 A. My last substantive role. I did, in fact, then take on
 20 some internal consultancy work within government.
 21 Q. Thank you. You have explained that upon leaving the
 22 Civil Service you undertook some consultancy work, that
 23 was external to government --
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. -- and I think later returned to academia; is that

110

1 slightly at arm's length, a freestanding agency set up
 2 actually as what we then called a Next Steps agency, so
 3 they were operationally responsible for running the
 4 operation of the payment of benefits and everything to
 5 do with that, but the Department of Social Security held
 6 the overall policy responsibility, ministers in charge
 7 of the Department had the overall responsibility,
 8 particularly, of course, on matters such as overall
 9 budgets and expenditure. So I hope that makes that
 10 clear in as simple a way as possible.
 11 Q. Thank you, it does.
 12 Before being appointed to lead the review you've
 13 described, had you had any prior experience of working
 14 on large IT projects on behalf of the --
 15 A. In the mid-1980s, I had been appointed as the head of
 16 corporate affairs, so to speak, for the operational
 17 strategy, which was a large programme within the then
 18 Department and the Benefits Agency, basically for
 19 computerising the payment of benefits and all the
 20 systems that underlay it.
 21 So I did, in fact, have some experience of working
 22 with procurement, which had been one of my
 23 responsibilities. And I don't know whether it would be
 24 interesting to the Inquiry, but I had spent some time in
 25 the United States as part of that programme and visiting

112

1 many of the contractors or potential contractors that we
2 might work with.

3 But also visiting something called the United States
4 Defence Staff System, based in San Diego, which was not
5 unpleasant, but that was the only system in the world
6 that was as large as our Benefit Payment System, which
7 I think indicates one of the interesting facts here that
8 I think the Department and the Benefits Agency had
9 a long experience of working with contractors, and also
10 had a long experience, for good or ill, with actually
11 computerising benefits. And, in fact, as some people
12 may know, you know, we had some of the oldest computer
13 systems going back to, sort of, huge processing machines
14 based in Newcastle.

15 So I say that just as giving a bit of the flavour of
16 the long experience, I think, possibly the deepest
17 within government itself, over the long -- such a long
18 period, of working with computer systems and also with
19 working with other contractors and consultants to
20 deliver our services.

21 And in that context, it might be worth saying that
22 one of the things that we learnt early on, that these
23 large global companies, they were never in the room
24 without a lawyer and, you know, this was something that
25 was actually quite new to us in the 1980s, and I'd like

113

1 re-stating, that the Benefits Agency and the Department,
2 the premise with which they'd actually embarked on this
3 was that we were going to be moving in the long term to
4 an ACT-based system of payment.

5 So there was a time factor that was implicit in the
6 whole project about a Benefit Payment Card. In other
7 words, if we didn't actually get the payment benefit
8 card delivered until, you know, we could have, as it
9 were, already moved to an automatic payment system with
10 the banks, it ceased to be of value to us.

11 **Q.** Thank you. Can you please explain why, in your view,
12 the Department had reason to doubt the technical
13 viability of the project at the point at which you
14 joined in November 1997?

15 **A.** I think that at the point that I started looking at the
16 issue, I'm not sure that the Department or the Benefits
17 Agency were in a position of saying it was not viable.
18 I mean, this would've perhaps emerged the longer the
19 discussions went on. I think it was more we had reached
20 a point where it was clearly not -- it was very late, it
21 was also over budget, increasingly, and, as you may have
22 seen, I think that, because of the government accounting
23 rules, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency needed
24 a direction in order to continue with the project.

25 So, in that sense, it was -- that was one of the

115

1 to think we learnt a lot from that experience.

2 But I hope we had a lot also to bring to the table
3 when it came to our discussions with our Post Office
4 colleagues and with government more generally on this
5 kind of issue.

6 **Q.** Thank you. You mentioned procurement. I don't believe
7 you had any direct involvement in the procurement of
8 this system; is that correct?

9 **A.** No, I didn't.

10 **Q.** It's been suggested by some witnesses to the Inquiry
11 that the Department and the Agency were hostile to the
12 Horizon project from the very outset. Do you consider
13 that to be a fair characterisation of the attitude of
14 the Department and the Agency, at the point at which you
15 became involved in November 1997?

16 **A.** I would say concern rather than hostile.

17 **Q.** In your statement, you explain that the Department and
18 the Agency had concerns in 1997 about the viability of
19 the project. You say those concerns were both technical
20 and practical; is that correct?

21 **A.** I think the two are inseparably interlinked because, as
22 it appeared to unfold that some of the problems with the
23 technical side of things were clearly impacting on how
24 it was getting delivered -- and I'm sure we'll come on
25 later -- that the premise that I think it's worth

114

1 reasons why we actually needed to reach a view with our
2 partners and across Government about the best way
3 forward.

4 **Q.** You've mentioned the ministerial direction in your
5 statement.

6 **A.** Yeah.

7 **Q.** Can you please explain what the purpose of that was and
8 why one had been sought in this particular case?

9 **A.** I think I would have to defer to others with more
10 experience to explain the detail of what a ministerial
11 direction under the accounting rules -- you know, all
12 the specifics of when it becomes necessary. But in very
13 broad terms, it becomes necessary if it looks as if
14 there are accounting issues that would present -- I'm
15 trying to search for the right word -- that would
16 present difficulties in a responsible use of taxpayers'
17 money, and there are clear accounting rules around this
18 and, as I say, I think I would have to defer to others
19 to say exactly what those were and are.

20 **Q.** Thank you. A little later in your statement you
21 describe ICL Pathway underperforming on the original
22 specification. Can you please explain what you mean by
23 that?

24 **A.** I think I might have to look at some -- can you cite to
25 me any of the documents that I've referred to?

116

1 **Q.** Your statement, if we could bring it up, bears the
 2 reference WITN03790100, please. It's at paragraph 7,
 3 please.

4 **A.** Can you repeat the question?

5 **Q.** Yes, of course. So we see here you explain:
 6 "I have been asked to explain the problems faced by
 7 the cross-departmental Horizon Project Review Group
 8 between Spring and Summer 1998. I cannot recall the
 9 specifics of the problems during this period but in
 10 broad terms, as explained in the referenced papers,
 11 there were serious and increasing concerns in DSS and
 12 the Benefits Agency that it was running increasingly
 13 late, underperforming on the original specification and
 14 potentially heading for significant budget overruns."

15 My question was what you meant when you said that
 16 the project was underperforming on the original
 17 specification?

18 **A.** I think what I meant there was that they were not, as
 19 I recall from the papers -- and perhaps I should say
 20 here I have been very dependent on the papers that have
 21 been delivered as part of this Inquiry on stimulating my
 22 memory. But underperforming in the sense that major
 23 milestones had been missed, a particular one, as
 24 I remember from the papers, and perhaps what had
 25 stimulated my appointment, was in November 1997.

117

1 concerns, as a result of that, were not as great as
 2 those of Post Office Counters, because, as I've
 3 explained earlier, we had a real interest in timing.
 4 I think that Post Office Counters had different
 5 priorities and concerns and, in simple terms, while we
 6 were still paying benefits through them with our order
 7 book system, they were still retaining the same level of
 8 income.

9 So to that extent, there perhaps wasn't quite the
 10 same driver, if you like, or sense of urgency about
 11 trying to resolve the problems with the Benefit Payment
 12 Card.

13 **Q.** We can see the concerns of the department articulated in
 14 a letter to the Prime Minister, dated 6 February 1998.
 15 That bears the reference CBO00100005_033. I wonder if
 16 that could please be shown. Thank you.

17 On the second page of that letter, we see the
 18 initials "HH", which we assume denote the then Secretary
 19 of State for the Department, Harriet Harman; is that
 20 correct?

21 **A.** Yes.

22 **Q.** Do you recall whether this letter was drafted by you in
 23 your role as project lead on the review?

24 **A.** I'm afraid I do not recall but I would think it highly
 25 likely.

119

1 I believe there had been problems with -- and we may
 2 come onto that later -- problems around the way this
 3 whole project had got off to a start, which the Project
 4 Mentors report around the reasons for the delays
 5 explains a little bit more. But it was because of these
 6 significant delays, and there had been a restructuring
 7 of the whole project, I understand, before I got
 8 involved, in February 1997, allowing, in a sense, for
 9 all parties to regroup and reset exactly the way they
 10 were going to move forward. And it was against that
 11 backdrop that, even though the requirements had been, as
 12 it were, reset, there was still a significant milestone
 13 missed in November. That was, I think, what I meant in
 14 very simple terms by saying "underperforming".

15 **Q.** Thank you.

16 In terms of the action which was taken to address
 17 the concerns you've described, you state it was the
 18 Department and the Agency who took the lead in raising
 19 concerns about the project's future deliverability; is
 20 that correct?

21 **A.** My understanding is that both the Post Office, or Post
 22 Office Counters Limited, and the Benefits Agency both
 23 agreed that ICL Pathway was in breach for missing their
 24 November 1997 deadline. However, I think that our
 25 interests were not -- were different, and perhaps our

118

1 **Q.** Thank you. If we could please turn back to the first
 2 page, we see the Department's concerns summarised in the
 3 first paragraph there. This is a letter, of course,
 4 addressed to the Prime Minister, in which the Secretary
 5 of State records:
 6 "I am writing to alert you to problems with
 7 a private/public sector project designed to improve the
 8 Benefit Payment System and automate the Post Office
 9 network. In a nutshell, there is a serious risk that
 10 this project will fail to deliver its objectives -- or
 11 will not do so within a timescale that will make it
 12 worthwhile."

13 The letter goes on to set out what the original
 14 objectives of the project were and to spell out some of
 15 the funding consequences and some of the wider policy
 16 considerations that were raised by the project.

17 I wonder if we could please scroll down to the
 18 second page. Thank you. We see there at the third
 19 paragraph, the letter essentially concludes that:
 20 "Although we [by which I understand the author to
 21 mean the Department of Social Security] have a clear
 22 view about the best route forward, I am clear that we
 23 should at all costs seek to avoid getting focused too
 24 closely on individual Departmental interests, and that
 25 we should aim to establish an agreed view from the

120

1 start, avoiding the potentially damaging effects that
2 our quite legitimately differing Departmental views
3 have, when exposed to the public eye."

4 Do you consider that that statement of the
5 Department's position accurately encapsulates your views
6 or the views of the Department at this stage in
7 February 1998?

8 **A.** As you know, I've only just seen this letter.
9 I wouldn't be in a position to say one way or another in
10 terms of what the Department was saying about its view
11 on a way forward but the sentiment that we should have
12 an agreed view from the start and that we should work
13 together with all the interests is one I very clearly
14 endorse as being at the heart of our Department's
15 thinking throughout and, indeed, I think that there are
16 some other exhibits that have actually brought this out.

17 I think that there was a consistent recognition by
18 us of the need to reach a solution that certainly was
19 agreeable to all the public sector parties and, indeed,
20 also to ICL.

21 I cannot recall the document now, but I do remember
22 reading one that I wrote which said "What we want to
23 avoid is a Treaty of Versailles situation", which
24 I think, in our Department, we were trying all the time
25 to find a solution that would work for everybody. And

121

1 you've answered that by saying you don't feel able to
2 articulate --

3 **A.** No.

4 **Q.** -- what that view was at that stage in the process.
5 Thank you.

6 In terms of the wider policy considerations which
7 underpinned the concerns of the DSS, your statement
8 suggests that one of the primary objectives of the
9 Department was to secure the timely and accurate payment
10 of benefits; is that correct?

11 **A.** Yes.

12 **Q.** I think we can see that reflected in your statement,
13 please, at page 4, paragraph 8. Thank you. We see
14 there at the bottom of the first paragraph it reads:

15 "Paramount, however, in the transition to any new
16 system, was the ability to sustain the reliability of
17 the Benefit Payment Service for recipients, many of whom
18 were among the most vulnerable in our population.
19 Problems with the Benefit Payment Card put these
20 responsibilities at risk."

21 You've described that as paramount; did you consider
22 it to be the most important of the considerations at
23 play for the Department at this stage?

24 **A.** I think it probably is still, in my view, the primary
25 concern that the payment of due benefits to recipients

123

1 I think I've just noted, because I happened to see it,
2 exhibit E6, there was an internal document that
3 I authored as briefing for our Secretary of State, so it
4 was an internal document, not for the public eye, in
5 which, again, I put this point very firmly,
6 paragraph 13.

7 And I think again in exhibit E14, I haven't made
8 a note of what that was, but I think I'd say it was
9 a consistent part of our approach.

10 **Q.** That is to say to achieve a consensus between interested
11 parties on the best way forward?

12 **A.** Yes, and I think -- again I cannot recall, I'm sorry,
13 which document -- but I have read one where I wrote
14 explicitly "We cannot -- in order to reach an agreed way
15 forward, each party has to accept it won't get
16 everything it wants". I mean, that's in the nature of
17 finding an agreement. But, on the other hand, each
18 party does need to get something it wants and, as
19 I recall it, there was one particular way forward that
20 was being suggested where the Benefits Agency and DSS
21 would get nothing. So, you know, that was clearly not
22 going to be one where we would be able to accommodate
23 others.

24 **Q.** My first question to you should have been what the clear
25 view about the best route forward was, but I think

122

1 is achieved safely and efficiently, effectively.

2 **Q.** You've referred there to problems with the Benefit
3 Payment Card. What did you understand those problems to
4 be in the spring and the summer of 1998?

5 **A.** My memory cannot recall that in detail.

6 **Q.** You've explained in your statement you did not have
7 technical expertise and that you relied upon those
8 within the Agency who did; is that right? We know from
9 documents obtained by the Inquiry that senior figures in
10 the Agency received reports of what were described as
11 lost or incomplete transactions of duplicate payments
12 and cash account errors. Do you recall whether those
13 types of issues or problems were brought to your
14 attention?

15 **A.** I do not recall. I have seen the paper or a paper in
16 the documents that were just sent to me, I think, very
17 recently. And I have to say it didn't, it didn't ring
18 any bells with me. So I'm not -- that isn't to say that
19 I did not know about them at the time, but certainly
20 I cannot recall.

21 **Q.** Thank you.

22 You say at paragraph 11 of your statement that you
23 were well aware from Agency colleagues that there were
24 serious concerns about the ability to develop the
25 Benefit Payment Card as originally designed and

124

1 specified.

2 Do you recall who at the Agency articulated those
3 concerns to you?

4 **A.** My main contact in the Benefits Agency was George
5 McCorkell, whose name I'm sure you will have seen on
6 some of the documents, who was the lead official.

7 **Q.** Thank you. It appears that Harriet Harman's letter to
8 the Prime Minister in early February 1998 prompted the
9 intervention of the then chief secretary to the
10 Treasury, Alistair Darling, who commissioned
11 an interdepartmental working group, known as the Horizon
12 Project Review Group, to address the problems which had
13 beset the programme. Is that consistent with your
14 recollection of events in the early part of 1998?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** The group was comprised of senior officials rather than
17 government ministers; is that correct?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** You were invited to act as a standing member of the
20 group, in order to represent the interests of the
21 Department of Social Security; is that right?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** You've explained in your statement that one of the tasks
24 assigned to the group was to carry out a review of the
25 project's technical viability. What did you understand

125

1 viable, technically viable, they recognised that there
2 were, nonetheless, huge risks around it in terms of its
3 deliverability, which was, you know, a different issue.

4 **Q.** Thank you. You've mentioned the expert panel, you were
5 assigned responsibility for investigating the project
6 technical viability. That was chaired by Adrian
7 Montague; is that correct?

8 And we know that they ultimately concluded that the
9 project was technically viable; is that consistent with
10 your recollection?

11 **A.** My understanding is that the Horizon platform they
12 considered as technically viable, but that, as I say,
13 my -- I think if we looked at the report, we'd see that
14 they hedged it around with saying there were, you know,
15 many, many risks in actually delivering it.

16 **Q.** Yes. We can bring up the report, please, it's at
17 POL00028094. Thank you. There's an "Executive Summary"
18 of the panel's findings at page 3, please. It's under
19 the heading "Findings" we see recorded:

20 "The programme is complex, probably the biggest of
21 its kind. Its scale, and particularly the development
22 work required, were underestimated initially. The
23 parties have since increased the resources devoted to
24 the programme, but a range of issues remain to be
25 resolved.

127

1 the term "technical viability" to mean in this context?

2 **A.** Ah ... I think that what I understood it to mean was
3 a clear investigation of what was involved technically
4 in the Horizon project, including the Benefit Payment
5 Card, and the viability of what was proposed.

6 **Q.** By "viability", can you confirm what you mean in the
7 sense -- are we talking about something that's
8 theoretically possible or something that, in actual
9 fact, can and will be delivered?

10 **A.** I think you've put your finger on one of the
11 difficulties with the project, in that there were
12 aspects that were to do with its technical complexity,
13 and clearly it was a very complex proposal, but its
14 viability would link also with human factors,
15 operational factors. You know, there was more to it
16 than just simply, as you say, a kind of theoretical
17 possibility.

18 And I don't know whether we're going to come on to
19 this, but the actual panel that was asked to look at the
20 technical side of the project certainly made clear that
21 while, in theory, it thought that the Horizon platform,
22 as distinct from anything you might add onto it like the
23 Benefit Payment Card, was technically -- I can't
24 remember the exact word they used, but I think they
25 certainly meant that it was possible, and that --

126

1 "Our view is that the programme is technically
2 viable. There must be some risk around scalability and
3 robustness because the system has had to be tested at
4 the level of component parts, but we are satisfied these
5 risks are being well managed by Pathway."

6 It goes on to state:

7 "There is good evidence of future proofing at all
8 levels. The basic infrastructure is very robust for the
9 future and, in the main, industry standard products have
10 been used. The system should allow [Post Office
11 Counters Limited] to compete for new business in
12 a variety of markets, including banking and financial
13 services. New applications based on smartcard
14 technology should be relatively straightforward and
15 economic. If online applications are required, they may
16 take longer and require more investment."

17 Were the panel's findings, as summarised there,
18 consistent with the expert advice which you were
19 receiving from colleagues within the Benefits Agency
20 about the reliability of the system that was admittedly
21 still under development at this stage?

22 **A.** First, to say I think the Department and the Benefits
23 Agency's interest was primarily in how the Benefit
24 Payment Card and payment of benefits was affected. So,
25 to that extent, this more general idea about the

128

1 robustness of Horizon was not within our province,
2 except, as I say, insofar as what would happen for the
3 Benefit Payment Card and the payment of benefits and our
4 policies on moving to ACT.

5 From what I can see here, I have no reason to
6 disagree with it. My memory is that, in the back part
7 of the report, there is perhaps more explanation of what
8 the risks were around the programme.

9 Q. Yes, indeed, would you like us to refer to that?

10 A. I'm not sure that I can actually pinpoint exactly --

11 Q. No, I'm sorry, would you like me to take you to those
12 sections now of the report?

13 A. Well, we could just have a look, yeah.

14 Q. By all means, yes.

15 (Pause)

16 A. I think we're just ... think about scalability --

17 Q. So we see at paragraph 25 --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- the main architectural --

20 A. And this is -- I think one of the key issues for -- from
21 the Benefit Payment Card perspective, as we may come on
22 to, was the whole approach to acceptance testing, and
23 I think that you may have seen in subsequent papers that
24 there is -- and we knew from bitter experience with
25 a project called NIRS2, that there is a great difference

129

1 So we see there the first of these, which was the
2 question as to the technical viability of the project:
3 "... was dealt with, and taken fully into account,
4 by the report it had commissioned from the specially
5 constituted Independent Panel. This report formed the
6 basis on which consideration of the possible options,
7 including cancellation, could stand. Thus, Option 1
8 assumes the Panel's view that, although there were risks
9 endemic in such a large and complex programme, the basic
10 platform was potentially robust albeit only achievable
11 on a much longer timescale (some 3 years later than
12 originally planned) and subject to significant
13 ratcheting up in many areas, primarily in the quality of
14 management and control within ICL Pathway ..."

15 It goes on to say:

16 "Having accepted that position, other issues came
17 into play, specifically the costs of cancellation and
18 alternative options, as per the Group's remit."

19 Did you consider at the time that the review group
20 was right to proceed on the assumption that the project
21 could be delivered successfully by ICL Pathway?

22 A. As I recall it, yes, in the sense that, as stated here,
23 that, in theory, it was potentially robust but there
24 were a number of issues around it that also needed to be
25 resolved, both in terms of the implications of timing

131

1 between what they called model office testing and live
2 trialling. And, as you say, scalability, all these
3 things would have caused, I suspect, you know, some
4 level of doubt and it's a risk that is quite difficult
5 to assess in this sort of rather theoretical
6 environment.

7 Q. Thank you.

8 You've explained in your statement that, in terms of
9 the significance of the panel's findings on this
10 important issue, their conclusions essentially
11 underpinned the advice which was subsequently
12 communicated to ministers by the review group about the
13 future options for the project; is that correct?

14 A. I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

15 Q. Sorry, the formulation was perhaps unfortunate. In your
16 statement, you suggest that the conclusions of the panel
17 as to the technical viability of the project very much
18 underpinned the advice that was subsequently given to
19 ministers by the review group, concerning the future
20 options for the project; is that fair?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. We can see evidence of that particular point set out at
23 paragraph 17 of your statement, please, on page 7.
24 Thank you. I think it's on the following page, please.
25 Thank you. Thank you.

130

1 and quality of management and control within Pathway, to
2 mention just a couple. So I think that would be a fair
3 assessment of what I -- or what the Department felt at
4 the time.

5 Q. You have explained in your statement that the review
6 group explored three possible options for the future of
7 the project. Put very simply, these were, firstly,
8 continuing with the project in its then guise, to a very
9 great extent; the second being restructuring of the
10 project to remove the Benefit Payment Card; and,
11 finally, cancellation of the project.

12 You've described cancellation in your statement as
13 the logical course. Can you please explain why you
14 regarded it at the time as the logical course?

15 A. Well, from memory, the cancellation -- from our
16 perspective, the cancellation of the project -- it
17 wasn't working, it hadn't -- it wasn't being delivered
18 to time. ICL Pathway were in breach and I believe it
19 was not impossible to conceive of other ways in which
20 the Post Office, ourselves, government, could achieve
21 our objectives. I think, you know, we shouldn't
22 altogether forget that there were some other objectives
23 apart from strictly the benefit -- payment of benefits.

24 There was also the Post Office's concern to grow its
25 business, which was a longer term objective, and to

132

1 become more commercial. And also there were Government
2 objectives about modernising government, making it more
3 efficient, also about social exclusion.

4 There were, you know, a number of these sort of
5 issues that were all sitting there and waiting, in
6 a way, to be taken forward. And it is possible that,
7 you know, if cancellation had been considered a viable
8 option, we could all have regrouped, as it were, and
9 started again.

10 **Q.** We know that the majority of the group recommended
11 continuing with the project, so the first of those three
12 options that we've mentioned. But that was not
13 a decision which you felt able to endorse; is that
14 right?

15 **A.** Yes.

16 **Q.** If we could please scroll down to page 8 of the
17 witness's statement, please, we can see that you
18 addressed this point at paragraph 18. You say:

19 "Looking again at the Group recommendation to pursue
20 Option 1, the decision seems clearly weighted to the
21 interests of the Post Office and ICL in a way that still
22 seems difficult to understand and could not be readily
23 accepted by the [Department and the Benefits Agency]."

24 You go on to say that:

25 "It appears that the majority of Group members
133

1 I haven't got option 2 in front of me now, so I'm sort
2 of speaking a little bit --

3 **Q.** That's the restructuring of the project to remove the
4 Benefit Payment Card.

5 **A.** Exactly. Well, in a very simple way, removing the
6 Benefit Payment Card very much simplified the project,
7 so it certainly increased its ability to -- would
8 significantly increase ICL Pathway's ability to be able
9 to deliver on the project. So I think that's the first
10 point.

11 And I think the other point, which I cannot now
12 recall whether it was at that stage part of option 2,
13 but to remove the Benefits Agency out of the contract
14 would actually have made things very much simpler in
15 terms of the relationship of managing the project if it
16 was between two parties, in perhaps a more conventional
17 manner.

18 **Q.** In view of the concerns that your colleagues in the
19 agency had expressed about the reliability of the
20 system, was there not a risk that in endorsing option 2,
21 the Department would be lumbering Post Office Counters
22 with a flawed system?

23 **A.** We were still going to be a customer of the Post Office,
24 so I don't think that we were viewing it as a negative
25 option, in the sense, as I said, that there was

135

1 deemed the risks to the Post Office and its future, the
2 possible risk of litigation, the potential impact on
3 inward investment and reputational risk to Government
4 and its PFI policy if the project failed, outweighed the
5 risks of forging forward with the project, despite the
6 evidence of performance to date, and even with so many
7 uncertainties as acknowledged by the Panel and the even
8 greater impact if it failed anyway."

9 Were you concerned at the time that, when assessing
10 the ability of Pathway successfully to deliver the
11 system in future, insufficient weight was being placed
12 upon its actual performance up until that point?

13 **A.** Can you repeat the question?

14 **Q.** Were you concerned at the time that when the group was
15 assessing the ability of Pathway successfully to deliver
16 the system in the future, it was placing insufficient
17 weight upon its actual performance to date?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** If you were concerned that the system could not be
20 delivered successfully, as it was originally conceived,
21 why did you, on behalf of the Department, endorse the
22 second of the two options?

23 **A.** Well, I think that, as -- as we were discussing earlier,
24 it was important to find a way forward for all to agree,
25 and it certainly seemed that there was scope --

134

1 a genuine belief that by desimplify -- decomplicating
2 the project and by taking the Benefit Payment Card away,
3 it should have become a much simpler and more
4 straightforward project to deliver. Even taking account
5 of issues like past performance, there was actually
6 a better opportunity for a positive way forward.

7 **Q.** From the perspective of your Department, did endorsement
8 of option 2 offer the path of least resistance in terms
9 of it offering an option which was at least acceptable
10 to some of the contracting parties?

11 **A.** It seemed, I think I said at the outset, that when
12 parties disagree it's often difficult to find a solution
13 that is perfect for everyone, but this certainly looked,
14 at the time, as the best way forward, taking all the
15 complex considerations into account.

16 **Q.** We know that efforts continued to be made in the autumn
17 of 1998 to find a workable solution to the problems
18 which had beset the project. Negotiations with
19 ICL Pathway as to the contractual basis on which the
20 project might proceed were initially conducted under the
21 auspices of Graham Corbett; is that correct?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** When those negotiations failed to come to fruition, the
24 issue was remitted to another working group; is that
25 right?

136

- 1 A. I cannot recall.
- 2 Q. It appears from the papers we have that a further
3 working group was brought together, whose composition
4 largely mirrored that of the original review group, but
5 also compromised representatives of the Benefits Agency
6 and Post Office Counters Limited; do you recall that?
- 7 A. Yes, I have to say that I had largely viewed it in the
8 way you've just described, that it was, in fact, the
9 earlier group with the helpful addition of people from
10 the Benefits Agency and Post Office.
- 11 Q. It appears from the documents we have that you, in fact,
12 suggested that it would be sensible to include
13 Post Office Counters Limited within the group; do you
14 recall making that suggestion?
- 15 A. No, but it sounds like a good one.
- 16 Q. You were sufficiently concerned about the direction of
17 interdepartmental discussions in mid-November 1998 that
18 you sent a paper to your colleagues in the Treasury
19 setting out the nature and cause of your concerns; is
20 that right?
- 21 A. Can you refer me to the paper?
- 22 Q. Of course. It bears the reference POL00028635. This
23 first page is a fax cover sheet.
- 24 A. Yeah.
- 25 Q. We can see it's addressed to the Horizon Working Group

137

1 they still wish to continue with an option around the
2 project 'as is', or whether now is the time to pull the
3 plug and open discussions with I'm ICL either around
4 an alternative option or a negotiated termination."
5 You explain that you've attached:
6 "... a note of some of the main issues that [you]
7 believe the Working Group should put to Ministers, which
8 [you say] do not naturally fall out of the evaluation
9 process we have been following."
10 Then at paragraph 3, please:
11 "Turning to the ICL proposals themselves, having had
12 the benefit of attending the presentation they gave
13 yesterday, I am quite clear that the proposals taken
14 together do not present a sufficiently significant move
15 on ICL's point to meet Ministers' original criterion for
16 the discussions -- to find a commercial 'deal'
17 acceptable to Government. The analysis that DTI/POCL
18 has put to you completely ignores the transfer of risk
19 that underlies the ICL proposals -- Government/public
20 sector parties being asked to underwrite not only the
21 new loans but the ones that already exist; guaranteed
22 payment to ICL, with scant regard to the level of
23 performance; significant price increases; payment in
24 advance; acceptance of the project before it is fully
25 trialed in any systematic form; by any token this is

139

- 1 members, who are listed on the left-hand side. They
2 include various officials in Her Majesty's Treasury,
3 David Sibbick in the Department of Trade and Industry,
4 Jeremy Crump in the Cabinet Office central IT unit,
5 Geoff Mulgan at Number 10, Jonathan Evans and Paul Rich
6 of the Post Office and George McCorkell of the
7 Benefits Agency. It also includes Hamish Sandison of
8 Bird & Bird, can you confirm what role he played at this
9 stage, please?
- 10 A. Hamish Sandison was the joint programme lawyer for the
11 Benefits Agency and Post Office Counters advising on
12 contractual arrangements.
- 13 Q. Thank you. We can see the fax is dated 13 November, and
14 in the lower section it's from you, Sarah Graham, at the
15 DSS.

16 If we scroll down to the second page, please, we can
17 see a covering letter addressed to Sarah Mullen and
18 addressed to various members of the Horizon Working
19 Group. In terms of the context of this paper, that's
20 set out at paragraph 1, in that it provides:

21 "In preparation for the Inter-Ministerial meeting on
22 Tuesday, and as agreed at the last Working Group
23 meeting, it is important that we do not concentrate on
24 an analysis of the ICL proposals at the expense of
25 giving ministers the opportunity to consider whether

138

1 a complete re-write of the contract which was originally
2 let; certainly changes the original PFI concept of
3 transferring some risk to the private sector; re-draws
4 the project in terms of the contractual basis, the
5 specification, the funding -- now put at £600 million
6 over the life of the project for ICL of which
7 £480 million is to be underwritten by the public sector
8 sponsors. In practical terms, to close the deal as
9 David Sibbick says, Government needs to commit a further
10 £120 million and more -- for the privilege of allowing
11 ICL to continue with the project, and possibly glean
12 some future benefit from 'the golden cloud' which hovers
13 over the partnership agreements with POCL."

14 If we scroll down, please, to page 4, we can see
15 a copy of the paper which you enclosed with this letter.
16 Thank you. It's described as an "*aide memoire*" of
17 issues that may have escaped the formal evaluation
18 process. Do you recall producing this document at the
19 time?

- 20 A. It's nearly 25 years ago, so I don't think I would be
21 honest if I said that I could recall it in detail.
22 Certainly re-reading it, I remember broadly the
23 situation.
- 24 Q. Thank you.

25 The first of the six headings in this paper is

140

1 entitled "The risks of continuing with the project".
 2 This is the area on which I would like to focus our
 3 attention, please.
 4 The first bullet point bears the heading:
 5 "Why should ICL performance improve dramatically in
 6 the future over the past?"
 7 You state there:
 8 "Apart from the well documented and continuing
 9 delays, ICL have dragged their feet every step of the
 10 way, always looking to do less rather than more,
 11 [for example] constant arguments about the security
 12 requirements for the [Benefit Payment Card] have only
 13 recently been resolved, although these were central to
 14 the [Department's] business and policy objectives for
 15 undertaking the project at all. There is no evidence
 16 that ICL is making extra efforts to keep to committed
 17 milestones since they were placed in breach of contract
 18 by both parties last November, [for example] the October
 19 1998 milestone for the software required for delayed
 20 operational trial (11 months late) was not met. The
 21 whole tenor of the discussions around the negotiations
 22 with Graham Corbett was to make life much easier for ICL
 23 than ... the current contract: easing requirements,
 24 cutting corners, etc; and this is further reflected in
 25 spades in the latest (9 November) proposals from ICL.

141

1 what does come up again and again in looking through
 2 these documents is ICL Pathway's repeated attempts to
 3 soften the acceptance criteria and, as I think I said
 4 earlier, to base acceptance on what was achieved in what
 5 was called the model office or partial trials, and not
 6 on the acceptance criteria that, if I recall rightly, in
 7 the Project Mentors report -- which we may allude to
 8 later -- that was commissioned at an earlier stage by
 9 the Benefits Agency and the Post Office, about the
 10 reasons for the delays, they had made quite clear that
 11 ICL were not actually following the normal kind of
 12 process that would be expected in a project of this
 13 type.
 14 **Q.** You've referred just now to two aspects of the
 15 proposals, one being a relaxation of the acceptance
 16 criteria, and the second being the acceptance of the
 17 system at the end of model office testing rather than
 18 a live operational trial. Those are the two that stand
 19 out in your memory; is that correct?
 20 **A.** From memory, but I think there were, you know, various
 21 gradations in between. I would -- you know, I would
 22 defer to those who actually were involved in this
 23 process to be able to describe more reliably what was
 24 involved.
 25 **Q.** What, if anything, did you deduce at the time from these

143

1 This cannot bode well for the future. Either the
 2 project is in the end going to cost much more than is
 3 envisaged, to get the quality and timely product we
 4 need; or, just as likely, it will not be delivered on
 5 time or in totality; or most likely of all, a mixture of
 6 both."
 7 We can see you here expressing yourself in what
 8 you've described as forthright terms. Why did you
 9 consider it necessary to do so at this stage in
 10 November 1998?
 11 **A.** As I've just said, I think it's quite difficult to
 12 recall in a way that would be helpful to this Inquiry,
 13 you know, the exact sequence of events. But reading
 14 that, I would judge that I clearly felt that the way the
 15 discussions were going was or were disregarding the key
 16 factors that I had put here in this document.
 17 **Q.** Thank you.
 18 Your *aides memoire* contained reference to
 19 ICL Pathway's proposals to ease the requirements imposed
 20 upon it by the terms of the original contract. We know
 21 that one aspect of their proposals related to the
 22 criteria on which the system would be deemed to be
 23 contractually acceptable; do you recall that?
 24 **A.** I recall it in part through reading some of these
 25 documents, but it would only be through that means. But

142

1 proposals about ICL Pathway's confidence in the
 2 robustness of its own technical solution?
 3 **A.** Well, I said at the beginning I am not an expert in this
 4 field at all, but I think, just in a common sense way,
 5 something didn't seem right in this constant, as I was
 6 understanding it, sort of eating away, trying to make
 7 things easier. And also I think remembering that these
 8 criteria related to the way that payments would then be
 9 made to ICL. So there is obviously that other aspect
 10 that, you know, it's not just making sure that the
 11 system works, which was obviously our primary interest,
 12 but, from an ICL Pathway point of view, there was a real
 13 concern that they needed to tie in or would like to tie
 14 in whatever the acceptance criteria were to, if you
 15 like, ease the criteria for payment to them.
 16 **Q.** From what you said, you therefore think that there was
 17 a strong financial aspect to the proposals; is that
 18 a fair inference --
 19 **A.** Yes.
 20 **Q.** -- from your evidence?
 21 **A.** Yes. But that's understandable, they're a business, so
 22 that's fair.
 23 **Q.** You refer in your statement to an independent review of
 24 Horizon which was jointly commissioned by the sponsors
 25 from Project Mentors Limited, and you've mentioned that

144

1 in your evidence this afternoon. Can you please explain
2 the reasons for Project Mentors' original appointment by
3 Post Office Counters and the Benefits Agency?

4 **A.** They were -- my understanding is that they were
5 appointed in order to establish, from our point of view,
6 where the blame lay for the severe delays in delivering
7 and meeting the deadlines and milestones. I mean, this
8 against a backdrop of the contract that we had jointly
9 with ICL and, as you might expect, ICL were basically
10 saying it was our fault that they hadn't been able to
11 deliver what they were supposed to be delivering.

12 So it was in, you know, our strong interest to make
13 sure that we had some independent view of what had
14 actually been going on, and the report stated very
15 clearly that the assertions by ICL -- that it was
16 basically our fault for not doing or not giving them the
17 data they needed and related issues -- that that was not
18 the case and that the delays should be laid
19 unequivocally at ICL Pathway's door.

20 **Q.** We know that Project Mentors produced three separate
21 reports, the first two of which were concerned with the
22 reasons underpinning the delays to the programme, as you
23 have outlined.

24 I would like to ask you about the third report which
25 was produced in December 1998. This bears the reference
145

1 requirements, causing the need for extensive re-work
2 before the system can be accepted and, potentially,
3 operational problems if the system is rolled out."

4 The memorandum is followed by a covering letter from
5 Professor Andrew Davies, the director of Project
6 Mentors, in which he summarises at the key conclusions
7 of the report -- I wonder if we could turn to page 3,
8 please. This letter addressed to Hamish Sandison reads:

9 "We have now completed a provisional version of our
10 position paper on requirements analysis, a copy of which
11 I attach. We are of the opinion that the findings of
12 this paper give serious concern that the Payment Card
13 System has been developed in a manner that creates
14 a breach of the contract relating to the requirement in
15 clause 702 of the Authorities Agreement to work to 'good
16 industry practice' and that the impact of the breach is
17 likely to be that the system will not be fit for purpose
18 unless extensive re-work is carried out before
19 implementation, causing further delay and additional
20 investment by Pathway and the Authorities."

21 The letter goes on to explain why Project Mentors
22 considered ICL Pathway to be in breach of contracts for
23 failing to follow good industry practice.

24 In the following paragraph we see Andrew Davies set
25 out a summary of the conclusions from chapter 2 of the
147

1 POL00031114, please. Thank you.

2 We can see this is simply the fax cover sheet
3 confirming that the report has been sent by
4 Hamish Sandison of Bird & Bird to BA/POCL, it's for the
5 attention of George McCorkell, to whom you've referred
6 earlier in your evidence, and also Paul Rich, Pat Kelsey
7 and Andrew Davies, who was also the director of Project
8 Mentors. Do you recall whether or not you were shown
9 a copy of this report at the time it was produced in
10 December 1998?

11 **A.** No, I don't. I mean, I don't recall.

12 **Q.** At page 2 of this document, thank you, we can see
13 a memorandum from Hamish Sandison, the joint programme
14 lawyer, as you've explained, introducing the report. It
15 reads at paragraph 1:

16 "Further to my Memorandum dated December 8th,
17 I attach the full report of the work by Andrew Davies
18 and his team on requirements analysis. This fleshes out
19 the brief update from Andrew which I sent you with my
20 December 8th Memorandum. As you will see, all three of
21 Andrew's team are (I quote from Andrew's letter to me)
22 'deeply concerned that their findings show a serious
23 problem with the way in which ICL Pathway have developed
24 the system. The impact of this is likely to be that
25 there will be failures to meet essential user
146

1 paper, in which it says:

2 "We have performed a requirements analysis for BPS
3 [the Benefit Payment Service], which is predominantly
4 a BA system element. From our analysis we conclude that
5 Pathway have made no attempt to undertake requirements
6 analysis in accordance with normal industry practice.
7 This is despite their having access to the SSR [which we
8 understand is the statement of service requirements] and
9 subsequent requirements since April 1996. Much of this
10 work could, and should, have been done during the
11 demonstrator [phase]."

12 On the following page, please, Professor Davies sets
13 out what he considered to be the consequences of
14 ICL Pathway's apparent failure to perform that detailed
15 requirements analysis. We can see that at the top of
16 page 4, where it reads:

17 "Our experience of systems where requirements have
18 not been analysed satisfactorily is that the system
19 fails to meet the users' needs. An effective acceptance
20 test will identify many such failings, necessitating
21 considerable rework. The result is a significant
22 extension of the time and cost required to complete the
23 system and roll it out. The alternative is to allow
24 unacceptable processing in the operational environment,
25 with unpredictable and potentially damaging results.
148

1 "In our opinion, the failure to satisfactorily
2 analyse the requirements for the Benefit Payments System
3 make it unlikely that the users' needs will be met by
4 the current Pathway system."

5 It goes on to say:

6 "We do not believe, from our understanding of other
7 elements of the complete Payment Card System, that these
8 other elements have been analysed using better
9 techniques than for the Benefits Payment System, so
10 there is a concern that user needs for these elements
11 will also not be met by the current Pathway system."

12 You have explained you don't recall reading a copy
13 of this report at the time. Do you recall whether its
14 findings were brought to your attention by George
15 McCorkell or others at the Benefits Agency?

16 **A.** No, I don't recall these particular findings. The
17 general finding does not surprise me, but I also am
18 not -- I don't know whether I alluded to any of this in
19 any of the submissions that I wrote. I feel that if
20 I had known about it, I feel I would have included it.

21 **Q.** It has been suggested by at least one witness to the
22 Inquiry that the production of this report reflected
23 a concerted strategy by the department and the
24 Benefits Agency to justify its withdrawal from the
25 programme. Do you consider there to be any substance to

149

1 (3.18 pm)

2 (A short break)

3 (3.35 pm)

4 **MS HODGE:** Hello, sir, can you hear and see me?

5 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Yes, I can, and I was having trouble
6 unmuting myself, hence the delay.

7 **MS HODGE:** Thank you. We can see you and hear you.

8 Thank you, Dr Graham. In early December 1998 there
9 came an intervention from Fujitsu Japan in the ongoing
10 negotiations over the future of the Horizon project. Do
11 you recall that?

12 **A.** Yes.

13 **Q.** I believe you have been shown a copy of a report
14 produced by the then British Ambassador to Japan,
15 Sir David Wright, in which he records a meeting he held
16 with Mr Naruto, the vice chairman of Fujitsu and
17 chairman of ICL, on 4 December 1998; is that correct?

18 **A.** Yes.

19 **Q.** We have a copy of that report, please, at BEIS0000336 --
20 thank you, Frankie.

21 We can see at the top of the page to whom the report
22 was intended to be transmitted. It records "FCO to pass
23 to DSS for PS/Secretary of State". Do you recall
24 reading this report at the time it was produced?

25 **A.** No, but I don't recall seeing it at the time. But I do

151

1 that allegation?

2 **A.** No. I think our concern was to establish, as
3 I explained earlier, what our position was in the face
4 of ICL claims, I think again in the pack there are
5 letters from the vice chairman, I believe, and chairman
6 of Fujitsu, and others involved at a very senior level
7 in ICL, that make it clear that they were trying to
8 place the blame of their delays on the Benefits Agency.

9 So I think our concern, and I would think the
10 Post Office's concern too, is to actually identify where
11 the problems with the development of the project
12 actually lay.

13 **MS HODGE:** Thank you.

14 Sir, this may be a convenient time to stop. I have
15 a limited number of additional questions for this
16 witness, and so if we could break for 10 to 15 minutes
17 now, and I still think we'd be on course to conclude
18 this afternoon.

19 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** That's fine. Are there questions from
20 legal representatives or is it just you, Ms Hodge?

21 **MS HODGE:** There are a small number of questions, I believe,
22 from recognised legal representatives.

23 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** All right. Let's take 15 minutes, that's
24 fine.

25 **MS HODGE:** Thank you, sir.

150

1 recall and see from the papers that I was aware of the
2 approach.

3 **Q.** Thank you. We find a detailed summary of the meeting
4 a little further down the page, starting at paragraph 2,
5 please. It reads:

6 "Naruto, Vice Chairman of Fujitsu and Chairman of
7 ICL, called on me today to present me with a letter
8 outlining the serious financial difficulties surrounding
9 Project Horizon and the problems for ICL/Fujitsu. Copy
10 of letter by fax."

11 I believe you have been shown a copy of that letter,
12 and indeed you were shown a copy of that letter at the
13 time; is that consistent with your recollection?

14 **A.** My recollection.

15 **Q.** That letter bears the reference BEIS0000337, but it need
16 not be shown at this stage, thank you.

17 In terms of what was discussed at that meeting, we
18 see at paragraph 3, and I refer you to this because it's
19 quite a helpful summary of Fujitsu's position I think
20 a little more succinctly than in the letter:

21 "Mr Naruto stressed the difficult and serious crisis
22 Project Horizon faced ..."

23 The first point being that the:

24 "Cost of Project had increased from [£185 million]
25 to [£600 million]. To date [ICL Pathway], supported by

152

1 Fujitsu, had spent over [£200 million] on the project.
 2 ICL and Fujitsu would have to raise the remaining funds
 3 through bank loans. Due to delays in setting up the
 4 project, ICL risked losing [£500 million] by the year
 5 2000. Loss of this scale against an outlay of
 6 [£600 million] was unsustainable.

7 "[Mr] Naruto and Fujitsu were worried that
 8 [Her Majesty's Government] did not understanding fully
 9 understand the seriousness of the situation. From the
 10 very outset, the Project had not been given the
 11 attention it deserved. Fujitsu were particularly
 12 frustrated that the Benefits Agency ... had failed to
 13 provide ICL with the necessary data to implement Project
 14 Horizon. They believed [the Agency] were now dragging
 15 their feet over this and appeared to want to stop the
 16 project altogether since they wish to switch the
 17 delivery system from the Post Office ... to the banking
 18 system."

19 Pausing there, do you consider that was a fair
 20 characterisation of the Agency's position at this stage
 21 in early December 1998?

22 A. No, and as we've just seen from, I think, the documents
 23 we were discussing before, the Project Mentors report,
 24 that was exactly our understanding of where Fujitsu and
 25 ICL were coming from, to throw, as it were, the blame on

153

1 viability. Fujitsu and Naruto in particular, have
 2 worked for 18 years first to prop up and then to put ICL
 3 on a healthy footing. Naruto certainly meant what he
 4 said when he warned of this now being under threat."

5 The final paragraph reads:

6 "finally, whatever the implications for plans for
 7 social security benefit delivery (on which it is not for
 8 me to comment), any threat to ICL's continued viability
 9 would have profound implications for jobs in the UK and
 10 for bilateral ties. Given Naruto's points at para 5
 11 above, we have to expect that Fujitsu and ICL would
 12 publicise their criticisms of the Project's management.
 13 That would be damaging to the hitherto benign and
 14 mutually supportive style of the relationship between
 15 [Her Majesty's Government] and Japanese companies
 16 invested in Britain. The waves created would be
 17 damaging politically at home and to the UK's position of
 18 strength here vis-à-vis our European competitors.
 19 ['This' probably] is already being weakened by
 20 perceptions of distancing from the centre of Europe over
 21 the single currency. We can do without more trouble."

22 These conclusions, I think, largely speak for
 23 themselves. What I would like to ask you is what
 24 effect, if any, you consider this intervention by
 25 Fujitsu Japan had upon the future course of the public

155

1 the Benefits Agency.

2 Q. Sir David's report goes to read:

3 "Fujitsu and ICL believed that the project was
 4 crucial to the modernisation and future health of
 5 [Post Office Counters Limited], they could not
 6 understand why the [Benefits Agency] were not making
 7 more effort to resolve current problems.

8 "Attention in Japan to PFI had led to 2 seminars
 9 organised by the LDP, portraying Project Horizon in the
 10 UK as a model for Japan. Naruto feared for Fujitsu's
 11 domestic reputation if the Project failed.

12 "[Mr] Naruto repeatedly stressed that failure of the
 13 Project will have serious repercussions for Fujitsu's
 14 international standing, lead to major internal
 15 difficulties within Fujitsu and the collapse of ICL."

16 We can see a little further down in the report the
 17 Ambassador records his conclusions -- thank you -- in
 18 relation both to the meeting he'd had with Mr Naruto and
 19 the letter, a copy of which was shown to you.

20 He recorded:

21 "The contents of the letter and the tone of
 22 Mr Naruto's approach make it quite clear that we have
 23 a major and potentially damaging problem on our hands.
 24 I do not (not) think he was simply trying to make our
 25 flesh creep, by warning of the threat to ICL's future

154

1 sector negotiations over the future of the Horizon
 2 project?

3 A. As we know, I'm very reliant on the papers that we have
 4 seen to recall the detail but, in general terms, I don't
 5 think the letter told us anything that we weren't
 6 expecting to hear anyway from Fujitsu and ICL, and
 7 elsewhere in the papers it is apparent that there was
 8 also some briefing of the specialist press, so I think
 9 we were already geared up, and I think the earlier
 10 papers show we were aware of the inward investment
 11 aspect of whatever decisions were taken.

12 Q. Do you consider that concerns about Japanese inward
 13 investment and job losses in the UK caused ministers to
 14 lose sight of the technical risks inherent in pursuing
 15 with the Horizon project?

16 A. I think it's in the nature of a decision of this sort
 17 that there are a number -- I mean, that's the essence in
 18 a way of what government does, is actually trying to
 19 make difficult decisions where there are many aspects to
 20 that decision. It is right that ministers should
 21 certainly be aware of these possible effects.

22 I think that Naruto's letter probably, as you would
 23 expect, makes the point extremely strongly as it is in
 24 their interests to do. But, as I have said in other
 25 ways, I think it's right that ministers think about this

156

1 alongside all the other aspects that they have to take
2 into account. But, coming back to the technical aspects
3 of, you know, whether this project was going to work or
4 not, the whole reason the issue was on the table was
5 because it wasn't actually working way back in 1997, and
6 the Department and the Benefits Agency were concerned
7 about it, which is, you know, where Harriet Harman's
8 letter started and everything flowed from that.

9 **Q.** Would it be fair to say that, between December 1998 and
10 early March 1999, the initiative for moving forward with
11 the public sector negotiations rested largely with
12 Her Majesty's Treasury and the Cabinet Office, as
13 opposed to the Department for Social Security and Post
14 Office Counters on the other hand?

15 **A.** I think they were certainly in the driving seat and were
16 seen as being able to play the role of honest broker.
17 It is manifest that the Department of Social Security,
18 DTI, Benefits Agency, POCL, you know, we all had skin in
19 the game, and the Treasury and the Cabinet Office were
20 well placed to represent the interests of government
21 overall in taking forward those discussions. But, as
22 I think we've seen from the papers, I don't think that
23 that meant that either the Department -- the departments
24 concerned or the agencies concerned and the Post Office
25 were actually left out of, if you like, informing what

157

1 **A.** I can recollect the very broad thrust of it, but in
2 terms of the detail, only what I've managed to read very
3 recently.

4 **Q.** Thank you.

5 I think it's fair to say the submission was
6 primarily concerned with the merits of the options that
7 were under consideration by ministers in the spring of
8 1999. It did, however, contain a brief update on the
9 progress of the programme which addressed the recent
10 results of testing and the agency's view of the
11 readiness of the system to enter live trial; is that
12 correct, do you recall?

13 **A.** I don't recall, no.

14 **Q.** We can see that update, please, if we turn to page 12.
15 This is both referenced in your submission and appended
16 to it and, therefore, presumably was written by you at
17 the time. Do you think that's a fair conclusion to
18 draw?

19 **A.** I'm sure that whatever is set down there is what
20 I believed to be accurate at the time.

21 **Q.** Thank you. Under the heading "Testing", it reads at
22 paragraph 3:

23 "Following technical testing of the latest ICL
24 Software New Release 2 (or NR2) four separate Model
25 Office and end-to-end tests have been undertaken. Each

159

1 formed the basis of those -- the basis for the
2 discussions, if not actually being party to the
3 negotiations themselves.

4 **Q.** You also remained involved in overseeing the programme
5 from the perspective of the Department; is that correct,
6 in that you were kept informed of developments which
7 were relevant to --

8 **A.** Yes.

9 **Q.** -- the negotiations?

10 At paragraph 22 of your statement, you say that
11 ministers were being kept closely in touch with all the
12 issues, including those aspects of the technical
13 development that were affecting the project delays, and
14 the various options and proposals being put forward by
15 the different parties.

16 We can see an illustration of that in April 1999 in
17 a document which bears the reference DWP00000019.

18 Thank you, Frankie.

19 This is a copy of a submission which you sent to the
20 then Secretary of State for the Department of Social
21 Security, Alistair Darling. This cover sheet is dated
22 19 April but if we turn to the following page, please,
23 we can see it's dated 15 April 1999 from you to the
24 Secretary of State. Do you have any recollection of the
25 detail of this document?

158

1 of these tests have taken approximately one month to
2 complete. At the end of each run all significant
3 incidents were corrected and proved through 'target'
4 testing. In theory the next model office test should
5 have produced a relatively clean run. However, in
6 practice, each of the subsequent Model Office tests has
7 raised as many new incidents as generated through the
8 previous runs."

9 It goes on to say:

10 "Initial test runs of the software should have been
11 completed by mid-December 1998, but because of the above
12 problems testing was halted for two months whilst ICL
13 took steps to put right large numbers of major faults.
14 This was overseen by POCL.

15 "As we entered the formal and what should have been
16 the final Modern Office run in Feb/March we made it
17 known to the Horizon team our considerable concerns
18 about the creation of new incidents and gave a view that
19 it might be necessary to have an additional run of Model
20 Office. In the event a further 200+ new faults were
21 identified. Some of these were critical and would
22 directly affect the correct or timeous payment of 1% of
23 benefit payments in a Live Environment.

24 "Further targeting testing has taken place to fix
25 all major faults identified but to date we have not seen

160

1 a clean run of Model Office. Our definition of a clean
2 run has been set at no incidents which would provide
3 incorrect or delayed payments and only a modest number
4 of background system problems.

5 "[Post Office Counters] have rejected that view
6 arguing that the targeted tests have dealt with all
7 known faults, further tests will be costly and will
8 delay the start of the live trial and National Rollout.

9 "The [Benefits Agency] view is that only with
10 a further run of testing of the end-to-end system will
11 give the level of assuring needed that no major new
12 faults will be uncovered because this could:

13 "put benefit payments to 60,000 Child Benefit
14 customers at risk during the Live Trial;

15 "put at risk the accurate payment of over
16 £1 [million] per week to those customers during the
17 Trial Period;

18 "puts at risk the successful completion of the Live
19 Trial; or

20 "create a situation in which we had to terminate the
21 Project because of failures of the software during the
22 Live Trial that could have been identified earlier in
23 testing."

24 This section concludes:

25 "The differences of view between POCL and BA remain
161

1 stuff about the model office trials and the problems
2 that were emerging, I just come back to the earlier
3 point I made at the beginning that I think it would be
4 fair to give the Benefits Agency the credit that they
5 were very experienced, for good reasons and bad, in what
6 could go wrong in the way a project was developed and
7 that it was really important to get the testing right.
8 And I think that is the concern that shines through for
9 me in what we see set down here.

10 **Q.** So far as you were aware then, were the concerns of the
11 Agency about the system's fitness to enter live trial
12 genuine concerns?

13 **A.** Yes.

14 **Q.** Do you know to what extent -- whilst we see that you are
15 raising these concerns with the Secretary of State for
16 your Department, do you know to what extent these
17 concerns were shared with other ministers in the
18 Department of Trade and Industry, for example, or
19 Her Majesty's Treasury?

20 **A.** No. On the whole, I was not party to -- as you would
21 expect, to internal briefings for ministers of other
22 departments. So, although we, at official level, might
23 speak to each other about these issues, we wouldn't
24 necessarily see what had been sent to each others'
25 ministers.

163

1 with further discussions taking place to try to
2 reconcile the two views. In the meantime, rather than
3 hold up the Programme, the [Benefits Agency] have agreed
4 not to stand in the way of preparations for the Live
5 Trial."

6 You go on then to explain the status of the live
7 trial, confirming that the BA had been unable to approve
8 proceeding to live trial as a result of the current
9 status of testing.

10 It's been suggested that the Agency's refusal to
11 enter live trial simply reflected a reluctance to commit
12 to further financial investment in the programme at
13 a time when the cancellation of the Benefit Payment Card
14 was in contemplation. Do you think that's a fair
15 characterisation of the position that was adopted by the
16 Agency at this stage in April 1999?

17 **A.** No. I think it would be fair to say we were very aware,
18 as we had been all along, about the fact that the longer
19 we didn't go on making a decision one way or another, or
20 choose between any of the options, the more money was
21 being spent, for example, not on things like developing
22 training and, you know, issues that were related to the
23 wider implementation of the project. So we were well
24 aware of that.

25 But I think coming back, just looking at all this
162

1 **Q.** Thank you. The Inquiry has obtained from the National
2 Archives a copy of a briefing which appears to have been
3 sent by Her Majesty's Treasury to the Cabinet Office on
4 22 April 1999. I believe you have been shown a copy of
5 that document, it bears the reference CBO00100002_025.

6 Thank you, Frankie.

7 The broader context of this briefing, it appears
8 from the documents we have, was a meeting of the board
9 of Fujitsu in which a decision was to be taken about the
10 future funding of ICL Pathway and the project.

11 We can see there at the top the briefing contains
12 proposed lines to take in the event that Fujitsu or
13 ICL Pathway decide unilaterally to withdraw.

14 In close, at the end of this briefing is a document
15 entitled "ICL Pathway: list of failures". Sorry, there
16 is a document entitled "ICL Pathway: list of failures"
17 at the end of this briefing. I wonder if we could
18 please turn to page 8.

19 This reads:

20 "Independent reviews of the Horizon project by
21 external IT experts have all concluded (most recently
22 this week) that ICL Pathway have failed and are failing
23 to meet good industry practice in taking this project
24 forward, both in their software development work and in
25 their management of the process."

164

1 Now stepping back, that seems to reflect some of the
2 substance of what we saw in the Project Mentors report;
3 would you agree with that?

4 **A.** Yes.

5 **Q.** And would tend to suggest that the findings of that
6 report, perhaps at a high level, had been brought to the
7 attention of officials within Her Majesty's Treasury?

8 **A.** I can't answer that.

9 **Q.** It goes on to state:

10 "To date, in the development stages of the project:

11 "all planned release dates have been missed --

12 including the key contractual milestone for completion
13 of the operational trial for which ICL Pathway were
14 placed in breach in November 1997

15 "on current working plans, updated as recently as
16 September 1998, the first milestone thereafter -- Model
17 Office Testing -- was delayed by 2 months

18 "every release has been subject to reductions in the
19 originally planned functionality.

20 "and even when each release has gone live, there
21 have been faults and problems which have resulted in the
22 need for Pathway to reimburse DSS.

23 "in the current trials the known problems have risen
24 from 46 in November 1998 to 139 at the end of
25 March 1999; and currently 146 have not been resolved
165

1 official involved in the public sector negotiations on
2 behalf of the DSS. I would like you please to confirm
3 what do you consider to be the principal reasons why the
4 Department decided to withdraw from the project in
5 May 1999?

6 **A.** As I think we've been discussing in the course of this
7 questioning, the main reason was that the Benefit
8 Payment Card had always been conceived as a stepping
9 stone to achieving the automated payment of benefits
10 through bank accounts which we wanted to introduce,
11 partly in order to make it safer.

12 Fraud with the existing, then, payment method
13 through order books was an easy win, if you like, and
14 the Benefit Payment Card, the longer it was getting
15 delayed, the longer in a way we were not being able to
16 realise those savings to the taxpayer, dare I say, and
17 nor were we able to progress to a better way of paying
18 benefits which had wider benefits for people through
19 trying to encourage people who didn't have bank accounts
20 to have them.

21 And it's worth bearing in mind that, actually, in
22 fact 80 per cent, I believe from memory, of our benefit
23 recipients already had bank accounts, they simply
24 weren't using them, and the comparative costs which are
25 laid out, I think, in one of the papers here, of payment
167

1 "nearly 16 million people should by now be paid by
2 the Benefit Payment Card. In fact only 30,000+ people
3 are currently being paid by the Benefit Payment Card --
4 for one benefit only

5 "rollout of the system to 19,000 post offices should
6 have been completed at the end of 1998. But only
7 limited functionality is available currently in 204 post
8 offices

9 "delays to the programme have already cost the
10 Government over £200 million in savings they would
11 otherwise have expected to make."

12 It's been suggested by one witness that this
13 document was authored by the Department of Social
14 Security. Are you able to shed any light on that
15 suggestion?

16 **A.** Not directly, but certainly the information that is in
17 this document seems to contain information that we have
18 discussed and presumably was made available to the
19 Treasury if they hadn't seen it already in the course of
20 all the discussions.

21 **Q.** Thank you.

22 Finally, Dr Graham, whilst you were, of course, not
23 responsible for the decision to withdraw the Department
24 from the project, ultimately leading to the cancellation
25 of the Benefit Payment Card, you were the leading
166

1 by a bank -- through a bank or payment through the
2 Post Office was actually very high for the taxpayer, the
3 difference.

4 So that was our long term and agreed government
5 policy, so the reason for cancelling the Benefit Payment
6 Card was because it basically was not delivering what it
7 had set out or had been designed to do and nor was it
8 doing it on time and, as we've discussed today, it
9 seemed in doubt whether it would deliver at all.

10 So I hope that sums up why we withdrew.

11 **MS HODGE:** Thank you very much, Dr Graham, for answering my
12 questions. I think there are a small number of
13 questions from representatives of the core participants.

14 **Questioned by MR STEIN**

15 **MR STEIN:** Good afternoon, Dr Graham. I represent a large
16 number of subpostmasters, mistresses and managers.

17 Can I just direct the questions that I've got, very
18 few, to a particular topic.

19 First of all, what did you know during the course of
20 your work in preparing documents for ministers about the
21 prosecution of postmasters and mistresses that had been
22 carried out prior to the introduction of the Horizon
23 system? Did you know the Post Office prosecuted?

24 **A.** If I did, I can't recollect anything now. But it's
25 quite possible I was not aware.
168

1 **Q.** Were you given any information that you can see in any
 2 of the documents that you have been provided with that
 3 set out the fact that the Post Office was going to use
 4 the Horizon system as the basis for investigations and
 5 prosecutions?
 6 **A.** No, I was not aware of that.
 7 **Q.** To your knowledge and recollection, you've mentioned the
 8 discussed live trials, was there any consideration of
 9 live trials in relation to the investigation and
 10 prosecution system?
 11 **A.** Not to my knowledge.
 12 **MR STEIN:** Thank you, Dr Graham.
 13 **A.** Thank you.
 14 **MS HODGE:** Sir, I think that concludes the questions that
 15 both the Inquiry and legal representatives would like to
 16 put to Dr Graham. Unless you have any further
 17 questions, she may be released.
 18 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** No, thank you very much, I have no
 19 questions.
 20 I would just like to convey my thanks to you,
 21 Dr Graham, for submitting your witness statement, taking
 22 the time and trouble to review all the documents which
 23 were sent to you, and coming to give evidence this
 24 afternoon.
 25 So thank you very much.

169

1 **A.** Well, thank you very much and, if I might say, I would
 2 like to be as helpful as I could be to such an important
 3 Inquiry.
 4 **MS HODGE:** Thank you.
 5 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Well, I think you and I can safely
 6 conclude that the importance of the Inquiry has been
 7 impressed upon me on many occasions, Dr Graham. Thank
 8 you very much.
 9 **A.** Thank you.
 10 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** So, 10.00 tomorrow morning, Ms Hodge,
 11 yes?
 12 **MS HODGE:** Yes, sir, thank you.
 13 **SIR WYN WILLIAMS:** Thank you very much. Bye bye, everyone.
 14 (4.05 pm)
 15 (The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am
 16 on Friday, 25 November 2022)
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 22
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 24
 25

170

1	INDEX	PAGE
2		
3	STEPHEN BYERS (affirmed)	1
4		
5	Questioned by MR BEER	1
6		
7	Questioned by MR STEIN	95
8		
9	Questioned by MS PAGE	101
10		
11	DR SARAH GRAHAM (sworn)	108
12		
13	Questioned by MS HODGE	108
14		
15	Questioned by MR STEIN	168
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

171

<p>MR BEER: [17] 1/3 1/5 1/9 35/22 52/11 55/22 56/2 56/5 56/22 87/4 87/12 87/15 95/11 107/21 108/5 108/9 108/13</p> <p>MR STEIN: [5] 95/13 95/18 101/8 168/15 169/12</p> <p>MS HODGE: [12] 108/19 108/21 108/24 150/13 150/21 150/25 151/4 151/7 168/11 169/14 170/4 170/12</p> <p>MS PAGE: [2] 101/10 107/20</p> <p>SIR WYN WILLIAMS: [34] 1/4 1/6 35/7 35/21 52/14 53/2 53/9 53/17 53/19 54/5 54/9 54/16 54/23 55/2 55/18 55/23 56/4 56/18 86/25 87/8 87/14 95/16 107/24 108/6 108/11 108/15 108/20 150/19 150/23 151/5 169/18 170/5 170/10 170/13</p>	<p>101 [1] 84/8 10th [1] 46/3 11 [2] 24/9 124/22 11 months [1] 141/20 11 October [1] 109/3 11.15 [1] 52/12 11.20 am [1] 55/24 11.30 [1] 52/13 11.35 [1] 55/21 11.35 am [1] 56/1 118 [1] 65/25 12 [5] 16/14 16/17 18/24 26/17 159/14 120 million [1] 140/10 13 [2] 76/18 122/6 13 November [1] 138/13 139 [1] 165/24 14 September [1] 46/2 14.1 [1] 95/24 146 [1] 165/25 15 April 1999 [1] 158/23 15 million [1] 75/18 15 minutes [2] 150/16 150/23 15 months [1] 2/11 15 September [1] 50/16</p>	<p>118/24 157/5 165/14 1998 [36] 2/12 2/15 3/1 3/2 3/3 6/3 15/22 15/24 27/23 28/6 37/3 38/16 57/6 57/9 62/17 63/14 117/8 119/14 121/7 124/4 125/8 125/14 136/17 137/17 141/19 142/10 145/25 146/10 151/8 151/17 153/21 157/9 160/11 165/16 165/24 166/6 1999 [15] 78/13 79/7 79/15 79/25 80/8 87/22 93/5 157/10 158/16 158/23 159/8 162/16 164/4 165/25 167/5</p>	<p>27 July 1998 [1] 2/12 27th [1] 16/1 28 July [1] 19/25</p> <hr/> <p>3</p> <p>3 years [1] 131/11 3.18 pm [1] 151/1 3.35 pm [1] 151/3 30,000 [1] 166/2 32nd [1] 1/20 33 [2] 27/1 76/16 34 [1] 84/9 35 [1] 27/19 35 pages [1] 1/18</p> <hr/> <p>4</p> <p>4 December 1998 [1] 151/17 4.05 pm [1] 170/14 4.15 [1] 108/14 4.19 [1] 83/1 42 [1] 13/2 434 [1] 92/5 46 [1] 165/24 47 [1] 92/6 480 million [7] 81/25 82/4 82/10 83/9 83/10 83/24 140/7</p> <hr/> <p>5</p> <p>500 million [1] 153/4 577 [1] 92/8</p> <hr/> <p>6</p> <p>6 February 1998 [1] 119/14 6 months [1] 90/18 6 per cent [1] 90/20 60,000 [1] 161/13 600 [1] 65/8 600 million [3] 140/5 152/25 153/6 63 [1] 84/8</p> <hr/> <p>7</p> <p>702 [1] 147/15 76 [1] 62/20</p> <hr/> <p>8</p> <p>8 June 2001 [2] 2/20 14/1 8 million [2] 70/19 71/4 80 per cent [1] 167/22 8th [2] 146/16 146/20</p> <hr/> <p>9</p> <p>9 December [3] 62/24 70/14 75/3 9 February [2] 89/13 92/4 90-odd million [1] 65/18</p>	<p>A</p> <p>ability [9] 46/19 60/1 105/13 123/16 124/24 134/10 134/15 135/7 135/8 able [18] 14/10 21/8 21/14 34/6 59/10 67/25 103/19 105/5 122/22 123/1 133/13 135/8 143/23 145/10 157/16 166/14 167/15 167/17 about [99] 2/2 10/2 10/11 12/24 13/10 18/24 19/7 19/16 23/13 26/21 27/8 27/10 28/8 28/13 28/23 28/25 29/9 30/15 31/19 31/22 32/1 32/23 33/14 35/18 35/23 41/16 46/11 52/16 52/20 53/3 53/11 55/3 56/7 56/12 58/18 61/9 61/9 63/22 66/22 71/9 71/15 75/17 83/8 84/17 84/25 86/8 86/12 90/1 91/7 93/21 94/3 96/1 96/10 96/11 98/10 99/7 99/25 100/21 101/13 102/15 105/13 108/2 110/3 111/14 111/24 114/18 115/6 116/2 118/19 119/10 120/22 121/10 122/25 124/19 124/24 126/7 128/20 128/25 129/16 130/12 133/2 133/3 135/19 137/16 141/11 143/9 144/1 145/24 149/20 156/12 156/25 157/7 160/18 162/18 163/1 163/11 163/23 164/9 168/20 above [2] 155/11 160/11 absence [1] 80/5 absolutely [1] 76/9 academia [1] 110/25 accept [8] 24/7 26/13 40/16 48/22 51/10 65/23 104/1 122/15 acceptable [5] 44/16 45/7 136/9 139/17 142/23 acceptance [19] 31/4 67/16 67/18 67/19 67/21 67/24 69/11 69/13 71/14 75/9 129/22 139/24 143/3 143/4 143/6 143/15 143/16 144/14 148/19 accepted [7] 31/8</p>
<p>'acceptance [1] 75/8 'as [1] 139/2 'Better [1] 70/23 'bunch [2] 92/11 92/15 'deal' [1] 139/16 'deeply [1] 146/22 'good [1] 147/15 'he' [1] 106/6 'laboratory [1] 31/5 'project' [1] 13/7 'speedy [1] 64/10 'target' [1] 160/3 'the [1] 140/12 'This' [1] 155/19</p> <hr/> <p>0</p> <p>025 [1] 164/5 033 [1] 119/15 0s [2] 45/25 68/11</p> <hr/> <p>1</p> <p>1 billion [2] 86/9 109/15 1 May 1997 [1] 2/6 1.00 pm [1] 108/16 10 [4] 20/14 90/16 138/5 150/16 10 September [2] 37/3 48/19 10.00 [1] 170/10 10.00 am [2] 1/2 170/15</p>	<p>16 [1] 13/4 16 million [1] 166/1 16 October [2] 57/8 58/6 17 [2] 109/8 130/23 17 September [1] 57/8 18 [1] 133/18 18 December [1] 68/14 18 October 1998 [1] 57/6 18 years [1] 155/2 185 million [1] 152/24 18th [1] 81/8 19 [1] 30/25 19 April [1] 158/22 19 March 2001 [1] 105/17 19 pages [1] 109/6 19,000 [2] 72/19 166/5 1976 [1] 110/6 1980s [2] 112/15 113/25 1987 [1] 11/20 1996 [3] 54/13 95/3 148/9 1997 [11] 2/6 4/1 111/4 114/15 114/18 115/14 117/25 118/8</p>	<p>2</p> <p>2 billion [1] 82/6 2 months [1] 165/17 2.00 [2] 108/14 108/15 2.00 pm [1] 108/18 200 [3] 72/24 73/2 160/20 200 million [2] 153/1 166/10 200 pilot [1] 73/10 2000 [6] 13/25 88/25 92/5 106/1 106/2 153/5 2001 [12] 2/20 3/3 6/3 13/19 13/22 13/23 13/25 14/1 88/13 89/11 92/24 105/17 2002-2003 [1] 82/7 2003 [4] 81/16 82/7 83/16 90/9 2007 [1] 47/14 2022 [2] 1/1 170/16 204 [1] 166/7 20th [2] 63/1 63/7 22 [4] 41/7 41/15 84/8 158/10 22 April [1] 164/4 22 July 1998 [1] 15/24 22 years [2] 9/19 98/13 23 December 1998 [1] 2/15 23 May [2] 80/8 80/19 24 [1] 24/11 24 November 2022 [1] 1/1 25 [2] 24/20 129/17 25 May [1] 80/22 25 November 2022 [1] 170/16 25 years [1] 140/20 26 [1] 25/18</p>	<p>27 July 1998 [1] 2/12 27th [1] 16/1 28 July [1] 19/25</p> <hr/> <p>3</p> <p>3 years [1] 131/11 3.18 pm [1] 151/1 3.35 pm [1] 151/3 30,000 [1] 166/2 32nd [1] 1/20 33 [2] 27/1 76/16 34 [1] 84/9 35 [1] 27/19 35 pages [1] 1/18</p> <hr/> <p>4</p> <p>4 December 1998 [1] 151/17 4.05 pm [1] 170/14 4.15 [1] 108/14 4.19 [1] 83/1 42 [1] 13/2 434 [1] 92/5 46 [1] 165/24 47 [1] 92/6 480 million [7] 81/25 82/4 82/10 83/9 83/10 83/24 140/7</p> <hr/> <p>5</p> <p>500 million [1] 153/4 577 [1] 92/8</p> <hr/> <p>6</p> <p>6 February 1998 [1] 119/14 6 months [1] 90/18 6 per cent [1] 90/20 60,000 [1] 161/13 600 [1] 65/8 600 million [3] 140/5 152/25 153/6 63 [1] 84/8</p> <hr/> <p>7</p> <p>702 [1] 147/15 76 [1] 62/20</p> <hr/> <p>8</p> <p>8 June 2001 [2] 2/20 14/1 8 million [2] 70/19 71/4 80 per cent [1] 167/22 8th [2] 146/16 146/20</p> <hr/> <p>9</p> <p>9 December [3] 62/24 70/14 75/3 9 February [2] 89/13 92/4 90-odd million [1] 65/18</p>	<p>ability [9] 46/19 60/1 105/13 123/16 124/24 134/10 134/15 135/7 135/8 able [18] 14/10 21/8 21/14 34/6 59/10 67/25 103/19 105/5 122/22 123/1 133/13 135/8 143/23 145/10 157/16 166/14 167/15 167/17 about [99] 2/2 10/2 10/11 12/24 13/10 18/24 19/7 19/16 23/13 26/21 27/8 27/10 28/8 28/13 28/23 28/25 29/9 30/15 31/19 31/22 32/1 32/23 33/14 35/18 35/23 41/16 46/11 52/16 52/20 53/3 53/11 55/3 56/7 56/12 58/18 61/9 61/9 63/22 66/22 71/9 71/15 75/17 83/8 84/17 84/25 86/8 86/12 90/1 91/7 93/21 94/3 96/1 96/10 96/11 98/10 99/7 99/25 100/21 101/13 102/15 105/13 108/2 110/3 111/14 111/24 114/18 115/6 116/2 118/19 119/10 120/22 121/10 122/25 124/19 124/24 126/7 128/20 128/25 129/16 130/12 133/2 133/3 135/19 137/16 141/11 143/9 144/1 145/24 149/20 156/12 156/25 157/7 160/18 162/18 163/1 163/11 163/23 164/9 168/20 above [2] 155/11 160/11 absence [1] 80/5 absolutely [1] 76/9 academia [1] 110/25 accept [8] 24/7 26/13 40/16 48/22 51/10 65/23 104/1 122/15 acceptable [5] 44/16 45/7 136/9 139/17 142/23 acceptance [19] 31/4 67/16 67/18 67/19 67/21 67/24 69/11 69/13 71/14 75/9 129/22 139/24 143/3 143/4 143/6 143/15 143/16 144/14 148/19 accepted [7] 31/8</p>

A	157/25 158/2 167/21 168/2 ad [1] 11/3 ad hoc [1] 11/3 add [3] 61/23 64/1 126/22 added [2] 102/9 103/2 addition [2] 73/18 137/9 additional [4] 47/18 147/19 150/15 160/19 address [11] 19/3 19/18 27/16 27/17 29/5 30/19 64/25 77/20 90/5 118/16 125/12 addressed [11] 26/8 30/11 37/6 54/4 120/4 133/18 137/25 138/17 138/18 147/8 159/9 addresses [1] 22/15 addressing [1] 27/20 adjourn [2] 87/1 108/6 adjourned [1] 170/15 adjournment [2] 94/7 108/17 adjustment [1] 39/9 adjustments [1] 51/13 administration [13] 3/17 31/25 32/5 32/7 32/13 32/15 33/10 33/18 33/22 34/17 53/21 61/1 78/21 administrations [1] 55/10 admit [1] 30/8 admittedly [1] 128/20 adopted [2] 100/19 162/15 Adrian [10] 3/19 20/23 20/24 28/12 29/5 34/21 34/23 36/9 41/8 127/6 Adrian Montague [3] 20/23 20/24 41/8 Adrian Montague's [1] 36/9 Adrian's [1] 30/18 advance [2] 23/17 139/24 advertising [2] 74/4 74/8 advice [6] 18/4 95/6 96/16 128/18 130/11 130/18 advised [2] 24/22 27/6 adviser [7] 39/2 43/4 44/23 45/10 45/14 51/6 52/6 advising [1] 138/11	advocacy [1] 84/1 advocate [2] 106/23 107/11 affairs [1] 112/16 affect [1] 160/22 affected [2] 100/17 128/24 affecting [2] 75/18 158/13 affirmed [2] 1/7 171/3 afraid [7] 5/8 11/23 14/13 15/12 31/13 54/21 119/24 after [9] 34/17 37/1 39/11 48/7 48/10 53/13 65/21 65/22 93/4 afternoon [7] 108/8 108/19 108/24 145/1 150/18 168/15 169/24 again [25] 6/3 20/20 21/13 28/4 49/23 56/2 58/3 62/20 62/23 68/12 68/17 70/7 87/19 91/19 91/21 99/18 103/23 122/5 122/7 122/12 133/9 133/19 143/1 143/1 150/4 against [8] 28/23 40/9 47/9 82/23 111/12 118/10 145/8 153/5 age [3] 16/11 91/1 91/8 agencies [1] 157/24 agency [62] 4/13 4/16 4/25 5/2 21/6 24/25 33/7 39/12 50/24 81/11 81/12 93/9 102/20 103/6 103/11 103/12 111/13 111/21 111/25 112/1 112/2 112/18 113/8 114/11 114/14 114/18 115/1 115/17 115/23 117/12 118/18 118/22 122/20 124/8 124/10 124/23 125/2 125/4 128/19 133/23 135/13 135/19 137/5 137/10 138/7 138/11 143/9 145/3 149/15 149/24 150/8 153/12 153/14 154/1 154/6 157/6 157/18 161/9 162/3 162/16 163/4 163/11 agency's [4] 128/23 153/20 159/10 162/10 agenda [1] 74/23 ago [4] 35/5 35/25 98/14 140/20 agree [18] 23/7 24/2	26/9 30/20 43/18 46/10 47/24 48/25 51/2 75/7 81/25 85/7 85/14 96/21 97/4 104/4 134/24 165/3 agreeable [1] 121/19 agreed [16] 31/2 34/7 36/21 38/22 38/25 67/18 69/16 70/17 81/13 118/23 120/25 121/12 122/14 138/22 162/3 168/4 agreeing [1] 39/25 agreement [15] 40/8 47/12 50/2 63/3 67/24 69/12 69/13 70/7 70/9 70/10 79/6 81/20 82/3 122/17 147/15 agreements [1] 140/13 agrees [1] 49/19 Ah [2] 41/9 126/2 ahead [4] 20/16 56/19 96/23 104/16 aide [1] 140/16 aide memoire [1] 140/16 aides [1] 142/18 aides memoire [1] 142/18 aim [1] 120/25 Alan [2] 8/15 10/16 Alan Johnson [1] 8/15 alarm [2] 87/9 87/10 albeit [1] 131/10 Alec [1] 21/12 Alec Wylie [1] 21/12 alert [4] 12/19 86/18 88/4 120/6 alerted [10] 15/7 32/14 54/2 55/15 78/23 79/3 88/14 93/14 93/17 94/6 aligned [3] 4/14 4/19 33/8 Alistair [19] 9/25 10/3 37/6 42/19 43/18 46/1 47/23 47/25 71/13 71/18 71/20 72/6 74/25 76/9 84/25 85/3 100/25 125/10 158/21 Alistair Darling [12] 9/25 37/6 42/19 46/1 47/23 47/25 71/13 74/25 84/25 100/25 125/10 158/21 all [73] 4/14 23/16 25/20 28/25 29/13 31/2 32/3 33/22 33/24 35/14 36/19 39/4 41/12 47/9 48/9 54/23 55/18 57/19 69/7 69/9	69/12 72/23 73/1 73/9 74/10 76/6 79/1 85/2 89/6 93/12 93/19 94/9 95/19 101/7 101/17 103/9 107/21 107/25 108/11 108/12 112/19 116/11 118/9 120/23 121/13 121/19 121/24 128/7 129/14 130/2 133/5 133/8 134/24 136/14 141/15 142/5 144/4 146/20 150/23 157/1 157/18 158/11 160/2 160/25 161/6 162/18 162/25 164/21 165/11 166/20 168/9 168/19 169/22 all right [7] 23/16 41/12 54/23 55/18 108/11 108/12 150/23 allegation [2] 50/17 150/1 allow [7] 29/16 38/20 46/13 70/8 96/24 128/10 148/23 allowed [2] 32/10 83/8 allowing [3] 73/18 118/8 140/10 allows [1] 83/13 allude [1] 143/7 alluded [2] 105/18 149/18 almost [9] 6/24 6/24 8/21 9/9 75/13 94/10 99/25 100/6 104/20 along [3] 8/24 53/24 162/18 alongside [1] 157/1 already [12] 50/19 51/15 99/15 101/16 105/18 115/9 139/21 105/19 156/9 166/9 166/19 167/23 also [37] 3/11 5/16 7/3 26/13 42/2 59/23 64/1 64/20 64/22 65/23 76/24 88/10 93/9 101/10 109/16 109/17 111/16 113/3 113/9 113/18 114/2 115/21 121/20 126/14 131/24 132/24 133/1 133/3 137/5 138/7 144/7 146/6 146/7 149/11 149/17 156/8 158/4 alternative [4] 45/9 131/18 139/4 148/23 although [7] 52/11 70/12 95/2 120/20 131/8 141/13 163/22 altogether [4] 11/14 99/1 132/22 153/16
----------	---	--	--	---

A	54/17 56/15 61/17 70/12 75/17 76/19 86/18 88/4 90/21 91/12 96/13 99/15 99/16 101/5 104/12 104/15 104/22 107/21 112/13 114/7 116/25 123/15 124/18 139/25 139/25 149/18 149/19 149/25 155/8 155/24 158/24 162/20 166/14 169/1 169/1 169/8 169/16	approached [1] 23/8 appropriate [4] 42/12 44/9 52/12 56/14 appropriately [1] 25/6 approval [2] 14/7 71/21 approve [1] 162/7 approved [2] 80/4 80/5 approximately [1] 160/1 April [8] 90/9 92/5 148/9 158/16 158/22 158/23 162/16 164/4 April 1996 [1] 148/9 April 1999 [1] 158/16 April 2003 [1] 90/9 arbiter [1] 35/7 architectural [2] 24/21 129/19 architecture [4] 24/13 24/19 25/7 25/23 Archives [1] 164/2 are [87] 1/23 1/25 2/25 2/25 6/6 6/7 10/12 14/10 14/11 17/5 22/2 22/7 22/19 22/20 24/21 24/22 24/25 25/21 29/20 32/20 33/21 35/11 39/5 39/18 40/10 40/14 43/2 43/23 44/6 46/21 46/24 49/2 51/1 51/18 51/22 53/25 55/4 56/5 66/2 70/24 72/20 72/22 75/17 75/19 75/21 77/20 80/18 82/10 86/12 87/12 90/5 90/23 94/2 96/19 97/8 98/8 100/16 101/3 101/13 104/6 104/18 105/5 107/20 114/21 116/14 116/17 116/19 121/15 126/7 128/4 128/5 128/15 138/1 143/18 146/21 147/11 150/4 150/19 150/21 156/17 156/19 163/14 164/22 166/3 166/14 167/24 168/12 area [5] 6/25 7/23 7/25 110/9 141/2 areas [3] 22/5 100/5 131/13 arguing [1] 161/6 arguments [1] 141/11 arise [2] 100/1 102/17 arising [1] 35/22 arm's [1] 112/1	arose [3] 86/18 88/5 88/15 around [18] 22/17 30/11 34/13 36/1 75/18 103/5 104/23 116/17 118/2 118/4 127/2 127/14 128/2 129/8 131/24 139/1 139/3 141/21 arrangement [1] 60/22 arrangements [7] 11/21 22/7 49/4 66/7 81/17 104/8 138/12 arrive [2] 33/1 63/3 articulate [1] 123/2 articulated [2] 119/13 125/2 as [272] ask [20] 1/11 11/15 40/16 52/16 52/19 61/9 66/22 67/23 73/5 87/19 98/4 98/4 100/12 102/15 105/16 107/22 109/8 109/25 145/24 155/23 asked [9] 21/20 26/19 27/8 72/2 96/1 100/20 117/6 126/19 139/20 asking [5] 26/16 54/19 75/8 98/9 110/2 asks [1] 52/5 aspect [5] 55/19 142/21 144/9 144/17 156/11 aspects [9] 50/25 53/11 108/2 126/12 143/14 156/19 157/1 157/2 158/12 assertions [1] 145/15 assertive [1] 42/13 assess [3] 21/20 25/24 130/5 assessing [2] 134/9 134/15 assessment [3] 26/11 35/3 132/3 assessments [1] 22/6 assigned [2] 125/24 127/5 assist [4] 1/14 53/12 68/1 74/21 assistance [1] 77/11 associated [1] 22/5 assume [2] 108/11 119/18 assumed [1] 52/24 assumes [1] 131/8 Assuming [2] 35/8 35/8 assumption [1]	131/20 assurance [1] 47/17 assured [2] 23/5 27/23 assuring [1] 161/11 at [257] attach [4] 70/25 97/1 146/17 147/11 attached [4] 39/5 72/13 80/15 139/5 attempt [3] 61/3 71/19 148/5 attempted [2] 109/17 109/19 attempting [1] 63/9 attempts [3] 50/19 57/25 143/2 attending [1] 139/12 attention [16] 25/9 25/16 36/10 60/12 76/12 78/7 79/17 91/14 91/18 124/14 141/3 146/5 149/14 153/11 154/8 165/7 attitude [2] 13/6 114/13 attract [1] 82/9 attractive [1] 84/2 auspices [1] 136/21 author [1] 120/20 authored [2] 122/3 166/13 Authorities [2] 147/15 147/20 authority [1] 98/7 authors [3] 16/15 16/20 19/3 automate [1] 120/8 automated [1] 167/9 automatic [1] 115/9 automation [4] 73/17 81/5 82/8 83/24 autumn [1] 136/16 available [5] 15/24 85/11 97/17 166/7 166/18 average [1] 92/7 avoid [4] 39/14 87/17 120/23 121/23 avoiding [1] 121/1 aware [22] 14/2 14/6 14/17 24/25 50/18 53/18 79/23 79/24 80/17 86/5 96/2 99/15 102/19 124/23 152/1 156/10 156/21 162/17 162/24 163/10 168/25 169/6 away [4] 78/17 84/23 136/2 144/6 awful [1] 94/22
		B		
		BA [17] 21/23 58/1		

B	167/21	118/1 118/6 118/11	belief [4] 1/24 109/12	137/5 137/10 138/7
BA... [15] 59/23 60/2	bears [8] 117/1	122/24 128/10 133/7	109/22 136/1	138/11 143/9 145/3
60/8 60/14 60/18	119/15 137/22 141/4	139/9 141/13 145/10	believe [23] 24/12	149/15 149/24 150/8
60/19 69/15 69/19	145/25 152/15 158/17	145/14 146/3 147/13	25/5 42/10 50/22	153/12 154/1 154/6
70/3 70/13 102/13	164/5	148/10 148/18 149/8	68/24 81/3 82/15	157/6 157/18 161/9
146/4 148/4 161/25	became [5] 2/12 20/9	149/21 151/13 152/11	82/17 97/13 98/1	162/3 163/4
162/7	21/10 78/2 114/15	153/10 159/25 160/10	107/21 109/6 114/6	benign [1] 155/13
BA/POCL [1] 146/4	because [64] 3/15	160/15 161/2 161/22	118/1 132/18 139/7	Bernadette [1] 91/20
back [43] 5/25 9/19	5/18 9/19 15/13 16/9	162/7 162/10 162/18	149/6 150/5 150/21	Bernadette Kelly [1]
16/13 17/14 19/11	18/12 19/6 19/16	163/24 164/2 164/4	151/13 152/11 164/4	91/20
21/2 21/18 22/13 28/2	22/18 30/10 30/22	165/6 165/11 165/18	167/22	beset [2] 125/13
28/5 28/22 29/7 29/8	36/3 41/16 42/18	165/21 165/25 166/6	believed [5] 84/12	136/18
30/24 31/18 36/13	43/21 43/24 50/1 54/3	166/12 167/6 167/8	99/22 153/14 154/3	best [15] 1/24 46/15
37/23 40/17 43/1 48/8	54/23 55/2 56/19	168/7 168/21 169/2	159/20	55/2 61/14 65/3 68/23
49/5 50/15 59/18	59/25 63/15 64/4 68/8	170/6	bell [1] 37/17	81/19 85/11 109/11
62/23 63/22 64/19	69/20 71/13 71/23	BEER [17] 1/8 1/11	bells [1] 124/18	109/21 116/2 120/22
67/9 69/22 70/3 71/14	72/5 74/19 78/21 79/5	52/14 53/22 56/19	benefit [50] 4/16	122/11 122/25 136/14
80/6 89/4 97/14 97/20	83/15 84/12 85/5 85/8	59/18 71/3 74/5 78/6	32/25 39/13 59/14	better [7] 15/11
104/9 113/13 120/1	85/10 85/14 86/1	86/25 87/11 95/23	77/13 78/16 80/14	30/18 46/9 62/20
129/6 157/2 157/5	87/17 90/15 90/23	96/4 96/10 107/24	81/18 84/20 95/9	136/6 149/8 167/17
162/25 163/2 165/1	92/20 94/10 94/15	108/6 171/5	109/15 111/7 111/19	between [35] 4/6 4/9
backdrop [3] 47/9	95/2 98/8 102/17	before [20] 15/25	113/6 115/6 115/7	6/21 8/16 10/20 12/8
118/11 145/8	102/19 104/18 107/13	17/18 21/10 34/13	119/11 120/8 123/17	38/2 38/21 44/5 44/24
background [9] 2/3	108/9 114/21 115/22	38/18 40/5 46/25	123/19 124/2 124/25	49/16 58/1 58/4 58/20
15/19 18/13 20/20	118/5 119/2 122/1	53/12 56/24 67/25	126/4 126/23 128/23	63/16 63/19 65/18
28/24 82/23 99/17	128/3 152/18 157/5	71/3 90/9 99/21 108/6	129/3 129/21 132/10	66/12 66/12 69/21
110/3 161/4	160/11 161/12 161/21	112/12 118/7 139/24	132/23 135/4 135/6	94/13 102/5 102/20
bad [4] 31/7 75/24	168/6	147/2 147/18 153/23	136/2 139/12 140/12	105/23 111/20 111/24
87/9 163/5	become [6] 53/12	beforehand [1] 75/22	141/12 148/3 149/2	117/8 122/10 130/1
badged [1] 16/10	53/13 74/14 94/10	begin [1] 110/2	155/7 160/23 161/13	135/16 143/21 155/14
badly [2] 71/18	133/1 136/3	beginning [3] 93/20	161/13 162/13 166/2	157/9 161/25 162/20
100/17	becomes [3] 55/18	144/3 163/3	166/3 166/4 166/25	between/negotiation
Bain [2] 80/9 84/11	116/12 116/13	begins [2] 53/5 106/4	167/7 167/14 167/22	[1] 66/12
balance [1] 14/21	been [142] 3/25 9/11	behalf [7] 1/11 88/16	168/5	beyond [2] 47/14
balancing [1] 91/16	9/12 14/12 14/16	95/14 109/25 112/14	benefits [63] 4/13	49/9
bank [6] 153/3	14/17 15/7 17/9 18/18	134/21 167/2	4/16 4/25 10/1 33/7	biased [1] 82/19
167/10 167/19 167/23	19/14 24/18 25/5 25/8	behind [2] 34/2 64/2	39/12 50/23 50/23	big [3] 60/13 85/20
168/1 168/1	25/12 25/20 27/6	being [60] 7/10 13/7	75/20 81/10 81/12	85/22
banking [4] 81/7	28/21 29/16 30/3	13/11 16/10 17/17	90/8 93/8 102/20	biggest [2] 8/4
102/11 128/12 153/17	30/10 30/22 31/8	22/20 25/9 26/4 26/8	103/6 103/11 103/12	127/20
banks [1] 115/10	31/18 32/2 32/12	27/8 31/14 34/21	111/13 111/21 111/25	bilateral [1] 155/10
barcode [1] 72/20	32/13 33/16 33/19	40/10 42/12 42/13	112/4 112/18 112/19	Bill [1] 21/5
base [1] 143/4	33/20 34/1 34/19 38/9	53/5 66/17 72/2 74/9	113/8 113/11 115/1	Bill Robins [1] 21/5
based [11] 18/4 25/4	38/13 40/3 40/5 49/6	75/12 79/16 80/20	115/16 115/23 117/12	billion [3] 82/6 86/9
29/18 46/19 72/16	52/21 53/25 55/13	83/8 88/9 92/20 94/6	118/22 119/6 122/20	109/15
72/22 100/11 113/4	55/16 56/11 56/24	96/3 96/5 96/5 96/18	123/10 123/25 125/4	bind [1] 45/10
113/14 115/4 128/13	59/10 61/18 62/14	97/6 97/9 97/11 99/7	128/19 128/22 128/24	binding [1] 70/9
basic [5] 29/14 39/7	63/12 64/12 66/10	100/16 102/9 103/2	129/3 132/23 133/23	Bird [4] 138/8 138/8
52/19 128/8 131/9	67/17 68/19 69/15	104/12 104/15 105/9	135/13 137/5 137/10	146/4 146/4
basically [7] 20/3	69/16 70/1 72/24 73/2	112/12 121/14 122/20	138/7 138/11 143/9	bit [11] 8/9 8/20
33/6 100/12 112/18	73/7 75/1 76/5 79/10	128/5 132/9 132/17	145/3 149/9 149/15	43/15 52/25 59/22
145/9 145/16 168/6	79/19 79/21 80/4	134/11 139/20 143/15	149/24 150/8 153/12	62/19 80/8 91/10
basis [23] 9/2 9/10	80/11 83/1 86/10	143/16 152/23 155/4	154/1 154/6 157/6	113/15 118/5 135/2
14/3 14/25 31/4 44/15	87/23 90/18 93/23	155/19 157/16 158/2	157/18 161/9 162/3	bits [2] 9/22 83/19
45/7 46/10 49/4 64/6	97/5 97/18 98/16	158/11 158/14 162/21	163/4 167/9 167/18	bitter [1] 129/24
75/9 81/1 82/16 91/17	98/16 98/22 98/23	166/3 167/15	167/18	blame [3] 145/6
92/25 97/12 104/8	98/24 99/2 99/3 99/8	BEIS000283 [1]	Benefits Agency [39]	150/8 153/25
131/6 136/19 140/4	99/10 99/16 100/13	50/8	4/13 4/16 4/25 33/7	blank [1] 24/6
158/1 158/1 169/4	100/17 100/18 100/20	BEIS000336 [1]	39/12 81/12 102/20	blindsided [1] 32/8
Bates [1] 4/1	101/4 102/18 106/11	151/19	103/6 111/13 111/21	blunt [1] 4/14
be [290]	106/14 106/18 107/18	BEIS000337 [1]	111/25 112/18 113/8	board [39] 7/16
bear [1] 87/3	111/11 112/15 112/22	152/15	115/1 115/23 117/12	10/17 11/8 11/10
bearing [2] 78/8	114/10 116/8 117/6	BEIS000417 [1]	118/22 122/20 125/4	11/12 11/16 12/9 12/9
	117/20 117/21 117/23	74/24	128/19 133/23 135/13	12/12 12/18 14/7

B	brought [8] 59/2 79/16 86/14 121/16 124/13 137/3 149/14 165/6 Brown [1] 43/12 budget [4] 47/19 111/16 115/21 117/14 budgets [1] 112/9 build [1] 78/18 built [2] 23/11 30/22 bullet [13] 18/12 18/22 18/23 22/14 23/12 23/14 28/1 29/9 29/10 36/15 47/7 65/22 141/4 bullying [1] 42/12 bundle [1] 72/8 busiest [1] 97/5 business [11] 4/24 29/17 82/9 82/15 82/16 107/6 110/12 128/11 132/25 141/14 144/21 busy [3] 96/20 97/3 97/4 but [121] 6/19 8/6 11/1 11/14 12/20 13/7 14/6 16/5 17/3 17/10 18/1 22/19 26/13 32/11 33/4 33/15 34/19 37/14 37/18 39/21 40/4 41/17 42/13 43/13 44/10 47/24 48/2 48/17 52/8 52/15 53/3 53/4 53/6 54/5 55/11 56/12 56/20 57/16 63/21 66/20 67/2 69/15 72/4 74/13 75/15 76/2 78/21 80/4 80/5 80/7 85/6 86/25 87/2 89/9 89/23 91/4 91/21 93/9 94/2 94/25 95/6 96/5 100/10 101/16 101/22 103/15 104/20 106/19 112/5 112/24 113/3 113/5 114/2 116/12 117/9 117/22 118/5 119/24 121/11 121/21 122/8 122/13 122/17 122/25 124/19 126/13 126/19 126/24 127/12 127/24 128/4 131/23 133/12 135/13 136/13 137/4 137/15 139/21 142/13 142/25 142/25 143/20 144/4 144/12 144/21 149/17 151/25 151/25 152/15 156/4 156/24 157/2 157/21 158/22 159/1 160/11 160/25 162/25 166/6 166/16 168/24 bye [2] 170/13	170/13 Byers [18] 1/5 1/7 1/9 1/16 6/15 13/5 35/7 52/16 52/18 56/14 56/20 56/25 93/19 95/11 95/18 101/10 107/25 171/3 Byers' [1] 56/12	C cabinet [11] 6/22 37/9 37/20 43/22 56/6 56/9 85/6 138/4 157/12 157/19 164/3 Cabinet Office [3] 157/12 157/19 164/3 call [4] 1/5 67/12 92/19 100/8 called [7] 74/17 112/2 113/3 129/25 130/1 143/5 152/7 calls [1] 11/1 came [11] 2/5 4/8 17/16 19/10 19/25 28/20 58/6 111/3 114/3 131/16 151/9 camera [1] 87/5 can [152] 1/3 1/4 1/5 1/12 1/14 2/2 3/4 3/23 4/12 4/22 6/4 6/10 6/20 7/8 9/22 12/1 13/3 14/21 15/19 15/22 17/14 17/17 17/19 18/11 19/1 20/17 20/18 21/18 21/21 22/10 22/13 22/23 23/9 24/8 24/12 29/7 29/8 30/2 30/13 30/15 30/24 31/10 31/14 32/8 33/10 33/12 35/22 36/13 36/15 37/2 37/5 38/5 38/22 38/24 38/25 39/20 40/17 42/1 42/7 43/1 48/14 50/12 52/19 53/21 53/22 56/2 56/4 56/23 57/10 59/23 60/2 61/11 62/17 62/18 62/23 63/25 66/6 68/2 68/7 68/13 71/1 72/13 72/14 74/21 74/24 74/24 76/16 80/1 80/2 80/9 81/18 83/13 87/16 89/10 91/10 91/10 91/19 95/22 96/8 96/12 102/8 103/1 103/23 105/1 105/21 108/7 108/19 108/20 111/10 111/19 115/11 116/7 116/22 116/24 117/4 119/13 123/12 126/6 126/9 127/16 129/5 129/10	130/22 132/13 133/17 134/13 137/21 137/25 138/8 138/13 138/16 140/14 142/7 145/1 146/2 146/12 147/2 148/15 151/4 151/5 151/7 151/21 154/16 155/21 158/16 158/23 159/1 159/14 164/11 168/17 169/1 170/5 can't [20] 5/14 10/25 11/6 31/13 31/16 33/11 35/5 35/17 36/1 53/1 55/11 55/11 65/10 67/22 68/6 72/10 72/12 126/23 165/8 168/24 cancel [1] 103/16 cancellation [14] 19/14 19/19 20/5 20/12 77/24 131/7 131/17 132/11 132/12 132/15 132/16 133/7 162/13 166/24 cancelled [2] 77/1 86/11 cancelling [4] 27/3 76/21 77/21 168/5 cannot [15] 17/23 25/20 32/5 32/11 47/14 47/15 117/8 121/21 122/12 122/14 124/5 124/20 135/11 137/1 142/1 capacity [1] 72/19 captured [1] 94/10 car [1] 85/20 card [34] 32/25 39/13 46/20 72/21 73/21 78/16 80/14 84/21 109/16 115/6 115/8 119/12 123/19 124/3 124/25 126/5 126/23 128/24 129/3 129/21 132/10 135/4 135/6 136/2 141/12 147/12 149/7 162/13 166/2 166/3 166/25 167/8 167/14 168/6 carried [3] 47/14 147/18 168/22 carry [2] 81/6 125/24 case [16] 5/8 8/25 10/4 12/3 13/18 34/5 41/9 44/4 55/11 67/4 67/5 77/4 105/10 108/2 116/8 145/18 cash [2] 81/25 124/12 cause [3] 51/13 51/17 137/19 caused [4] 86/2 93/23 130/3 156/13 causes [1] 90/4	causing [3] 64/5 147/1 147/19 cautious [2] 47/24 48/2 CBO00000001 [1] 91/19 CBO00000002 [1] 89/12 CBO00100001 [1] 62/18 CBO00100002 [1] 164/5 CBO00100005 [1] 119/15 ceased [1] 115/10 cent [2] 90/20 167/22 central [3] 73/19 138/4 141/13 centre [2] 13/17 155/20 certain [2] 81/8 106/18 certainly [24] 7/24 9/4 17/1 20/2 27/17 55/14 72/5 77/22 91/13 101/22 104/24 121/18 124/19 126/20 126/25 134/25 135/7 136/13 140/2 140/22 155/3 156/21 157/15 166/16 cetera [1] 92/2 chair [4] 7/16 35/13 44/24 54/22 chaired [2] 20/22 127/6 chairing [1] 93/7 chairman [14] 10/18 10/21 11/1 11/7 11/9 11/17 12/9 65/2 150/5 150/5 151/16 151/17 152/6 152/6 chairmanship [2] 58/11 78/25 challenge [2] 94/18 95/7 challenges [2] 8/6 105/11 challenging [2] 23/3 91/10 chance [1] 95/3 Chancellor [2] 37/9 53/1 change [10] 7/21 52/22 52/23 55/7 58/4 81/17 81/19 91/9 100/6 110/12 changed [1] 13/9 changes [1] 140/2 chaotic [1] 52/25 chapter [1] 147/25 chapter 2 [1] 147/25 character [1] 42/2 characterisation [3]
----------	--	---	--	--	---

C	116/17 120/21 120/22 122/24 126/3 126/20 139/13 143/10 150/7 154/22 clearance [1] 10/15 clearer [1] 62/19 clearly [14] 13/8 47/9 53/20 63/18 63/21 82/13 114/23 115/20 121/13 122/21 126/13 133/20 142/14 145/15 client [5] 60/9 60/17 60/22 73/20 78/17 clients [5] 4/11 5/19 33/7 60/14 63/22 close [4] 58/12 90/15 140/8 164/14 closely [2] 120/24 158/11 closures [4] 90/3 92/1 92/4 92/8 cloud' [1] 140/12 co [4] 16/15 16/20 39/4 51/7 co-authors [2] 16/15 16/20 co-operation [2] 39/4 51/7 Code [2] 56/6 100/21 Codified [1] 82/2 collapse [1] 154/15 colleagues [13] 40/19 43/23 49/5 80/12 81/3 81/14 103/19 104/9 114/4 124/23 128/19 135/18 137/18 collective [1] 85/6 column [1] 65/14 combined [1] 23/12 come [26] 6/10 8/3 9/14 9/16 10/15 11/4 13/4 20/12 23/14 28/2 42/1 42/7 48/8 61/11 92/23 98/20 98/25 99/5 99/10 114/24 118/2 126/18 129/21 136/23 143/1 163/2 comes [1] 101/18 coming [11] 1/13 10/7 79/25 89/10 96/24 104/21 108/1 153/25 157/2 162/25 169/23 comment [2] 14/11 155/8 commenting [1] 84/25 comments [3] 94/2 94/3 95/10 commercial [13] 38/22 44/15 51/16 51/21 57/22 58/19 59/2 64/23 65/12 70/6	102/4 133/1 139/16 commercialisation [1] 7/19 commercially [1] 74/19 commission [1] 44/25 commissioned [5] 111/11 125/10 131/4 143/8 144/24 commit [2] 140/9 162/11 commitment [4] 36/20 39/13 66/5 66/8 committed [1] 141/16 Committee [1] 88/21 common [1] 144/4 communicated [1] 130/12 communication [3] 10/20 10/24 66/12 Communications [1] 21/12 communities [1] 8/6 community [1] 89/5 companies [3] 74/18 113/23 155/15 company [3] 52/10 67/6 74/7 comparative [1] 167/24 compatible [2] 39/10 51/14 compelling [1] 99/6 compete [2] 29/16 128/11 competition [2] 82/15 82/19 Competitiveness [1] 37/17 competitors [1] 155/18 complete [5] 69/12 140/1 148/22 149/7 160/2 completed [7] 25/6 36/21 67/19 67/25 147/9 160/11 166/6 completely [1] 139/18 completing [3] 21/24 21/25 44/19 completion [3] 92/10 161/18 165/12 complex [5] 24/14 126/13 127/20 131/9 136/15 complexity [1] 126/12 complicated [1] 33/3 component [4] 22/19 25/4 25/14 128/4 components [3]	25/23 26/15 51/21 composition [1] 137/3 comprised [1] 125/16 compromise [1] 45/5 compromised [1] 137/5 compulsory [1] 81/11 computer [4] 21/23 90/23 113/12 113/18 computerisation [2] 90/20 91/5 computerising [2] 112/19 113/11 computers [2] 92/18 92/22 computing [1] 24/17 conceive [1] 132/19 conceived [2] 134/20 167/8 concentrate [1] 138/23 concept [1] 140/2 concern [16] 31/10 51/13 79/13 85/21 91/25 107/15 114/16 123/25 132/24 144/13 147/12 149/10 150/2 150/9 150/10 163/8 concerned [17] 5/11 10/2 10/10 38/14 51/18 106/16 107/4 134/9 134/14 134/19 137/16 145/21 146/22 157/6 157/24 157/24 159/6 concerning [4] 26/24 27/9 36/4 130/19 concerns [28] 13/17 31/19 31/22 36/4 102/17 102/19 107/5 111/13 114/18 114/19 117/11 118/17 118/19 119/1 119/5 119/13 120/2 123/7 124/24 125/3 135/18 137/19 156/12 160/17 163/10 163/12 163/15 163/17 concerted [1] 149/23 concession [1] 71/5 conclude [4] 19/12 148/4 150/17 170/6 concluded [4] 54/13 77/24 127/8 164/21 concludes [4] 58/3 120/19 161/24 169/14 conclusion [10] 23/13 26/4 26/5 27/12 29/22 30/23 39/6 46/13 70/17 159/17 conclusions [7] 17/10 130/10 130/16	147/6 147/25 154/17 155/22 condition [2] 40/1 71/7 conditional [1] 47/24 conditions [7] 40/8 48/5 51/8 51/25 57/20 71/21 75/6 conduct [1] 66/14 conducted [4] 40/10 40/11 90/13 136/20 conference [1] 88/13 confidence [5] 36/19 40/12 66/7 74/1 144/1 confidential [1] 57/19 confidentiality [1] 73/24 confirm [6] 48/18 48/21 51/9 126/6 138/8 167/2 confirmed [1] 69/5 confirming [2] 146/3 162/7 congestion [1] 25/11 connection [1] 96/14 consciously [1] 87/21 consensus [2] 45/20 122/10 consequences [5] 27/2 76/19 77/14 120/15 148/13 consider [15] 20/5 54/11 80/13 102/10 114/12 121/4 123/21 131/19 138/25 142/9 149/25 153/19 155/24 156/12 167/3 considerable [2] 148/21 160/17 considerably [1] 81/1 consideration [11] 20/6 20/7 27/3 60/7 76/21 77/22 85/17 85/24 131/6 159/7 169/8 considerations [4] 120/16 123/6 123/22 136/15 considered [5] 24/18 127/12 133/7 147/22 148/13 considering [2] 40/23 103/15 consistency [2] 101/1 101/5 consistent [7] 59/1 121/17 122/9 125/13 127/9 128/18 152/13 consisting [1] 79/1 constant [2] 141/11 144/5
----------	--	---	--	---

C				D
<p>constituency [2] 89/6 94/8</p> <p>constituted [1] 131/5</p> <p>constrained [1] 53/20</p> <p>constructed [1] 54/3</p> <p>consult [2] 66/20 102/13</p> <p>consultancy [2] 110/20 110/22</p> <p>consultants [1] 113/19</p> <p>consulted [2] 66/23 67/1</p> <p>consulting [3] 24/24 30/9 58/12</p> <p>Consulting's [1] 58/13</p> <p>contact [4] 11/16 12/1 12/6 125/4</p> <p>contain [3] 56/9 159/8 166/17</p> <p>contained [1] 142/18</p> <p>contains [1] 164/11</p> <p>contemplation [1] 162/14</p> <p>content [3] 48/21 109/11 109/20</p> <p>contents [2] 1/23 154/21</p> <p>context [7] 71/22 71/25 74/14 113/21 126/1 138/19 164/7</p> <p>contingency [2] 25/22 26/14</p> <p>continuation [1] 45/7</p> <p>continue [12] 40/13 46/23 47/8 50/22 51/1 53/7 59/11 73/15 103/8 115/24 139/1 140/11</p> <p>continued [3] 61/23 136/16 155/8</p> <p>continues [3] 45/13 59/15 92/11</p> <p>continuing [16] 16/24 38/23 40/15 45/14 45/17 52/5 61/8 61/11 62/1 78/23 91/25 92/25 132/8 133/11 141/1 141/8</p> <p>contract [35] 4/12 5/25 12/4 16/25 22/4 32/23 33/2 33/3 38/2 38/13 39/11 39/25 46/20 47/14 50/18 51/14 54/12 60/25 63/23 67/8 69/21 71/17 72/4 72/7 78/20 79/15 84/18 85/9 135/13 140/1 141/17 141/23 142/20 145/8</p>	<p>147/14</p> <p>contracted [1] 24/12</p> <p>contracting [2] 12/4 136/10</p> <p>contractor [7] 5/17 66/13 66/19 67/10 71/17 72/3 74/11</p> <p>contractors [4] 113/1 113/1 113/9 113/19</p> <p>contracts [8] 4/3 4/7 39/9 39/15 40/14 60/7 67/11 147/22</p> <p>contractual [12] 24/15 28/18 38/12 58/19 60/8 60/22 64/23 66/7 136/19 138/12 140/4 165/12</p> <p>contractually [1] 142/23</p> <p>contrary [1] 61/18</p> <p>contribute [1] 65/17</p> <p>contributed [1] 49/17</p> <p>contributions [1] 45/4</p> <p>control [3] 97/1 131/14 132/1</p> <p>controlled [3] 96/20 96/22 96/25</p> <p>convene [1] 44/24</p> <p>convenient [1] 150/14</p> <p>convention [10] 32/15 34/20 35/1 35/6 35/8 52/17 52/20 56/11 56/15 85/7</p> <p>conventional [1] 135/16</p> <p>conversations [1] 83/8</p> <p>convey [1] 169/20</p> <p>convince [1] 103/19</p> <p>copied [1] 37/7</p> <p>copies [1] 70/24</p> <p>copy [16] 69/14 70/25 75/1 140/15 146/9 147/10 149/12 151/13 151/19 152/9 152/11 152/12 154/19 158/19 164/2 164/4</p> <p>Corbett [16] 40/25 57/3 57/4 59/5 61/2 61/12 63/8 64/17 64/18 65/13 66/14 70/15 102/21 104/19 136/21 141/22</p> <p>Corbett's [1] 59/1</p> <p>core [3] 80/16 107/22 168/13</p> <p>corners [1] 141/24</p> <p>corporate [1] 112/16</p> <p>corporation [2] 7/11 54/13</p> <p>correct [28] 2/7 3/21 12/11 16/2 16/12 54/8</p>	<p>58/25 61/20 61/20 73/5 97/10 109/4 110/10 111/4 114/8 114/20 118/20 119/20 123/10 125/17 127/7 130/13 136/21 143/19 151/17 158/5 159/12 160/22</p> <p>corrected [1] 160/3</p> <p>correction [1] 109/20</p> <p>correctly [4] 71/16 83/15 90/25 107/7</p> <p>correspondence [11] 25/10 34/11 48/9 50/20 52/12 66/10 66/25 72/6 94/8 101/15 103/4</p> <p>cost [6] 81/21 103/11 142/2 148/22 152/24 166/9</p> <p>costly [3] 76/25 81/13 161/7</p> <p>costs [7] 22/3 83/22 86/1 86/3 120/23 131/17 167/24</p> <p>could [62] 5/20 8/7 11/4 20/3 23/5 26/1 28/16 28/17 28/21 28/25 30/20 34/5 34/9 41/9 41/17 49/23 59/18 60/21 61/15 61/22 74/13 75/7 76/10 79/2 79/4 82/3 85/24 86/23 88/2 92/9 93/14 94/9 100/10 103/22 105/16 106/24 106/25 109/8 115/8 117/1 119/16 120/1 120/17 129/13 130/14 131/7 131/21 132/20 133/8 133/16 133/22 134/19 140/21 147/7 148/10 150/16 154/5 161/12 161/22 163/6 164/17 170/2</p> <p>couldn't [8] 29/5 32/13 33/17 34/3 34/9 54/1 61/23 84/16</p> <p>council [4] 88/12 88/24 105/24 105/24</p> <p>counsel [1] 55/16</p> <p>count [1] 68/11</p> <p>countenance [1] 76/10</p> <p>counter [1] 73/17</p> <p>Counters [18] 4/13 4/17 11/18 11/22 12/2 79/7 118/22 119/2 119/4 128/11 135/21 137/6 137/13 138/11 145/3 154/5 157/14 161/5</p> <p>counting [1] 45/25</p> <p>couple [2] 20/2 132/2</p>	<p>course [28] 28/18 31/20 36/5 38/7 38/17 39/9 40/25 41/11 41/11 59/20 70/10 82/11 85/5 87/4 95/6 105/21 112/8 117/5 120/3 132/13 132/14 137/22 150/17 155/25 166/19 166/22 167/6 168/19</p> <p>Court [3] 13/23 77/3 77/3</p> <p>cover [4] 83/9 137/23 146/2 158/21</p> <p>covered [1] 42/18</p> <p>covering [3] 69/7 138/17 147/4</p> <p>create [1] 161/20</p> <p>created [4] 11/19 64/20 102/22 155/16</p> <p>creates [1] 147/13</p> <p>creation [1] 160/18</p> <p>credible [1] 38/24</p> <p>credit [1] 163/4</p> <p>creep [1] 154/25</p> <p>crisis [1] 152/21</p> <p>criteria [8] 39/7 142/22 143/3 143/6 143/16 144/8 144/14 144/15</p> <p>criterion [1] 139/15</p> <p>critical [2] 54/17 160/21</p> <p>criticism [2] 64/11 85/4</p> <p>criticisms [1] 155/12</p> <p>cross [3] 41/6 84/7 117/7</p> <p>cross-departmental [1] 117/7</p> <p>cross-reference [1] 84/7</p> <p>crucial [4] 27/3 75/12 76/20 154/4</p> <p>Crump [1] 138/4</p> <p>cultures [2] 4/22 63/24</p> <p>Cunningham [1] 37/8</p> <p>currency [2] 85/22 155/21</p> <p>current [9] 22/3 69/1 141/23 149/4 149/11 154/7 162/8 165/15 165/23</p> <p>currently [4] 81/1 165/25 166/3 166/7</p> <p>customer [2] 74/1 135/23</p> <p>customers [4] 75/11 82/19 161/14 161/16</p> <p>cutting [1] 141/24</p> <p>CWU [2] 88/7 93/10</p>	<p>daily [2] 9/1 9/10</p> <p>damaging [5] 121/1 148/25 154/23 155/13 155/17</p> <p>dare [1] 167/16</p> <p>Darling [15] 9/25 37/6 42/19 43/18 46/1 47/23 47/25 71/13 74/25 84/25 100/24 100/25 103/4 125/10 158/21</p> <p>Darling's [1] 84/5</p> <p>data [4] 73/20 73/23 145/17 153/13</p> <p>date [10] 36/22 38/17 39/11 46/21 80/6 134/6 134/17 152/25 160/25 165/10</p> <p>dated [9] 15/22 37/3 57/6 109/3 119/14 138/13 146/16 158/21 158/23</p> <p>dates [2] 22/4 165/11</p> <p>David [3] 138/3 140/9 151/15</p> <p>David Sibbick [2] 138/3 140/9</p> <p>David's [1] 154/2</p> <p>Davies [5] 146/7 146/17 147/5 147/24 148/12</p> <p>day [11] 6/24 6/24 8/21 8/21 8/24 8/24 37/25 83/2 92/19 94/16 94/16</p> <p>days [5] 10/25 15/25 68/8 68/14 91/23</p> <p>deadline [2] 63/2 118/24</p> <p>deadlines [1] 145/7</p> <p>deadlock [2] 63/10 63/14</p> <p>deal [8] 10/3 81/4 81/15 90/6 90/10 93/5 105/2 140/8</p> <p>dealing [4] 3/4 9/1 10/13 101/4</p> <p>deals [1] 44/5</p> <p>dealt [7] 99/2 99/4 99/11 100/7 100/22 131/3 161/6</p> <p>debates [1] 94/7</p> <p>December [21] 2/15 3/2 3/3 6/3 20/11 62/17 62/24 68/14 70/14 75/3 92/5 104/17 145/25 146/10 146/16 146/20 151/8 151/17 153/21 157/9 160/11</p> <p>December 1998 [9] 3/2 3/3 6/3 62/17</p>

D	93/10 93/13	describe [10] 3/19 5/22 6/4 7/8 9/2 43/14 63/19 111/10 116/21 143/23	97/20 98/2 101/1 102/17 105/6 106/12 107/7 107/7 107/15 110/19 112/21 123/21 124/3 124/6 124/8 124/19 125/25 131/19 134/21 136/7 142/8 143/25 153/8 159/8 168/19 168/23 168/24	disappointed [1] 59/10
December 1998... [5] 145/25 146/10 151/8 153/21 157/9	deliver [16] 21/21 22/10 22/23 24/12 38/12 74/13 87/25 105/14 113/20 120/10 134/10 134/15 135/9 136/4 145/11 168/9	described [9] 63/4 112/13 118/17 123/21 124/10 132/12 137/8 140/16 142/8	110/19 112/21 123/21 124/3 124/6 124/8 124/19 125/25 131/19 134/21 136/7 142/8 143/25 153/8 159/8 168/19 168/23 168/24	disciplines [1] 22/7 disclose [1] 35/17 disclosed [1] 33/17 discoveries [1] 36/11 discrete [1] 6/25 discretion [1] 82/4 discussed [10] 14/12 14/16 51/23 65/1 69/15 96/9 152/17 166/18 168/8 169/8
December 2000 [1] 92/5	deliverability [3] 111/15 118/19 127/3	designed [3] 120/7 124/25 168/7	didn't [23] 15/16 24/3 27/16 27/17 33/4 37/14 49/20 55/7 61/4 61/17 71/18 84/19 84/21 87/10 91/2 91/6 114/9 115/7 124/17 124/17 144/5 162/19 167/19	discussing [4] 56/11 134/23 153/23 167/6
December 8th [2] 146/16 146/20	deliverable [2] 22/1 29/1	desimplify [1] 136/1	Diego [1] 113/4	discussion [11] 10/15 38/21 47/8 48/5 51/3 51/8 51/20 52/2 52/3 58/5 58/18
decide [3] 43/24 92/19 164/13	delivered [18] 23/6 23/10 28/16 37/2 69/5 76/5 79/11 79/14 87/20 88/10 114/24 115/8 117/21 126/9 131/21 132/17 134/20 142/4	desirable [1] 81/3	difference [3] 65/18 129/25 168/3	discussions [30] 14/6 26/21 39/7 39/18 40/10 40/11 40/14 44/24 46/14 46/25 57/17 57/18 57/22 58/7 58/13 67/17 69/10 70/5 70/13 114/3 115/19 137/17 139/3 139/16 141/21 142/15 157/21 158/2 162/1 166/20
decided [3] 32/24 38/20 167/4	delivering [5] 82/18 127/15 145/6 145/11 168/6	desire [1] 4/18	differences [4] 31/1 38/23 51/17 161/25	dispute [3] 58/20 72/2 77/10
decision [20] 27/2 33/1 33/14 34/13 36/8 64/5 66/21 67/2 68/24 76/19 77/3 84/13 87/21 133/13 133/20 156/16 156/20 162/19 164/9 166/23	delivery [5] 22/3 44/21 70/23 153/17 155/7	despite [4] 31/1 81/13 134/5 148/7	different [24] 4/15 4/22 5/4 5/5 5/7 5/10 5/19 19/2 23/23 24/17 24/23 27/15 34/25 63/9 63/23 63/24 94/25 100/18 102/14 108/2 118/25 119/4 127/3 158/15	disregarding [1] 142/15
decision-making [3] 33/14 36/8 87/21	delve [2] 32/10 33/11	detail [16] 8/22 9/11 17/22 19/2 20/18 25/15 35/6 77/24 88/2 100/22 116/10 124/5 140/21 156/4 158/25 159/2	difficult [14] 5/12 5/18 5/24 81/16 85/12 94/13 98/13 102/19 130/4 133/22 136/12 142/11 152/21 156/19	distinct [1] 126/22 distinction [1] 89/19 dive [1] 30/16 divided [1] 8/16
decisions [7] 14/7 32/11 33/11 33/12 53/13 156/11 156/19	delved [1] 33/5	detailed [13] 8/1 10/14 32/1 44/18 46/5 67/17 69/14 70/9 80/11 83/7 98/23 148/14 152/3	difficulties [6] 32/2 78/5 116/16 126/11 152/8 154/15	do [90] 8/2 8/25 9/10 9/13 9/13 9/14 9/22 10/11 12/15 15/1 18/2 19/3 19/4 19/6 19/9 21/6 22/21 27/12 28/8 29/22 31/14 41/12 41/14 41/20 42/5 44/11 48/13 58/21 62/10 63/6 77/14 78/7 79/15 82/17 82/20 85/13 88/2 89/24 94/18 96/20 97/13 99/5 99/18 103/18 104/12 104/18 105/2 106/6 108/12 109/9 112/5 114/12 119/22 119/24 120/11 121/4 121/21 124/12 124/15 125/2 126/12 137/6 137/13 138/23 139/8 139/14 140/18 141/10 142/9 142/23 146/8 149/6 149/13 149/25 151/10 151/23 151/25 153/19 154/24 155/21 156/12 156/24 158/24
decisive [2] 63/4 64/10	demand [1] 7/24	details [5] 33/4 33/13 52/5 79/9 84/21	difficulty [3] 4/11 40/7 51/17	disagree [4] 94/18 95/7 129/6 136/12
decode [2] 39/20 49/23	demonstrator [1] 148/11	devalued [1] 86/11	diplomatic [2] 85/16 105/9	disagreements [3] 49/16 63/18 63/21
decoding [1] 47/23	denied [6] 32/4 32/20 33/9 33/22 35/12 79/21	devaluing [1] 86/6	direct [7] 7/4 12/5 66/12 70/12 103/17 114/7 168/17	
decomplicating [1] 136/1	denote [1] 119/18	develop [2] 70/8 124/24	directing [1] 101/21	
deduce [1] 143/25	department [56] 2/8 5/1 6/11 6/13 10/7 14/17 35/19 48/7 48/11 53/15 71/16 74/6 94/11 111/8 111/14 111/21 111/24 112/5 112/7 112/18 113/8 114/11 114/14 114/17 115/1 115/12 115/16 118/18 119/13 119/19 120/21 121/6 121/10 121/24 123/9 123/23 125/21 128/22 132/3 133/23 134/21 135/21 136/7 138/3 149/23 157/6 157/13 157/17 157/23 158/5 158/20 163/16 163/18 166/13 166/23 167/4	developed [5] 20/3 57/18 146/23 147/13 163/6	direction [7] 7/20 11/4 20/14 115/24 116/4 116/11 137/16	
deemed [2] 134/1 142/22	Department's [5] 46/19 120/2 121/5 121/14 141/14	developing [2] 105/12 162/21	directions [1] 101/21	
deep [1] 30/16	departmental [4] 15/8 117/7 120/24 121/2	development [11] 21/25 25/1 25/3 102/10 110/12 127/21 128/21 150/11 158/13 164/24 165/10	directions [1] 101/21	
deepest [1] 113/16	departments [8] 4/2 31/2 43/16 44/3 44/5 63/16 157/23 163/22	development [11] 21/25 25/1 25/3 102/10 110/12 127/21 128/21 150/11 158/13 164/24 165/10	directions [1] 101/21	
Defence [2] 21/13 113/4	dependent [2] 75/19 117/20	developments [1] 158/6	directions [1] 101/21	
defer [3] 116/9 116/18 143/22	depends [1] 9/5	devoted [1] 127/23	directions [1] 101/21	
deficiencies [1] 60/25		dialogue [4] 10/5 66/24 88/11 99/25	directions [1] 101/21	
deficiency [1] 100/1		diary [4] 96/20 96/24 97/1 97/4	directions [1] 101/21	
defining [2] 102/8 103/1		did [61] 5/8 5/9 8/9 11/12 11/14 11/21 12/16 13/18 20/24 21/1 23/1 25/12 26/2 28/11 28/22 29/22 30/7 30/9 31/21 33/1 33/6 61/12 61/21 62/8 67/21 69/17 73/3 75/15 76/13 77/16 78/7 88/16 88/18 95/2	directions [1] 101/21	
definition [1] 161/1			directions [1] 101/21	
definitive [1] 70/9			directions [1] 101/21	
degree [3] 65/24 83/4 106/13			directions [1] 101/21	
delay [7] 64/4 64/5 81/13 83/22 147/19 151/6 161/8			directions [1] 101/21	
delayed [4] 141/19 161/3 165/17 167/15			directions [1] 101/21	
delaying [1] 9/19			directions [1] 101/21	
delays [14] 38/10 49/17 111/15 118/4 118/6 141/9 143/10 145/6 145/18 145/22 150/8 153/3 158/13 166/9			directions [1] 101/21	
deliberate [1] 43/6			directions [1] 101/21	
deliberately [3] 93/4			directions [1] 101/21	

<p>D</p> <p>do... [7] 159/12 159/17 162/14 163/14 163/16 167/3 168/7</p> <p>document [22] 12/23 35/10 38/6 57/11 61/11 71/2 105/1 105/17 121/21 122/2 122/4 122/13 140/18 142/16 146/12 158/17 158/25 164/5 164/14 164/16 166/13 166/17</p> <p>document's [1] 18/18</p> <p>documentation [1] 103/14</p> <p>documented [1] 141/8</p> <p>documents [18] 32/6 36/11 55/12 72/9 80/15 80/19 116/25 124/9 124/16 125/6 137/11 142/25 143/2 153/22 164/8 168/20 169/2 169/22</p> <p>does [14] 24/3 26/13 33/24 37/17 37/18 48/4 63/17 92/23 103/3 112/11 122/18 143/1 149/17 156/18</p> <p>doesn't [4] 5/6 24/2 36/7 107/4</p> <p>dog [1] 28/20</p> <p>doing [8] 42/15 42/15 48/3 48/10 95/5 103/20 145/16 168/8</p> <p>domestic [1] 154/11</p> <p>don't [41] 5/19 11/14 11/23 11/24 11/24 19/1 19/18 21/1 21/7 21/17 25/15 31/17 34/24 48/1 52/20 54/1 54/21 73/8 76/2 79/18 84/4 92/18 94/1 94/5 104/20 108/10 112/23 114/6 123/1 126/18 135/24 140/20 146/11 146/11 149/12 149/16 149/18 151/25 156/4 157/22 159/13</p> <p>done [8] 11/2 70/1 70/21 93/12 98/24 99/8 101/7 148/10</p> <p>door [1] 145/19</p> <p>double [1] 41/19</p> <p>double-checked [1] 41/19</p> <p>doubt [4] 82/8 115/12 130/4 168/9</p> <p>down [40] 6/10 8/9 16/13 17/13 18/13 21/4 27/19 37/5 42/1 42/7 44/22 46/4 48/4</p>	<p>48/20 50/11 50/12 51/11 57/24 59/6 61/11 62/23 65/11 66/1 72/10 82/3 91/23 98/19 101/20 103/24 105/1 106/3 106/18 120/17 133/16 138/16 140/14 152/4 154/16 159/19 163/9</p> <p>Dr [14] 80/9 84/11 108/21 108/22 108/24 151/8 166/22 168/11 168/15 169/12 169/16 169/21 170/7 171/11</p> <p>Dr Bain [2] 80/9 84/11</p> <p>Dr Graham [9] 108/21 108/24 166/22 168/11 168/15 169/12 169/16 169/21 170/7</p> <p>DR SARAH GRAHAM [1] 108/22</p> <p>draft [3] 38/6 49/10 50/5</p> <p>drafted [1] 119/22</p> <p>dragged [1] 141/9</p> <p>dragging [1] 153/14</p> <p>dramatically [2] 105/12 141/5</p> <p>draw [5] 17/11 26/5 60/11 82/3 159/18</p> <p>drawn [8] 25/15 26/4 36/10 76/12 78/6 89/19 91/14 91/18</p> <p>draws [1] 140/3</p> <p>driven [3] 4/24 72/22 73/25</p> <p>driver [1] 119/10</p> <p>driving [1] 157/15</p> <p>dropped [1] 78/16</p> <p>DSS [14] 31/7 31/14 37/7 46/1 50/20 63/16 72/2 117/11 122/20 123/7 138/15 151/23 165/22 167/2</p> <p>DTI [5] 63/17 101/24 105/21 139/17 157/18</p> <p>DTI/POCL [1] 139/17</p> <p>Duchy [1] 37/10</p> <p>due [5] 38/7 40/25 70/10 123/25 153/3</p> <p>duplicate [1] 124/11</p> <p>duration [1] 13/18</p> <p>during [11] 20/6 32/3 33/15 86/19 110/8 117/9 148/10 161/14 161/16 161/21 168/19</p> <p>DWP00000019 [1] 158/17</p> <p>dysfunctional [5] 4/6 4/9 5/6 5/10 5/23</p>	<p>E6 [1] 122/2</p> <p>each [19] 4/20 5/12 22/5 36/6 44/6 49/1 49/7 56/9 58/10 104/5 104/10 122/15 122/17 159/25 160/2 160/6 163/23 163/24 165/20</p> <p>earlier [17] 8/20 33/10 56/12 60/13 84/16 88/4 95/23 119/3 134/23 137/9 143/4 143/8 146/6 150/3 156/9 161/22 163/2</p> <p>earliest [2] 36/21 109/18</p> <p>early [9] 15/2 33/16 81/5 113/22 125/8 125/14 151/8 153/21 157/10</p> <p>earnest [1] 25/21</p> <p>ease [3] 74/1 142/19 144/15</p> <p>easier [3] 83/20 141/22 144/7</p> <p>easing [1] 141/23</p> <p>easy [1] 167/13</p> <p>eating [1] 144/6</p> <p>economic [2] 29/19 128/15</p> <p>Education [1] 2/9</p> <p>effect [4] 66/14 77/7 104/13 155/24</p> <p>effective [4] 62/15 79/7 82/18 148/19</p> <p>effectively [4] 19/14 60/14 77/9 124/1</p> <p>effects [2] 121/1 156/21</p> <p>efficiency [1] 81/12</p> <p>efficient [2] 82/18 133/3</p> <p>efficiently [1] 124/1</p> <p>effort [1] 154/7</p> <p>efforts [2] 136/16 141/16</p> <p>either [6] 5/17 11/4 104/13 139/3 142/1 157/23</p> <p>elapsed [1] 56/13</p> <p>election [1] 2/5</p> <p>element [4] 9/23 71/4 107/13 148/4</p> <p>elements [6] 6/8 69/18 80/16 149/7 149/8 149/10</p> <p>else [2] 5/15 62/6</p> <p>elsewhere [2] 19/10 156/7</p> <p>email [1] 10/25</p> <p>embarked [1] 115/2</p> <p>embodied [1] 69/13</p> <p>emboldened [1] 89/25</p>	<p>embrace [1] 91/9</p> <p>emerged [1] 115/18</p> <p>emerging [1] 163/2</p> <p>employ [1] 24/17</p> <p>employed [1] 110/8</p> <p>Employment [1] 2/9</p> <p>enabled [1] 73/17</p> <p>encapsulates [1] 121/5</p> <p>enclosed [2] 82/24 140/15</p> <p>encourage [1] 167/19</p> <p>encryption [1] 73/24</p> <p>end [36] 25/13 25/13 25/21 25/21 33/6 46/8 46/20 46/20 49/7 58/6 59/18 64/8 67/11 75/12 78/13 87/5 89/11 93/21 94/2 94/20 95/10 104/11 104/16 106/3 109/9 142/2 143/17 159/25 159/25 160/2 161/10 161/10 164/14 164/17 165/24 166/6</p> <p>ended [1] 84/18</p> <p>endemic [1] 131/9</p> <p>endorse [3] 121/14 133/13 134/21</p> <p>endorsement [1] 136/7</p> <p>endorsing [1] 135/20</p> <p>enduring [1] 59/14</p> <p>enforceable [1] 69/6</p> <p>engage [1] 52/8</p> <p>engaged [1] 66/24</p> <p>enjoys [1] 82/22</p> <p>enlarge [2] 62/18 62/21</p> <p>enormous [1] 66/5</p> <p>enormously [1] 33/19</p> <p>enquire [1] 33/25</p> <p>ensure [11] 4/18 36/19 39/19 44/21 45/8 49/1 77/16 79/20 86/16 87/10 104/5</p> <p>entail [1] 39/16</p> <p>enter [3] 159/11 162/11 163/11</p> <p>entered [2] 39/15 160/15</p> <p>entering [3] 40/1 42/21 52/3</p> <p>entire [3] 25/5 25/24 26/9</p> <p>entirely [2] 96/20 97/8</p> <p>entities [3] 4/22 5/4 63/19</p> <p>entitled [3] 141/1 164/15 164/16</p> <p>entity [2] 12/2 30/10</p>	<p>entrepreneurial [1] 4/24</p> <p>environment [7] 29/4 31/9 75/15 82/20 130/6 148/24 160/23</p> <p>envisage [1] 49/8</p> <p>envisaged [3] 61/12 61/18 142/3</p> <p>equated [1] 28/6</p> <p>equation [1] 60/18</p> <p>equipped [1] 72/20</p> <p>error [1] 109/14</p> <p>errors [1] 124/12</p> <p>escalated [1] 15/14</p> <p>escaped [1] 140/17</p> <p>essence [1] 156/17</p> <p>essential [2] 31/3 146/25</p> <p>essentially [10] 15/3 18/22 21/19 57/24 58/19 63/15 70/19 91/22 120/19 130/10</p> <p>establish [6] 45/7 46/25 50/20 120/25 145/5 150/2</p> <p>established [2] 32/4 58/9</p> <p>et [1] 92/2</p> <p>et cetera [1] 92/2</p> <p>etc [1] 141/24</p> <p>Europe [2] 8/5 155/20</p> <p>European [2] 85/22 155/18</p> <p>evaluation [3] 55/4 139/8 140/17</p> <p>evaluators [1] 55/4</p> <p>Evans [1] 138/5</p> <p>even [10] 19/18 65/23 78/1 83/20 92/24 118/11 134/6 134/7 136/4 165/20 33/19</p> <p>evening [1] 44/8</p> <p>event [5] 62/3 75/17 83/22 160/20 164/12</p> <p>events [2] 125/14 142/13</p> <p>eventually [1] 77/4</p> <p>ever [6] 14/2 86/14 87/14 87/20 88/16 97/5</p> <p>every [2] 141/9 165/18</p> <p>everybody [2] 53/24 121/25</p> <p>everyone [2] 136/13 170/13</p> <p>everything [4] 32/21 112/4 122/16 157/8</p> <p>evidence [25] 9/7 14/3 15/23 27/25 29/13 36/4 54/6 55/7 57/14 63/12 77/6 79/5 88/21 96/3 108/1</p>
---	---	--	---	--

<p>E</p> <p>evidence... [10] 110/1 111/19 128/7 130/22 134/6 141/15 144/20 145/1 146/6 169/23</p> <p>evident [1] 28/21</p> <p>ex [1] 95/19</p> <p>ex-subpostmasters [1] 95/19</p> <p>exact [2] 126/24 142/13</p> <p>exactly [7] 74/5 75/13 116/19 118/9 129/10 135/5 153/24</p> <p>examination [1] 80/11</p> <p>examining [2] 3/8 6/6</p> <p>example [11] 3/16 8/2 9/22 9/25 14/23 35/11 47/20 141/11 141/18 162/21 163/18</p> <p>examples [1] 76/13</p> <p>exceed [1] 92/9</p> <p>except [1] 129/2</p> <p>exception [1] 50/19</p> <p>exchanges [1] 64/15</p> <p>exclusion [1] 133/3</p> <p>executive [12] 17/18 17/20 18/11 22/13 50/13 62/25 105/23 105/24 106/8 107/8 115/23 127/17</p> <p>exercise [4] 9/13 31/20 36/7 58/24</p> <p>exercised [1] 7/9</p> <p>exercising [2] 9/17 15/9</p> <p>exhibit [2] 122/2 122/7</p> <p>exhibits [1] 121/16</p> <p>exist [1] 139/21</p> <p>existed [1] 35/11</p> <p>existing [5] 22/12 29/23 30/21 40/14 167/12</p> <p>expect [11] 14/22 15/1 17/24 18/2 39/4 101/23 103/9 145/9 155/11 156/23 163/21</p> <p>expectation [2] 98/15 99/3</p> <p>expected [8] 25/25 34/16 53/3 59/4 81/22 98/14 143/12 166/11</p> <p>expecting [2] 69/20 156/6</p> <p>expenditure [2] 3/10 112/9</p> <p>expense [1] 138/24</p> <p>experience [18] 2/3 31/7 75/17 75/24 100/23 106/9 106/24</p>	<p>107/9 107/14 112/13 112/21 113/9 113/10 113/16 114/1 116/10 129/24 148/17</p> <p>experienced [3] 32/2 95/20 163/5</p> <p>expert [3] 127/4 128/18 144/3</p> <p>expertise [5] 20/25 21/9 21/16 41/24 124/7</p> <p>experts [1] 164/21</p> <p>explain [17] 3/5 14/21 56/5 102/15 111/20 114/17 115/11 116/7 116/10 116/22 117/5 117/6 132/13 139/5 145/1 147/21 162/6</p> <p>explained [15] 10/17 12/7 12/23 16/6 110/15 110/21 117/10 119/3 124/6 125/23 130/8 132/5 146/14 149/12 150/3</p> <p>explains [2] 92/17 118/5</p> <p>explanation [3] 5/20 87/8 129/7</p> <p>explanatory [1] 47/11</p> <p>explicitly [1] 122/14</p> <p>exploit [1] 82/8</p> <p>exploration [1] 102/5</p> <p>explore [2] 7/2 56/15</p> <p>explored [1] 132/6</p> <p>exploring [2] 23/17 23/25</p> <p>exposed [1] 121/3</p> <p>expressed [2] 48/2 135/19</p> <p>expresses [1] 89/23</p> <p>expressing [1] 142/7</p> <p>expressly [2] 17/9 17/15</p> <p>extending [1] 16/25</p> <p>extends [1] 49/9</p> <p>extension [2] 22/4 148/22</p> <p>extensive [2] 147/1 147/18</p> <p>extent [15] 9/12 17/20 26/20 30/2 31/20 56/10 69/4 69/17 73/12 74/2 119/9 128/25 132/9 163/14 163/16</p> <p>external [2] 110/23 164/21</p> <p>extra [1] 141/16</p> <p>extremely [2] 87/9 156/23</p> <p>eye [2] 121/3 122/4</p>	<p>F</p> <p>face [5] 15/22 53/9 55/2 91/2 150/3</p> <p>faced [3] 105/10 117/6 152/22</p> <p>facilitate [2] 39/1 40/20</p> <p>facilitating [1] 45/14</p> <p>facing [1] 8/6</p> <p>fact [24] 23/24 31/12 33/2 49/20 50/7 54/2 54/5 61/12 64/2 75/12 85/21 96/20 97/20 98/1 110/19 112/21 113/11 126/9 137/8 137/11 162/18 166/2 167/22 169/3</p> <p>factor [2] 85/23 115/5</p> <p>factors [7] 24/18 86/12 86/14 87/18 126/14 126/15 142/16</p> <p>facts [1] 113/7</p> <p>factual [1] 109/13</p> <p>fail [1] 120/10</p> <p>failed [7] 31/9 134/4 134/8 136/23 153/12 154/11 164/22</p> <p>failing [4] 25/25 26/9 147/23 164/22</p> <p>failings [1] 148/20</p> <p>fails [1] 148/19</p> <p>failure [6] 15/6 38/11 79/20 148/14 149/1 154/12</p> <p>failures [4] 146/25 161/21 164/15 164/16</p> <p>fair [15] 73/11 85/4 107/6 114/13 130/20 132/2 144/18 144/22 153/19 157/9 159/5 159/17 162/14 162/17 163/4</p> <p>fall [1] 139/8</p> <p>fallback [1] 103/15</p> <p>fallen [1] 84/23</p> <p>fantastically [1] 33/2</p> <p>far [9] 9/12 24/24 51/18 58/18 61/15 61/22 106/15 107/3 163/10</p> <p>fast [1] 110/6</p> <p>fatally [1] 32/23</p> <p>fatally-flawed [1] 32/23</p> <p>fault [2] 145/10 145/16</p> <p>faults [7] 78/19 160/13 160/20 160/25 161/7 161/12 165/21</p> <p>favour [1] 69/7</p> <p>fax [5] 83/1 137/23 138/13 146/2 152/10</p>	<p>FCO [1] 151/22</p> <p>feared [1] 154/10</p> <p>feasible [2] 23/8 23/9</p> <p>feasibly [1] 23/10</p> <p>featured [1] 36/8</p> <p>features [1] 66/2</p> <p>Feb [1] 160/16</p> <p>Feb/March [1] 160/16</p> <p>February [10] 77/7 89/11 89/13 92/4 92/6 92/24 118/8 119/14 121/7 125/8</p> <p>February 1997 [1] 118/8</p> <p>February 1998 [1] 121/7</p> <p>February 2001 [2] 89/11 92/24</p> <p>Federation [5] 88/11 88/16 89/5 93/9 106/13</p> <p>feel [4] 53/20 123/1 149/19 149/20</p> <p>feet [2] 141/9 153/15</p> <p>fell [2] 47/19 83/19</p> <p>felt [9] 10/14 12/19 35/17 68/25 78/1 106/15 132/3 133/13 142/14</p> <p>few [5] 42/24 81/23 102/14 110/2 168/18</p> <p>field [3] 75/15 82/17 144/4</p> <p>Fifth [1] 70/21</p> <p>figure [2] 92/6 92/9</p> <p>figures [1] 124/9</p> <p>final [5] 92/9 92/17 95/10 155/5 160/16</p> <p>finally [5] 33/6 49/19 132/11 155/6 166/22</p> <p>finance [2] 3/13 41/25</p> <p>finances [1] 81/23</p> <p>financial [10] 27/2 47/12 76/19 77/14 90/3 90/16 128/12 144/17 152/8 162/12</p> <p>financially [1] 83/20</p> <p>find [11] 48/17 99/14 100/3 101/1 101/4 121/25 134/24 136/12 136/17 139/16 152/3</p> <p>finding [4] 29/25 39/3 122/17 149/17</p> <p>findings [13] 18/13 19/13 22/14 29/10 127/18 127/19 128/17 130/9 146/22 147/11 149/14 149/16 165/5</p> <p>fine [3] 53/2 150/19 150/24</p> <p>finger [1] 126/10</p> <p>finish [1] 108/14</p>	<p>firm [1] 39/11</p> <p>firmly [2] 82/15 122/5</p> <p>first [47] 3/4 3/4 6/9 6/11 18/12 21/3 22/8 35/14 38/1 43/3 49/7 52/17 57/7 58/16 59/7 60/15 65/6 67/7 69/3 72/22 75/1 80/6 81/10 84/13 90/6 100/8 100/10 101/17 104/11 109/16 111/3 120/1 120/3 122/24 123/14 128/22 131/1 133/11 135/9 137/23 140/25 141/4 145/21 152/23 155/2 165/16 168/19</p> <p>firstly [3] 2/25 77/21 132/7</p> <p>fit [2] 45/6 147/17</p> <p>fitness [2] 24/11 163/11</p> <p>five [3] 2/14 3/7 15/25</p> <p>five days [1] 15/25</p> <p>five months [1] 2/14</p> <p>five-month [1] 3/7</p> <p>fix [1] 160/24</p> <p>flavour [1] 113/15</p> <p>flaw [1] 5/25</p> <p>flawed [2] 32/23 135/22</p> <p>flaws [1] 33/16</p> <p>flesh [1] 154/25</p> <p>fleshes [1] 146/18</p> <p>Flora [1] 101/10</p> <p>Flora Page [1] 101/10</p> <p>flowed [1] 157/8</p> <p>focus [3] 3/11 102/4 141/2</p> <p>focused [2] 28/15 120/23</p> <p>follow [5] 5/3 67/23 68/8 68/14 147/23</p> <p>followed [3] 63/7 75/13 147/4</p> <p>following [10] 2/5 67/17 111/19 130/24 139/9 143/11 147/24 148/12 158/22 159/23</p> <p>follows [2] 2/24 66/3</p> <p>foot [7] 24/10 26/18 65/19 67/15 71/10 80/3 90/12</p> <p>footing [1] 155/3</p> <p>footnotes [1] 65/22</p> <p>foreign [1] 7/4</p> <p>forget [2] 35/8 132/22</p> <p>forging [1] 134/5</p> <p>forgive [1] 99/12</p> <p>form [2] 95/3 139/25</p> <p>formal [5] 10/22 11/2 37/16 140/17 160/15</p>
--	--	---	--	---

F	19/16 36/19 36/20 38/25 39/4 51/6 51/19 92/8 108/24 146/17 fully [10] 21/21 21/23 22/10 22/24 38/16 75/14 84/11 131/3 139/24 153/8 fulsome [2] 48/18 50/1 function [2] 15/10 87/24 functional [1] 32/23 functionality [3] 24/13 165/19 166/7 functioning [3] 21/21 22/10 22/24 fund [1] 65/6 fundamental [3] 5/25 70/8 84/17 funding [8] 66/16 69/9 81/21 102/7 102/25 120/15 140/5 164/10 funds [1] 153/2 funny [1] 94/12 further [33] 3/12 24/9 27/19 39/12 44/20 56/15 58/4 61/17 61/21 65/5 69/10 70/5 70/21 70/24 73/18 102/10 104/21 105/3 105/15 137/2 140/9 141/24 146/16 147/19 152/4 154/16 160/20 160/24 161/7 161/10 162/1 162/12 169/16 future [29] 4/18 23/13 26/21 27/25 28/1 29/13 29/15 29/24 30/1 38/10 76/20 118/19 128/7 128/9 130/13 130/19 132/6 134/1 134/11 134/16 140/12 141/6 142/1 151/10 154/4 154/25 155/25 156/1 164/10 future-proofing [2] 27/25 28/1	2/5 General of [1] 21/12 generality [1] 18/1 generally [6] 7/13 7/14 30/4 46/24 88/18 114/4 generate [1] 74/1 generated [2] 14/4 160/7 generating [1] 96/2 generation [1] 73/17 generous [2] 83/5 83/7 genuine [2] 136/1 163/12 Geoff [1] 138/5 Geoff Mulgan [1] 138/5 George [4] 125/4 138/6 146/5 149/14 George McCorkell [2] 138/6 146/5 get [18] 17/19 24/1 40/6 43/16 43/25 52/20 64/18 71/20 84/19 87/10 100/5 107/10 115/7 122/15 122/18 122/21 142/3 163/7 gets [1] 44/10 getting [7] 68/11 86/9 97/7 103/13 114/24 120/23 167/14 gilts [4] 82/1 83/10 83/12 83/24 give [15] 1/14 9/7 36/19 51/6 65/5 71/21 93/23 102/3 103/9 108/1 108/24 147/12 161/11 163/4 169/23 giveaway [1] 70/19 given [27] 4/5 12/3 18/4 21/14 25/9 25/19 39/4 52/24 56/12 56/12 59/17 60/7 66/9 67/5 74/9 77/6 78/3 90/17 92/20 94/6 96/11 96/13 97/9 130/18 153/10 155/10 169/1 giving [5] 57/14 101/22 113/15 138/25 145/16 glean [1] 140/11 global [1] 113/23 go [39] 8/24 16/13 18/18 20/16 20/19 21/2 21/18 22/13 27/1 29/7 29/8 30/24 35/18 36/13 37/4 37/23 40/17 43/1 50/7 53/24 56/23 57/10 57/15 59/18 71/1 75/4 76/16 90/11 91/6 91/19	97/20 99/19 101/20 103/24 106/2 133/24 162/6 162/19 163/6 goals [1] 4/19 goes [9] 63/21 120/13 128/6 131/15 147/21 149/5 154/2 160/9 165/9 going [43] 5/15 9/7 17/12 20/13 20/16 23/14 24/6 28/2 30/18 40/6 43/24 48/8 48/17 50/7 50/15 56/16 57/15 63/1 64/25 66/18 70/3 73/5 74/5 87/1 87/11 87/24 90/6 97/12 100/5 100/12 100/22 105/15 113/13 115/3 118/10 122/22 126/18 135/23 142/2 142/15 145/14 157/3 169/3 golden [1] 140/12 gone [3] 71/18 100/3 165/20 good [25] 1/3 1/9 1/10 5/17 27/24 29/13 42/5 48/4 54/21 55/1 56/2 68/12 85/10 86/15 95/3 95/13 108/19 108/24 113/10 128/7 137/15 147/23 163/5 164/23 168/15 goodwill [1] 86/10 Gordon [2] 43/12 43/13 Gordon Brown [1] 43/12 got [15] 8/14 17/21 42/3 61/15 61/21 61/22 78/12 78/16 88/25 94/17 104/20 118/3 118/7 135/1 168/17 governance [3] 11/21 12/8 54/24 government [79] 2/4 2/21 4/2 5/1 11/12 12/22 13/8 23/22 30/3 31/2 31/21 32/5 32/16 32/17 40/20 43/16 44/3 46/10 50/24 52/21 52/22 52/23 53/6 53/12 53/14 63/13 66/21 67/3 67/13 69/19 73/13 74/15 74/16 74/17 74/22 74/23 76/6 79/23 81/7 81/24 82/5 82/12 85/9 86/2 92/23 93/11 94/6 94/13 94/14 94/17 94/24 95/1 95/4 95/5 96/24 97/6 105/6 106/15	110/15 110/20 110/23 113/17 114/4 115/22 116/2 125/17 132/20 133/1 133/2 134/3 139/17 139/19 140/9 153/8 155/15 156/18 157/20 166/10 168/4 Government' [1] 70/23 Government's [3] 47/2 47/10 79/17 Government/public [1] 139/19 gradations [1] 143/21 graduating [1] 110/5 Graham [22] 40/25 57/2 57/4 61/6 61/14 108/10 108/21 108/22 108/24 109/1 136/21 138/14 141/22 151/8 166/22 168/11 168/15 169/12 169/16 169/21 170/7 171/11 Graham Corbett [4] 40/25 57/4 136/21 141/22 grateful [3] 46/4 76/8 108/3 great [5] 8/6 31/24 119/1 129/25 132/9 greater [4] 9/12 56/10 100/22 134/8 ground [4] 23/4 77/19 78/9 78/22 group [30] 49/21 58/9 79/1 88/6 93/6 93/16 95/14 117/7 125/11 125/12 125/16 125/20 125/24 130/12 130/19 131/19 132/6 133/10 133/19 133/25 134/14 136/24 137/3 137/4 137/9 137/13 137/25 138/19 138/22 139/7 Group's [1] 131/18 grow [1] 132/24 growing [1] 111/13 guarantee [3] 26/3 67/6 69/6 guaranteed [1] 139/21 guess [1] 91/9 guidance [9] 56/8 56/10 96/17 98/19 98/20 98/21 99/15 99/16 99/19 guiding [1] 58/13 guise [1] 132/8
	G			
	gained [1] 36/7 game [2] 104/25 157/19 gateways [1] 73/21 gave [3] 76/13 139/12 160/18 geared [1] 156/9 general [12] 2/5 7/9 11/15 21/12 33/21 39/14 39/22 83/6 93/21 128/25 149/17 156/4 general election [1]			

H	10/14 17/12 17/12 21/1 21/5 21/8 21/15 28/12 30/17 35/16 37/6 37/8 37/18 37/22 39/3 39/20 41/2 41/3 41/23 41/24 41/24 42/2 42/2 42/5 42/5 42/11 42/11 43/13 45/6 46/4 46/17 47/4 47/17 48/3 49/8 49/19 50/15 51/5 52/5 56/13 57/7 57/7 57/22 57/25 58/3 58/7 58/13 59/2 59/16 61/7 61/7 61/15 61/17 61/21 61/22 61/23 65/1 65/1 66/4 72/7 74/25 101/18 106/5 106/10 106/12 106/19 138/8 147/6 148/13 151/15 151/15 154/20 154/24 155/3 155/4	Her [7] 138/2 153/8 155/15 157/12 163/19 164/3 165/7 Her Majesty's [7] 138/2 153/8 155/15 157/12 163/19 164/3 165/7 here [21] 13/10 14/22 19/1 29/25 44/2 63/14 76/8 85/5 93/4 106/6 107/10 113/7 117/5 117/20 129/5 131/22 142/7 142/16 155/18 163/9 167/25 HH [1] 119/18 hidden [2] 103/6 103/10 high [10] 24/16 28/15 72/19 73/24 77/3 79/9 90/4 91/25 165/6 168/2 High Court [1] 77/3 high-capacity [1] 72/19 higher [2] 65/23 81/1 highest [1] 25/10 highly [3] 24/14 72/18 119/24 him [10] 9/13 9/14 11/5 35/2 39/4 51/6 61/8 62/6 101/19 101/25 himself [3] 20/25 21/9 61/6 hindsight [1] 77/14 his [22] 2/16 9/7 28/13 29/5 29/25 30/15 37/16 39/5 41/24 42/9 48/7 49/24 56/16 57/3 61/13 61/23 66/15 71/20 101/24 104/14 146/18 154/17 hitherto [1] 155/13 HMT [2] 41/20 101/21 HMT00000001 [2] 68/9 68/12 HMT00000048 [2] 48/16 103/23 HMT00000052 [1] 45/23 HMT00000055 [3] 37/2 43/1 101/17 hoc [1] 11/3 Hodge [5] 108/9 108/23 150/20 170/10 171/13 hold [2] 80/18 162/3 home [1] 155/17 honest [7] 34/12 61/4 62/12 85/3 99/1 140/21 157/16 honestly [3] 17/23 21/7 35/5	hope [9] 59/11 65/4 82/13 82/23 102/23 107/10 112/9 114/2 168/10 hopefully [2] 44/10 107/1 Horizon [73] 3/15 4/7 7/12 9/24 13/7 14/4 14/25 15/2 20/4 26/21 26/25 27/23 28/14 28/19 28/24 29/3 30/11 31/3 32/24 35/3 35/8 35/23 53/4 53/12 54/1 58/11 70/22 71/9 71/24 76/20 77/8 77/11 78/25 79/10 84/12 85/1 86/11 88/6 88/17 90/20 92/10 92/14 93/1 93/6 95/20 96/2 96/14 97/11 97/15 99/21 109/15 111/3 114/12 117/7 125/11 126/4 126/21 127/11 129/1 137/25 138/18 144/24 151/10 152/9 152/22 153/14 154/9 156/1 156/15 160/17 164/20 168/22 169/4 hostile [2] 114/11 114/16 hour [1] 108/12 hovers [1] 140/12 how [25] 7/9 8/7 8/16 9/13 9/20 15/3 30/11 30/15 49/23 66/22 71/23 74/21 79/13 84/17 86/12 86/24 88/9 91/13 94/5 94/9 99/25 100/1 100/7 114/23 128/23 however [6] 25/21 38/20 118/24 123/15 159/8 160/5 hub [1] 73/19 huge [4] 75/21 105/10 113/13 127/2 human [1] 126/14 hundreds [2] 27/4 76/22	I ask [7] 1/11 52/19 67/23 98/4 98/4 109/8 109/25 I asked [1] 72/2 I attach [2] 146/17 147/11 I authored [1] 122/3 I became [3] 20/9 21/10 78/2 I believe [12] 68/24 81/3 107/21 109/6 118/1 132/18 150/5 150/21 151/13 152/11 164/4 167/22 I believed [1] 159/20 I call [1] 1/5 I came [1] 19/25 I can [19] 1/4 4/12 4/22 6/20 9/22 20/17 32/8 33/10 33/12 53/21 53/22 56/4 68/2 108/20 129/5 129/10 151/5 159/1 170/5 I can't [15] 5/14 10/25 11/6 31/13 31/16 36/1 55/11 55/11 65/10 67/22 68/6 72/12 126/23 165/8 168/24 I cannot [7] 32/11 117/8 121/21 122/12 124/20 135/11 137/1 I certainly [2] 27/17 104/24 I characterised [1] 50/1 I clearly [1] 142/14 I confirm [1] 48/21 I consider [1] 80/13 I could [7] 20/3 41/17 75/7 100/10 105/16 140/21 170/2 I couldn't [1] 84/16 I describe [1] 43/14 I did [4] 110/19 112/21 124/19 168/24 I didn't [4] 49/20 61/4 84/19 114/9 I do [8] 9/10 44/11 48/13 119/24 121/21 124/15 151/25 154/24 I don't [30] 5/19 11/14 11/23 19/1 21/1 25/15 34/24 54/1 54/21 73/8 76/2 79/18 84/4 94/1 94/5 104/20 108/10 112/23 114/6 126/18 135/24 140/20 146/11 146/11 149/16 149/18 151/25 156/4 157/22 159/13 I expect [1] 39/4 I explained [1] 150/3 I feel [2] 149/19
hadn't [6] 19/22 19/24 62/14 132/17 145/10 166/19 half [1] 2/19 halted [1] 160/12 Hamish [5] 138/7 138/10 146/4 146/13 147/8 Hamish Sandison [5] 138/7 138/10 146/4 146/13 147/8 hand [5] 50/11 58/2 122/17 138/1 157/14 handover [3] 101/2 101/3 101/6 hands [3] 6/20 66/11 154/23 hands-on [1] 6/20 happen [3] 9/21 15/16 129/2 happened [8] 34/2 35/14 37/1 52/24 94/23 100/4 100/18 122/1 happy [1] 56/18 hard [1] 59/16 harm [2] 85/9 86/2 Harman [1] 119/19 Harman's [2] 125/7 157/7 harms [1] 93/23 Harriet [3] 119/19 125/7 157/7 Harriet Harman's [2] 125/7 157/7 has [44] 6/19 22/18 23/24 24/24 25/4 25/5 25/8 25/22 26/12 28/12 36/3 38/13 52/21 52/24 55/16 56/13 59/24 60/3 65/1 65/24 66/10 67/17 68/20 69/15 69/16 70/10 70/21 80/4 80/11 81/19 93/22 122/15 128/3 139/18 146/3 147/13 149/21 160/6 160/24 161/2 164/1 165/18 165/20 170/6 have [271] haven't [8] 30/8 55/12 56/14 64/13 76/6 101/16 122/7 135/1 having [15] 5/7 5/10 20/11 26/14 28/24 43/22 60/14 63/22 74/25 91/15 93/22 131/16 139/11 148/7 151/5 he [78] 8/25 9/1 9/11	he'd [4] 61/15 61/21 61/22 154/18 he's [5] 48/3 48/4 48/6 52/1 59/9 head [9] 20/22 21/5 35/19 37/21 42/23 68/11 89/16 111/6 112/15 heading [7] 57/16 57/21 105/22 117/14 127/19 141/4 159/21 headings [1] 140/25 heads [6] 42/4 42/8 42/24 59/2 59/3 63/3 health [2] 111/24 154/4 healthy [1] 155/3 hear [7] 1/3 55/7 56/2 108/19 151/4 151/7 156/6 heard [2] 52/17 79/5 hearing [1] 170/15 heart [2] 107/6 121/14 hedged [1] 127/14 held [11] 2/11 2/14 2/19 2/22 56/13 57/17 69/10 70/5 82/1 112/5 151/15 Hello [1] 151/4 help [6] 14/21 17/19 21/8 21/14 96/12 106/25 helped [2] 33/18 64/1 helpful [7] 30/8 51/19 70/13 137/9 142/12 152/19 170/2 helping [1] 53/13 helpline [1] 77/12 helplines [1] 91/4 helps [1] 24/9 hence [1] 151/6	her [7] 138/2 153/8 155/15 157/12 163/19 164/3 165/7 Her Majesty's [7] 138/2 153/8 155/15 157/12 163/19 164/3 165/7 here [21] 13/10 14/22 19/1 29/25 44/2 63/14 76/8 85/5 93/4 106/6 107/10 113/7 117/5 117/20 129/5 131/22 142/7 142/16 155/18 163/9 167/25 HH [1] 119/18 hidden [2] 103/6 103/10 high [10] 24/16 28/15 72/19 73/24 77/3 79/9 90/4 91/25 165/6 168/2 High Court [1] 77/3 high-capacity [1] 72/19 higher [2] 65/23 81/1 highest [1] 25/10 highly [3] 24/14 72/18 119/24 him [10] 9/13 9/14 11/5 35/2 39/4 51/6 61/8 62/6 101/19 101/25 himself [3] 20/25 21/9 61/6 hindsight [1] 77/14 his [22] 2/16 9/7 28/13 29/5 29/25 30/15 37/16 39/5 41/24 42/9 48/7 49/24 56/16 57/3 61/13 61/23 66/15 71/20 101/24 104/14 146/18 154/17 hitherto [1] 155/13 HMT [2] 41/20 101/21 HMT00000001 [2] 68/9 68/12 HMT00000048 [2] 48/16 103/23 HMT00000052 [1] 45/23 HMT00000055 [3] 37/2 43/1 101/17 hoc [1] 11/3 Hodge [5] 108/9 108/23 150/20 170/10 171/13 hold [2] 80/18 162/3 home [1] 155/17 honest [7] 34/12 61/4 62/12 85/3 99/1 140/21 157/16 honestly [3] 17/23 21/7 35/5	hope [9] 59/11 65/4 82/13 82/23 102/23 107/10 112/9 114/2 168/10 hopefully [2] 44/10 107/1 Horizon [73] 3/15 4/7 7/12 9/24 13/7 14/4 14/25 15/2 20/4 26/21 26/25 27/23 28/14 28/19 28/24 29/3 30/11 31/3 32/24 35/3 35/8 35/23 53/4 53/12 54/1 58/11 70/22 71/9 71/24 76/20 77/8 77/11 78/25 79/10 84/12 85/1 86/11 88/6 88/17 90/20 92/10 92/14 93/1 93/6 95/20 96/2 96/14 97/11 97/15 99/21 109/15 111/3 114/12 117/7 125/11 126/4 126/21 127/11 129/1 137/25 138/18 144/24 151/10 152/9 152/22 153/14 154/9 156/1 156/15 160/17 164/20 168/22 169/4 hostile [2] 114/11 114/16 hour [1] 108/12 hovers [1] 140/12 how [25] 7/9 8/7 8/16 9/13 9/20 15/3 30/11 30/15 49/23 66/22 71/23 74/21 79/13 84/17 86/12 86/24 88/9 91/13 94/5 94/9 99/25 100/1 100/7 114/23 128/23 however [6] 25/21 38/20 118/24 123/15 159/8 160/5 hub [1] 73/19 huge [4] 75/21 105/10 113/13 127/2 human [1] 126/14 hundreds [2] 27/4 76/22	I I accept [2] 48/22 104/1 I agree [1] 46/10 I alluded [1] 149/18 I also [3] 3/11 101/10 149/17 I am [12] 15/12 39/1 48/21 64/9 75/16 75/23 89/10 91/1 120/6 120/22 139/13 144/3 I apologise [1] 41/11

I	I remember [7] 71/16 72/5 83/7 83/14 107/7 117/24 140/22	18/3 34/16 63/18 98/6 121/9	138/24 139/3 139/11 139/19 139/22 140/6 140/11 141/5 141/9 141/16 141/22 141/25 142/19 143/2 143/11 144/1 144/9 144/12 145/9 145/9 145/15 145/19 146/23 147/22 148/14 150/4 150/7 151/17 152/7 152/9 152/25 153/2 153/4 153/13 153/25 154/3 154/15 155/2 155/11 156/6 159/23 160/12 164/10 164/13 164/15 164/16 164/22 165/13	39/23 40/5 43/24 45/13 45/23 47/4 47/19 50/10 52/22 52/25 53/22 53/24 57/16 57/23 58/15 59/6 59/14 62/18 62/22 63/25 66/6 67/23 71/15 74/8 75/4 75/21 76/11 76/25 77/16 79/3 80/2 80/7 80/22 81/14 83/14 84/25 86/18 88/4 88/14 90/11 90/25 92/6 92/9 93/13 95/13 97/17 99/25 101/15 101/20 103/7 103/16 103/18 103/22 103/23 105/15 106/2 107/7 108/13 110/2 115/7 116/13 116/13 117/1 119/10 119/15 120/1 120/17 127/13 128/15 133/7 133/16 134/4 134/8 134/19 135/15 138/16 140/14 140/21 143/6 143/25 144/14 147/3 147/7 149/19 150/16 154/11 155/24 157/25 158/2 158/22 159/14 164/17 166/19 167/13 168/24 170/1
I feel... [1] 149/20	I represent [2] 95/15 168/15	I wrote [4] 109/13 121/22 122/13 149/19	ICL Pathway [25] 35/4 36/5 38/7 38/13 39/15 39/19 40/5 42/22 50/4 50/17 116/21 118/23 131/14 131/21 132/18 136/19 146/23 147/22 152/25 164/10 164/13 164/15 164/16 164/22 165/13	ignore [2] 18/11 94/9
I felt [2] 35/17 68/25	I said [10] 8/20 33/10 84/16 109/15 111/12 135/25 136/11 140/21 143/3 144/3	I'd [16] 18/7 20/12 24/6 41/18 48/17 52/24 74/7 77/20 88/24 97/17 99/22 103/18 105/2 110/1 113/25 122/8	icon [1] 72/22	ignores [1] 139/18
I get [2] 24/1 64/18	I saw [1] 9/6	I'll [9] 7/2 9/22 26/13 30/13 68/11 87/14 87/19 95/13 102/15	icon-based [1] 72/22	iii [1] 27/20
I got [1] 118/7	I say [5] 105/15 113/15 116/18 127/12 167/16	I'm [64] 1/11 5/8 9/19 9/19 11/14 11/23 14/13 15/12 18/9 21/17 22/9 23/14 23/25 24/1 31/13 35/13 35/16 40/4 41/16 41/17 42/18 43/11 45/25 48/8 50/7 54/16 54/17 54/21 56/18 57/15 61/6 63/1 63/20 68/5 68/11 72/4 73/11 76/8 83/23 86/25 87/1 90/6 98/12 98/25 99/13 103/20 106/2 106/5 107/19 108/3 114/24 115/16 116/14 119/24 122/12 124/18 125/5 129/10 129/11 130/14 135/1 139/3 156/3 159/19	icons [1] 73/25	ill [1] 113/10
I guess [1] 91/9	I should [8] 23/17 62/19 64/1 64/13 68/17 76/17 109/17 117/19	I'm afraid [7] 5/8 11/23 14/13 15/12 31/13 54/21 119/24	idea [1] 128/25	illustration [1] 158/16
I had [10] 6/8 9/4 77/22 78/3 84/17 112/15 112/24 137/7 142/16 149/20	I spoke [1] 88/12	I've [11] 52/17 79/25 84/19 94/4 116/25 119/2 121/8 122/1 142/11 159/2 168/17	identified [8] 32/12 33/16 33/20 53/25 55/15 160/21 160/25 161/22	immediate [2] 44/13 64/14
I hadn't [1] 19/22	I start [1] 2/2	Ian [8] 8/14 8/14 9/7 9/9 10/16 12/19 37/16 78/25	identifies [1] 72/8	immediately [2] 64/17 100/2
I happened [1] 122/1	I started [1] 115/15	Ian McCartney [4] 8/14 9/7 37/16 78/25	identify [3] 9/20 148/20 150/10	imminent [1] 68/25
I have [17] 18/17 30/8 54/24 70/17 81/13 93/19 104/15 117/6 117/20 122/13 124/15 124/17 129/5 137/7 150/14 156/24 169/18	I still [1] 150/17	ICL [111] 5/16 5/17 12/4 31/5 31/12 31/15 35/4 36/5 38/3 38/7 38/11 38/13 39/15 39/19 39/24 40/5 42/22 46/18 46/21 47/1 47/3 50/4 50/17 58/2 62/25 63/4 64/2 64/7 64/8 64/12 64/22 65/2 65/21 65/23 66/6 66/18 68/20 69/4 69/18 70/11 70/19 70/21 71/23 72/11 72/16 73/12 74/14 74/18 75/8 75/13 76/2 76/25 78/4 102/21 116/21 118/23 121/20 131/14 131/21 132/18 133/21 135/8 136/19	ie [5] 15/9 23/9 23/23 30/16 52/20	impact [8] 81/12 81/23 86/6 90/10 134/2 134/8 146/24 147/16
I haven't [7] 30/8 55/12 56/14 64/13 76/6 122/7 135/1	I suspect [3] 21/14 105/17 130/3	ie exercising [1] 15/9	ie that [2] 23/9 52/20	impacting [1] 114/23
I held [1] 57/17	I take [1] 16/5	ie the [1] 23/23	ie what [1] 30/16	impasse [1] 64/9
I honestly [3] 17/23 21/7 35/5	I then [1] 10/2	if [146] 3/22 4/11 4/22 6/20 7/2 8/9 9/9 9/21 9/22 9/23 9/24 10/9 10/9 10/12 11/15 12/1 13/3 14/16 14/23 15/2 15/4 15/13 16/13 17/14 18/13 18/15 18/19 21/2 21/3 24/8 25/18 26/16 26/17 27/1 29/8 29/19 30/24 32/11 33/12 33/15 33/19 34/17 34/19 34/23 35/14 35/16 35/17 37/2 37/4 37/23	ie that [2] 23/9 52/20	implement [1] 153/13
I hope [4] 102/23 112/9 114/2 168/10	I think [215]			implementation [7] 36/20 38/11 38/25 44/18 110/13 147/19 162/23
I just [6] 21/17 37/1 53/3 95/22 163/2 168/17	I turn [1] 15/19			implication [5] 3/15 17/8 17/16 19/8 107/19
I know [2] 85/18 87/2	I understand [7] 25/17 28/9 34/8 34/8 68/7 118/7 120/20			implications [3] 131/25 155/6 155/9
I left [2] 20/10 100/15	I understood [1] 126/2			implicit [1] 115/5
I looked [1] 77/23	I very [1] 121/13			importance [2] 71/15 170/6
I made [2] 95/9 163/3	I wanted [3] 54/11 66/22 87/10			important [19] 8/5 40/24 41/1 41/10 46/7
I make [1] 94/20	I was [28] 7/25 11/15 14/9 27/17 43/9 43/12 43/14 43/15 43/19 43/19 44/8 53/21 56/20 61/9 73/5 74/5 76/1 77/23 92/20 98/12 100/12 103/15 144/5 151/5 152/1 163/20 168/25 169/6			
I may [3] 88/4 101/15 110/2	I wonder [4] 119/15 120/17 147/7 164/17			
I mean [18] 6/21 8/4 27/13 34/12 36/10 55/6 69/20 76/6 76/8 96/22 99/13 99/21 105/11 115/18 122/16 145/7 146/11 156/17	I would [38] 9/12 10/10 10/11 12/17 14/20 15/6 18/2 26/5 33/15 35/18 52/15 53/2 53/10 59/23 63/19 63/20 69/25 74/12 74/12 88/11 89/20 98/14 114/16 116/9 116/18 119/24 140/20 141/2 142/14 143/21 143/21 145/24 149/20 150/9 155/23 167/2 169/20 170/1			
I meant [2] 117/18 118/13	I wouldn't [9] 12/5 12/20 14/13 17/24			
I mentioned [1] 60/13				
I might [2] 116/24 170/1				
I now [1] 13/15				
I ought [1] 93/23				
I particularly [1] 46/11				
I probably [3] 8/20 28/11 78/1				
I put [1] 122/5				
I quote [1] 146/21				
I read [1] 91/13				
I realise [1] 79/25				
I recall [7] 90/25 92/20 117/19 122/19 131/22 142/24 143/6				
I refer [1] 152/18				

I	40/5 60/15 78/4 101/23 individual [5] 8/6 9/5 25/22 26/14 120/24 individuals [3] 5/11 5/13 5/14 inducement [2] 83/22 83/23 industry [19] 2/17 3/3 6/3 6/12 13/14 29/15 37/13 43/17 48/15 78/2 85/19 88/21 128/9 138/3 147/16 147/23 148/6 163/18 164/23 inevitable [1] 90/2 inference [1] 144/18 influence [1] 74/3 influenced [2] 26/22 73/13 information [23] 21/13 32/1 33/9 34/12 34/24 35/17 45/8 52/20 53/16 55/3 57/18 73/20 79/21 92/19 96/17 97/7 97/15 97/17 100/13 108/10 166/16 166/17 169/1 informed [1] 158/6 informing [1] 157/25 infrastructure [5] 29/14 70/22 72/15 82/12 128/8 inherent [1] 156/14 inherited [3] 3/16 60/25 78/20 initial [4] 48/24 49/9 104/3 160/10 initially [4] 2/8 84/12 127/22 136/20 initials [1] 119/18 initiative [1] 157/10 Initiatives [1] 3/14 Inquiry [33] 1/12 1/13 2/25 3/8 6/5 6/7 26/19 28/13 33/5 34/13 36/3 44/10 52/18 55/13 56/6 77/6 84/5 84/19 86/5 94/2 99/14 100/5 110/1 112/24 114/10 117/21 124/9 142/12 149/22 164/1 169/15 170/3 170/6 Inquiry's [6] 27/21 33/14 63/13 76/12 79/5 88/25 inseparably [1] 114/21 insist [1] 107/8 insisted [2] 29/2 79/11 insisting [2] 86/21 86/23	insofar [1] 129/2 installation [1] 72/22 instance [2] 54/6 54/10 instances [1] 53/4 instead [2] 29/24 56/16 institute [2] 49/3 104/7 insufficient [2] 134/11 134/16 integrates [2] 21/23 22/11 integrity [12] 23/24 24/5 26/12 26/24 27/9 27/10 27/22 28/6 30/21 58/22 87/20 88/17 intended [5] 9/2 53/6 85/4 106/5 151/22 inter [3] 34/10 34/10 138/21 inter-ministerial [2] 34/10 138/21 interdepartmental [4] 26/20 49/21 125/11 137/17 interest [5] 2/25 119/3 128/23 144/11 145/12 interested [3] 22/9 56/20 122/10 interesting [4] 34/23 99/13 112/24 113/7 interests [17] 4/14 13/15 33/7 48/7 48/11 57/14 64/9 64/14 70/16 82/18 118/25 120/24 121/13 125/20 133/21 156/24 157/20 interlinked [1] 114/21 internal [5] 110/20 122/2 122/4 154/14 163/21 internally [1] 10/9 international [1] 154/14 internecine [1] 63/15 internet [1] 73/19 internet/intranet [1] 73/19 interrupt [1] 86/25 interrupting [1] 8/23 intervention [3] 125/9 151/9 155/24 interviewed [1] 13/22 intimidating [1] 42/13 into [29] 2/5 7/5 7/5 13/16 17/19 17/21 30/16 32/10 33/5 33/11 39/15 40/1 42/21 52/3 67/2 86/15	87/21 89/4 90/14 96/24 100/5 100/10 104/12 104/20 106/12 131/3 131/17 136/15 157/2 intranet [1] 73/19 intriguing [1] 55/19 introduce [1] 167/10 introduced [2] 90/24 91/3 introducing [1] 146/14 introduction [3] 92/10 92/14 168/22 invested [2] 86/8 155/16 investigating [1] 127/5 investigation [4] 1/14 98/2 126/3 169/9 investigations [7] 13/24 96/4 96/6 96/15 97/13 97/16 169/4 investigators [1] 13/22 investment [14] 7/4 7/5 13/16 27/5 29/21 65/7 76/23 85/15 128/16 134/3 147/20 156/10 156/13 162/12 investments [2] 81/25 82/6 invited [1] 125/19 involve [3] 75/7 80/20 102/13 involved [14] 4/7 4/10 9/9 43/13 59/17 88/1 114/15 118/8 126/3 143/22 143/24 150/6 158/4 167/1 involvement [7] 7/23 9/3 9/4 10/6 61/23 111/3 114/7 involving [2] 44/2 85/18 inward [6] 7/5 13/16 85/15 134/3 156/10 156/12 Ireland [1] 21/5 is [313] is' [1] 139/2 isn't [2] 80/6 124/18 issue [27] 9/21 9/25 10/10 19/3 19/18 23/7 35/22 40/9 53/23 72/1 72/5 79/16 79/22 83/14 85/18 85/22 88/22 91/16 99/9 103/5 105/2 114/5 115/16 127/3 130/10 136/24 157/4 issued [1] 98/21 issues [39] 3/8 6/6 9/1 9/14 10/13 24/21	26/24 27/8 30/11 31/18 31/22 35/23 35/24 36/4 54/25 58/8 58/21 59/14 69/11 69/12 70/6 81/9 89/9 91/12 104/16 116/14 124/13 127/24 129/20 131/16 131/24 133/5 136/5 139/6 140/17 145/17 158/12 162/22 163/23 it [396] it's [70] 13/3 15/22 16/5 16/17 17/1 17/15 17/15 22/8 30/25 31/24 35/5 37/23 41/10 41/15 41/21 47/25 48/2 50/2 52/15 53/22 57/6 58/20 59/22 63/12 64/1 65/3 71/1 73/8 74/6 74/6 74/20 79/10 79/19 80/3 80/9 81/16 83/5 83/6 90/22 95/24 97/5 97/18 99/9 99/9 100/15 102/21 114/10 114/25 117/2 127/16 127/18 130/4 130/24 136/12 137/25 138/14 140/16 140/20 142/11 144/10 146/4 152/18 156/16 156/25 158/23 159/5 162/10 166/12 167/21 168/24 italics [1] 26/19 items [2] 49/1 104/5 iteration [1] 65/13 its [35] 4/1 5/2 14/18 15/22 16/11 28/8 28/18 42/22 47/2 64/21 68/20 82/21 86/2 87/20 88/8 88/16 96/14 103/8 120/10 121/10 126/12 126/13 127/2 127/21 127/21 132/8 132/24 134/1 134/4 134/12 134/17 135/7 144/2 149/13 149/24 itself [4] 6/1 18/3 64/5 113/17
J				
Jack [1] 37/8 January [1] 92/6 Japan [6] 85/15 151/9 151/14 154/8 154/10 155/25 Japanese [2] 155/15 156/12 Jason [1] 1/11 Jason Beer [1] 1/11 Jeremy [1] 138/4 Jeremy Crump [1]				

J	Keith [3] 50/12 62/22 68/17	168/15	99/19 108/14 150/23	linked [3] 67/20 71/4 85/19
Jeremy Crump... [1] 138/4	Keith Todd [3] 50/12 62/22 68/17	largely [4] 137/4 137/7 155/22 157/11	letter [64] 10/25 37/3 38/6 40/17 46/1 46/2 46/18 47/25 48/19 48/23 49/24 50/5 50/10 50/16 51/13 57/6 62/22 62/25 63/1 63/7 63/25 68/8 68/14 68/16 68/21 71/3 74/25 75/1 81/8 82/24 83/21 84/10 89/13 89/25 91/24 92/1 92/4 101/18 104/2 119/14 119/17 119/22 120/3 120/13 120/19 121/8 125/7 138/17 140/15 146/21 147/4 147/8 147/21 152/7 152/10 152/11 152/12 152/15 152/20 154/19 154/21 156/5 156/22 157/8	linking [1] 97/15
job [4] 2/16 16/3 37/13 156/13	Kelly [1] 91/20	larger [1] 80/23	letters [3] 69/23 104/18 150/5	links [1] 71/14
jobs [1] 155/9	Kelsey [1] 146/6	largest [2] 16/10 109/18	level [26] 14/8 14/12 14/16 22/19 25/10 25/15 28/15 30/16 33/21 43/6 58/20 70/1 79/9 82/16 86/1 99/2 99/11 106/12 119/7 128/4 130/4 139/22 150/6 161/11 163/22 165/6	list [4] 9/6 59/21 164/15 164/16
John [1] 1/16	kept [2] 158/6 158/11	last [21] 26/2 26/3 36/15 37/4 45/16 47/16 49/12 65/13 68/23 72/25 73/3 73/10 82/11 90/18 100/20 102/13 105/2 110/15 110/19 138/22 141/18	levels [5] 24/16 29/14 73/22 73/24 128/8	listed [4] 21/3 49/1 104/5 138/1
Johnson [2] 8/15 10/16	key [7] 32/22 38/12 85/17 129/20 142/15 147/6 165/12	lastly [2] 45/12 87/16	life [4] 26/6 97/5 140/6 141/22	listen [1] 95/6
joined [2] 110/5 115/14	kind [8] 15/8 16/5 47/20 74/2 114/5 126/16 127/21 143/11	late [3] 115/20 117/13 141/20	lift [1] 34/4	listening [2] 107/16 107/17
joining [1] 85/21	knew [4] 23/3 35/10 98/4 129/24	later [14] 28/20 43/14 68/8 68/15 91/23 99/6 100/6 100/22 110/25 114/25 116/20 118/2 131/11 143/8	light [2] 94/4 166/14	literally [1] 8/25
joint [2] 138/10 146/13	knock [2] 59/2 59/3	law [2] 39/10 51/14	like [34] 4/24 33/12 42/18 43/15 46/17 48/17 52/15 53/11 54/1 73/12 74/18 77/20 102/12 105/2 110/2 113/25 119/10 126/22 129/9 129/11 136/5 137/15 141/2 144/13 144/15 145/24 155/23 157/25 162/21 167/2 167/13 169/15 169/20 170/2	litigation [4] 31/15 76/25 87/17 134/2
jointly [2] 144/24 145/8	knocked [4] 42/4 42/9 42/23 42/25	lawyer [3] 113/24 138/10 146/14	limited [15] 11/18 11/22 12/3 35/23 67/6 79/8 79/8 118/22 128/11 137/6 137/13 144/25 150/15 154/5 166/7	little [10] 8/9 27/19 80/7 102/15 116/20 118/5 135/2 152/4 152/20 154/16
Jonathan [1] 138/5	know [81] 5/19 11/18 12/15 13/21 14/13 14/14 15/13 15/16 15/23 21/7 21/17 32/21 32/24 34/23 34/24 36/3 37/14 38/9 39/21 48/1 53/21 55/8 63/23 73/3 76/2 76/13 77/2 78/16 84/20 85/18 86/7 87/2 88/20 89/7 91/3 98/2 98/13 100/16 100/21 102/21 108/10 109/25 111/24 112/23 113/12 113/12 113/24 115/8 116/11 121/8 122/21 124/8 124/19 126/15 126/18 127/3 127/8 127/14 130/3 132/21 133/4 133/7 133/10 136/16 142/13 142/20 143/20 143/21 144/10 145/12 145/20 149/18 156/3 157/3 157/7 157/18 162/22 163/14 163/16 168/19 168/23	lay [2] 145/6 150/12	limit [1] 32/19	lived [4] 21/3 49/1 104/5 138/1
judge [2] 46/13 142/14	knowing [1] 53/10	laying [2] 48/3 48/4	limits [1] 32/20	live [28] 20/6 20/7 29/3 31/3 68/3 71/15 71/24 75/10 76/10 77/22 78/22 86/23 130/1 143/18 159/11 160/23 161/8 161/14 161/18 161/22 162/4 162/6 162/8 162/11 163/11 165/20 169/8 169/9
July [7] 2/12 3/1 15/22 15/24 19/25 27/23 82/3	knowledge [14] 1/24 12/22 14/10 20/24 21/9 28/5 35/1 36/7 73/6 97/24 109/12 109/22 169/7 169/11	LDP [1] 154/9	lines [2] 48/6 164/12	list [4] 9/6 59/21 164/15 164/16
July 1998 [3] 3/1 15/22 27/23	known [7] 98/6 106/22 125/11 149/20 160/17 161/7 165/23	lead [8] 5/6 5/9 73/24 112/12 118/18 119/23 125/6 154/14	link [1] 126/14	listen [1] 95/6
June [5] 2/20 3/3 6/3 13/19 14/1	knows [1] 108/9	least [7] 13/21 44/11 52/18 53/6 136/8 136/9 149/21		listening [2] 107/16 107/17
June 2001 [3] 3/3 6/3 13/19	L	leave [1] 56/16		literally [1] 8/25
junior [3] 8/10 98/22 99/4	laboratory [1] 75/9	leaving [2] 101/2 110/21		litigation [4] 31/15 76/25 87/17 134/2
just [80] 2/22 3/23 6/14 8/23 16/13 17/14 17/18 17/20 18/19 21/2 21/17 22/21 24/8 32/16 33/21 37/1 37/2 38/5 39/20 41/12 42/22 45/25 47/4 47/21 48/2 50/10 50/15 52/15 53/3 54/17 56/5 56/20 57/16 57/23 59/7 60/22 62/18 62/22 63/25 64/13 66/9 68/13 71/25 73/1 75/4 80/2 80/7 80/9 83/25 87/4 94/21 95/22 96/8 96/9 100/11 100/22 102/15 103/22 105/2 110/2 113/15 121/8 122/1 124/16 126/16 129/13 129/16 132/2 137/8 142/4 142/11 143/14 144/4 144/10 150/20 153/22 162/25 163/2 168/17 169/20	Labour [1] 2/4	led [5] 3/19 5/23 30/13 42/10 154/8		little [10] 8/9 27/19 80/7 102/15 116/20 118/5 135/2 152/4 152/20 154/16
justified [1] 66/6	laid [4] 98/19 106/18 145/18 167/25	left [4] 20/10 100/15 138/1 157/25		live [28] 20/6 20/7 29/3 31/3 68/3 71/15 71/24 75/10 76/10 77/22 78/22 86/23 130/1 143/18 159/11 160/23 161/8 161/14 161/18 161/22 162/4 162/6 162/8 162/11 163/11 165/20 169/8 169/9
justify [1] 149/24	Lancaster [1] 37/10	left-hand [1] 138/1		liabilities [1] 75/20
K	large [8] 95/18 112/14 112/17 113/6 113/23 131/9 160/13	legal [8] 12/2 40/9 47/12 51/2 51/16 150/20 150/22 169/15		loans [2] 139/21 153/3
keen [3] 43/23 50/25 71/24		legally [2] 69/6 70/9		Local [1] 2/21
keep [1] 141/16		legitimately [1] 121/2		log [1] 73/23
keeping [1] 58/12		length [2] 56/13 112/1		log-on [1] 73/23
		less [3] 19/4 90/16 141/10		logical [3] 30/20 132/13 132/14
		lesser [1] 56/10		long [11] 35/5 50/23 79/11 80/11 113/9 113/10 113/16 113/17 113/17 115/3 168/4
		lessons [1] 96/23		long term [2] 115/3 168/4
		let [2] 53/20 140/2		long-term [1] 50/23
		let's [5] 55/20 97/24		longer [11] 29/20 82/10 92/13 92/16 115/18 128/16 131/11 132/25 162/18 167/14 167/15
				look [35] 15/20 17/14 17/17 20/18 20/19 24/8 25/18 26/16 26/17 29/8 36/14 37/2 38/5 41/12 45/23 48/9 48/14 56/23 57/16 62/17 72/13 72/15 74/24 80/1 80/2 84/7 85/10 89/11 90/11 97/24 101/24 103/22 116/24 126/19 129/13
				looking [27] 5/24 7/21 8/22 18/6 18/11

L	make [27] 42/20 51/12 53/13 54/24 61/4 62/19 63/4 64/10 68/3 75/22 78/22 83/20 85/11 86/23 93/21 94/20 120/11 141/22 144/6 145/12 149/3 150/7 154/22 154/24 156/19 166/11 167/11	77/13 100/20 matters [9] 14/11 14/16 51/18 51/22 88/9 96/17 98/5 100/15 112/8 may [55] 2/6 5/11 5/12 7/2 8/9 8/25 17/9 29/20 32/2 33/5 36/3 40/3 40/4 49/6 54/2 59/12 72/8 77/7 78/13 78/24 79/7 79/15 79/25 80/8 80/19 80/22 85/1 87/22 88/4 93/5 94/16 94/21 95/8 95/9 97/20 99/15 100/4 101/4 101/15 101/22 103/16 104/10 105/10 110/2 113/12 115/21 118/1 128/15 129/21 129/23 140/17 143/7 150/14 167/5 169/17	162/2 measures [2] 49/2 104/6 mechanism [1] 9/16 mechanisms [1] 86/17 meet [6] 39/7 88/12 139/15 146/25 148/19 164/23 meeting [15] 7/24 10/23 11/6 47/17 88/8 89/1 105/23 138/21 138/23 145/7 151/15 152/3 152/17 154/18 164/8 meetings [6] 11/3 12/8 12/12 14/19 68/19 105/19 meets [2] 21/22 22/11 member [4] 31/21 106/21 107/9 125/19 members [9] 7/16 11/9 21/2 32/5 88/17 94/24 133/25 138/1 138/18 memoire [2] 140/16 142/18 memorandum [4] 146/13 146/16 146/20 147/4 memory [7] 117/22 124/5 129/6 132/15 143/19 143/20 167/22	mid-November [1] 137/17 midday [1] 58/6 middle [2] 43/14 87/11 midnight [1] 80/19 might [17] 23/22 40/23 52/12 53/6 53/12 58/23 67/1 92/12 113/2 113/21 116/24 126/22 136/20 145/9 160/19 163/22 170/1 migrate [1] 46/19 milestone [5] 38/12 118/12 141/19 165/12 165/16 milestones [3] 117/23 141/17 145/7 Military [1] 73/22 million [24] 65/8 65/18 65/25 70/15 70/19 71/4 75/18 81/25 82/4 82/10 83/9 83/10 83/24 140/5 140/7 140/10 152/24 152/25 153/1 153/4 153/6 161/16 166/1 166/10 millions [3] 27/4 64/6 76/22 mind [7] 19/23 19/24 27/15 28/10 52/15 78/8 167/21 minimising [1] 49/15 minimum [2] 48/24 104/3 minister [30] 2/8 6/19 6/22 6/23 8/10 8/12 8/16 8/21 10/5 10/12 10/13 37/8 37/9 37/16 54/19 89/20 89/22 91/21 93/6 96/19 97/6 97/19 98/22 98/24 99/5 100/23 101/2 119/14 120/4 125/8 Minister's [3] 89/14 91/24 110/17 ministerial [11] 6/15 9/15 12/15 15/14 34/10 56/6 80/12 100/21 116/4 116/10 138/21 ministers [46] 15/7 29/2 31/25 32/22 33/19 34/6 34/14 36/18 38/9 43/4 43/7 44/14 55/14 66/8 68/25 78/5 79/2 82/13 86/17 88/1 88/3 88/14 93/14 93/17 94/6 94/13 94/15 94/17 94/23 94/24 95/5
looking... [22] 22/21 29/10 29/11 29/24 29/25 48/7 48/10 56/24 60/16 63/3 66/16 71/23 77/13 88/22 97/14 98/13 106/23 115/15 133/19 141/10 143/1 162/25	makes [2] 112/9 156/23 making [11] 33/14 34/13 36/8 64/5 87/21 133/2 137/14 141/16 144/10 154/6 162/19	May 1999 [7] 78/13 79/7 79/15 79/25 87/22 93/5 167/5 McCartney [6] 8/14 9/7 12/16 37/16 43/8 78/25 McCorkell [4] 125/5 138/6 146/5 149/15	me [36] 1/3 9/6 9/9 10/16 18/2 18/4 39/3 56/20 61/7 61/14 65/5 80/10 87/3 89/3 89/9 89/15 93/4 99/12 100/4 107/25 108/10 108/19 116/25 124/16 124/18 129/11 135/1 137/21 146/21 149/17 151/4 152/7 152/7 155/8 163/9 170/7	memorandum [4] 146/13 146/16 146/20 147/4 memory [7] 117/22 124/5 129/6 132/15 143/19 143/20 167/22
looks [1] 116/13 loop [1] 60/8 Lord [1] 84/5 Lord Darling's [1] 84/5 lose [2] 64/6 156/14 losing [2] 85/9 153/4 loss [4] 39/24 65/24 86/3 153/5 losses [2] 93/22 156/13 lost [3] 48/11 63/15 124/11 lot [4] 23/22 64/7 114/1 114/2 low [2] 25/25 79/9 lower [2] 99/2 138/14 luck [1] 55/1 lukewarm [1] 48/3 lumbering [1] 135/21 lumpy [1] 83/18 lunchtime [1] 108/7	managed [5] 22/20 72/19 94/9 128/5 159/2 management [14] 58/8 73/20 73/21 73/22 101/14 102/1 102/3 102/16 104/23 105/7 131/14 132/1 155/12 164/25 managerial [1] 22/1 managers [2] 95/19 168/16 managing [2] 102/18 135/15 Mandelson [10] 2/15 37/12 42/19 43/17 48/14 100/24 101/18 101/23 103/23 104/13 manifest [1] 157/17 manner [2] 135/17 147/13 Manual [2] 56/7 56/9 manufacturers [1] 85/20 many [17] 24/23 75/19 94/23 99/6 101/14 108/1 108/2 113/1 123/17 127/15 127/15 131/13 134/6 148/20 156/19 160/7 170/7	mean [40] 6/21 7/17 8/4 8/25 9/10 19/20 19/20 23/1 23/23 24/2 24/3 24/4 26/2 27/13 33/24 34/12 36/10 39/20 39/21 55/6 67/21 69/20 76/6 76/8 96/22 99/13 99/18 99/18 99/21 105/11 115/18 116/22 120/21 122/16 126/1 126/2 126/6 145/7 146/11 156/17 meaning [3] 23/22 30/5 44/10 means [6] 10/20 23/8 48/1 97/7 129/14 142/25 meant [10] 27/4 28/18 66/15 76/21 117/15 117/18 118/13 126/25 155/3 157/23 meantime [2] 59/13	men [1] 44/6 mention [1] 132/2 mentioned [11] 31/6 35/24 51/9 60/13 72/1 114/6 116/4 127/4 133/12 144/25 169/7 mentioning [2] 47/21 93/18 Mentors [9] 118/4 143/7 144/25 145/20 146/8 147/6 147/21 153/23 165/2 Mentors' [1] 145/2 menu [1] 72/22 menus [1] 73/25 merit [1] 82/15 merits [1] 159/6 mess [1] 20/3 met [5] 37/24 88/24 141/20 149/3 149/11 method [2] 81/18 167/12 Microsoft [1] 72/17 Microsoft NT [1] 72/17 mid [3] 112/15 137/17 160/11 mid-1980s [1] 112/15 mid-December [1] 160/11	
M	machines [1] 113/13 made [33] 5/24 16/21 17/1 23/12 28/12 39/14 39/24 45/16 57/25 59/13 67/18 76/15 76/19 79/23 79/24 80/17 84/2 84/2 85/24 94/3 95/9 107/1 107/8 122/7 126/20 135/14 136/16 143/10 144/9 148/5 160/16 163/3 166/18 Magistrates [1] 13/23 magstripe [1] 72/21 Mail [1] 97/25 main [15] 3/9 3/10 4/11 6/8 24/21 29/15 46/12 58/16 66/2 90/7 125/4 128/9 129/19 139/6 167/7 Majesty's [7] 138/2 153/8 155/15 157/12 163/19 164/3 165/7 major [10] 25/3 50/23 60/24 64/11 117/22 154/14 154/23 160/13 160/25 161/11 majority [2] 133/10 133/25	March [7] 13/22 88/25 92/7 105/17 157/10 160/16 165/25 March 1999 [2] 157/10 165/25 March 2000 [1] 88/25 March 2001 [1] 13/22 market [1] 4/24 markets [2] 29/17 128/12 matchmaker [1] 43/20 matter [4] 18/1 54/5	memory [7] 117/22 124/5 129/6 132/15 143/19 143/20 167/22 men [1] 44/6 mention [1] 132/2 mentioned [11] 31/6 35/24 51/9 60/13 72/1 114/6 116/4 127/4 133/12 144/25 169/7 mentioning [2] 47/21 93/18 Mentors [9] 118/4 143/7 144/25 145/20 146/8 147/6 147/21 153/23 165/2 Mentors' [1] 145/2 menu [1] 72/22 menus [1] 73/25 merit [1] 82/15 merits [1] 159/6 mess [1] 20/3 met [5] 37/24 88/24 141/20 149/3 149/11 method [2] 81/18 167/12 Microsoft [1] 72/17 Microsoft NT [1] 72/17 mid [3] 112/15 137/17 160/11 mid-1980s [1] 112/15 mid-December [1] 160/11	mind [7] 19/23 19/24 27/15 28/10 52/15 78/8 167/21 minimising [1] 49/15 minimum [2] 48/24 104/3 minister [30] 2/8 6/19 6/22 6/23 8/10 8/12 8/16 8/21 10/5 10/12 10/13 37/8 37/9 37/16 54/19 89/20 89/22 91/21 93/6 96/19 97/6 97/19 98/22 98/24 99/5 100/23 101/2 119/14 120/4 125/8 Minister's [3] 89/14 91/24 110/17 ministerial [11] 6/15 9/15 12/15 15/14 34/10 56/6 80/12 100/21 116/4 116/10 138/21 ministers [46] 15/7 29/2 31/25 32/22 33/19 34/6 34/14 36/18 38/9 43/4 43/7 44/14 55/14 66/8 68/25 78/5 79/2 82/13 86/17 88/1 88/3 88/14 93/14 93/17 94/6 94/13 94/15 94/17 94/23 94/24 95/5

<p>M</p> <p>ministers... [15] 112/6 125/17 130/12 130/19 138/25 139/7 156/13 156/20 156/25 158/11 159/7 163/17 163/21 163/25 168/20</p> <p>Ministers' [1] 139/15</p> <p>Ministry [1] 21/13</p> <p>minor [1] 85/23</p> <p>minute [2] 14/23 14/24</p> <p>minutes [7] 12/12 12/18 14/18 87/1 93/15 150/16 150/23</p> <p>mirrored [1] 137/4</p> <p>missed [4] 79/19 117/23 118/13 165/11</p> <p>missing [1] 118/23</p> <p>mistakes [1] 71/19</p> <p>mistresses [6] 13/25 14/3 86/8 95/19 168/16 168/21</p> <p>misunderstanding [1] 39/14</p> <p>misunderstandings [1] 49/16</p> <p>misunderstood [1] 96/19</p> <p>mixture [1] 142/5</p> <p>Mm [2] 47/22 105/20</p> <p>model [11] 130/1 143/5 143/17 154/10 159/24 160/4 160/6 160/19 161/1 163/1 165/16</p> <p>modern [3] 76/5 81/7 160/16</p> <p>modernisation [2] 74/16 154/4</p> <p>modernising [3] 74/17 74/23 133/2</p> <p>modest [1] 161/3</p> <p>modular [1] 25/7</p> <p>moment [10] 7/2 16/13 22/21 23/16 28/2 35/24 52/13 87/2 87/9 99/12</p> <p>Monday [1] 83/3</p> <p>money [9] 43/25 46/9 46/15 82/4 83/13 83/19 86/9 116/17 162/20</p> <p>monitor [2] 49/4 104/8</p> <p>monitoring [1] 22/6</p> <p>monopoly [1] 7/20</p> <p>Montague [28] 3/20 15/20 16/16 16/21 17/6 17/9 19/15 19/22 20/23 20/24 23/19 24/2 27/7 27/11 27/23 28/7 28/12 28/23 29/7</p>	<p>30/4 30/7 30/15 31/17 34/22 36/14 41/8 56/25 127/7</p> <p>Montague's [1] 36/9</p> <p>month [13] 3/7 38/18 38/20 44/14 48/24 49/7 51/2 51/10 57/9 58/5 104/3 104/11 160/1</p> <p>monthly [3] 10/23 64/6 92/7</p> <p>months [9] 2/11 2/14 52/25 53/1 90/18 92/5 141/20 160/12 165/17</p> <p>more [58] 4/23 4/24 4/24 6/20 6/24 7/12 7/22 8/1 8/22 9/2 9/4 9/10 10/14 18/16 20/18 29/21 33/21 35/24 41/10 46/5 46/24 48/18 50/1 55/18 55/19 60/16 78/1 78/18 82/9 95/8 95/12 98/22 99/4 102/7 102/8 102/15 102/25 103/1 114/4 115/19 116/9 118/5 126/15 128/16 128/25 129/7 133/1 133/2 135/16 136/3 140/10 141/10 142/2 143/23 152/20 154/7 155/21 162/20</p> <p>morning [9] 1/3 1/9 1/10 31/6 56/2 84/16 95/13 95/23 170/10</p> <p>most [6] 2/25 90/15 123/18 123/22 142/5 164/21</p> <p>mostly [1] 110/9</p> <p>move [13] 36/13 63/5 65/5 68/7 71/3 81/10 81/15 90/8 94/25 100/2 103/17 118/10 139/14</p> <p>move' [1] 64/10</p> <p>moved [6] 8/14 13/11 78/17 79/25 93/13 115/9</p> <p>moving [7] 4/4 4/16 66/8 105/11 115/3 129/4 157/10</p> <p>MR [55] 1/8 1/9 6/15 12/16 13/5 35/7 43/8 52/14 52/16 52/18 53/22 56/12 56/14 56/19 56/20 56/25 59/1 59/18 61/12 71/3 72/14 74/5 75/3 76/5 78/6 86/25 87/11 93/19 95/11 95/17 95/18 95/23 96/4 96/10 100/24 100/24 101/10 101/18 101/23</p>	<p>103/4 103/23 104/13 107/24 107/25 108/6 151/16 152/21 153/7 154/12 154/18 154/22 168/14 171/5 171/7 171/15</p> <p>Mr Beer [14] 52/14 53/22 56/19 59/18 71/3 74/5 78/6 86/25 87/11 95/23 96/4 96/10 107/24 108/6</p> <p>Mr Byers [14] 1/9 6/15 13/5 35/7 52/16 52/18 56/14 56/20 56/25 93/19 95/11 95/18 101/10 107/25</p> <p>Mr Byers' [1] 56/12</p> <p>Mr Corbett [1] 61/12</p> <p>Mr Corbett's [1] 59/1</p> <p>Mr Darling [2] 100/24 103/4</p> <p>Mr Mandelson [5] 100/24 101/18 101/23 103/23 104/13</p> <p>Mr McCartney [2] 12/16 43/8</p> <p>Mr Naruto [3] 151/16 152/21 154/18</p> <p>Mr Naruto's [1] 154/22</p> <p>Mr Todd [3] 72/14 75/3 76/5</p> <p>MS [7] 101/9 108/9 108/23 150/20 170/10 171/9 171/13</p> <p>Ms Hodge [3] 108/9 150/20 170/10</p> <p>much [36] 4/25 6/19 8/22 34/12 35/21 41/24 55/19 55/22 56/22 60/16 61/4 73/14 85/24 87/12 87/15 95/11 102/3 102/8 103/1 105/3 108/15 109/24 130/17 131/11 135/6 135/14 136/3 141/22 142/2 148/9 168/11 169/18 169/25 170/1 170/8 170/13</p> <p>Mulgan [1] 138/5</p> <p>Mullen [1] 138/17</p> <p>multiple [1] 77/8</p> <p>must [11] 22/17 24/14 35/10 38/1 39/7 39/9 39/11 41/9 51/14 53/4 128/2</p> <p>mute [1] 107/23</p> <p>mutually [1] 155/14</p> <p>my [71] 3/11 10/6 11/11 12/25 13/6 13/8 13/17 17/8 18/2 18/4 19/22 20/6 23/13 25/15 33/25 35/14</p>	<p>41/18 43/14 44/10 45/25 47/19 48/23 52/15 61/14 61/16 65/2 65/4 65/4 68/11 68/16 80/12 81/3 81/14 84/25 89/6 89/11 89/16 89/20 92/4 93/16 94/2 96/16 97/3 97/5 101/10 101/13 103/19 104/2 104/16 107/20 110/19 111/12 112/22 117/15 117/21 117/25 118/21 122/24 123/24 124/5 125/4 127/11 127/13 129/6 145/4 146/16 146/19 152/14 168/11 169/11 169/20</p> <p>myself [3] 11/6 55/14 151/6</p>	<p>161/11</p> <p>needn't [1] 84/7</p> <p>needs [11] 5/19 7/24 77/17 81/19 103/8 103/10 106/10 140/9 148/19 149/3 149/10</p> <p>negative [1] 135/24</p> <p>negotiate [1] 58/1</p> <p>negotiated [1] 139/4</p> <p>negotiating [2] 47/3 69/18</p> <p>negotiation [4] 38/1 49/10 51/20 66/12</p> <p>negotiations [12] 46/15 47/13 51/23 136/18 136/23 141/21 151/10 156/1 157/11 158/3 158/9 167/1</p> <p>net [2] 92/4 92/8</p> <p>network [22] 4/19 8/2 8/5 13/16 72/19 78/10 81/6 82/21 86/7 90/10 99/23 103/9 103/18 106/10 106/11 106/13 106/19 106/21 106/25 107/11 107/16 120/9</p> <p>neutral [4] 36/16 36/24 41/1 57/2</p> <p>never [6] 71/23 78/6 89/9 91/18 92/24 113/23</p> <p>new [28] 7/24 16/3 23/4 29/17 29/17 31/21 31/25 32/5 33/10 53/20 73/17 78/9 78/21 82/9 92/10 93/5 105/12 106/23 113/25 123/15 128/11 128/13 139/21 159/24 160/7 160/18 160/20 161/11</p> <p>Newcastle [1] 113/14</p> <p>next [10] 34/17 57/24 80/2 81/23 83/2 95/4 107/2 108/21 112/2 160/4</p> <p>next week [1] 107/2</p> <p>NFSP [3] 105/19 105/25 107/3</p> <p>NFSP0000058 [1] 105/16</p> <p>NHS [1] 111/25</p> <p>nightmare [1] 84/18</p> <p>nine [4] 53/1 68/8 68/14 92/5</p> <p>nine days [2] 68/8 68/14</p> <p>nine months [1] 92/5</p> <p>NIRS2 [3] 75/14 75/16 129/25</p> <p>Nissan [1] 85/20</p> <p>no [77] 5/14 7/13 10/22 11/25 11/25 12/1 12/7 12/14 14/5</p>
---	---	---	---	--

<p>N</p> <p>no... [68] 14/9 14/15 17/24 17/25 21/1 24/25 25/13 26/13 33/17 34/8 34/17 34/18 36/10 36/12 39/12 40/9 41/12 42/24 45/10 51/17 52/1 58/4 59/22 61/21 62/7 62/9 65/4 72/12 76/3 78/4 81/16 82/8 84/6 85/4 85/10 89/3 89/4 91/18 93/16 96/7 96/16 98/3 98/7 100/15 101/7 101/7 103/14 104/15 114/9 123/3 129/5 129/11 137/15 141/15 146/11 148/5 149/16 150/2 151/25 153/22 159/13 161/2 161/11 162/17 163/20 169/6 169/18 169/18</p> <p>nominated [2] 7/16 7/17</p> <p>non [2] 106/8 107/8</p> <p>non-executive [1] 106/8</p> <p>none [1] 28/19</p> <p>nonetheless [1] 127/2</p> <p>nor [2] 167/17 168/7</p> <p>normal [2] 143/11 148/6</p> <p>North [1] 89/7</p> <p>North Tyneside [1] 89/7</p> <p>Northern [1] 21/5</p> <p>not [144] 4/14 4/19 5/17 11/14 12/16 12/25 17/9 17/12 18/7 19/3 20/13 20/17 24/3 28/14 28/23 29/5 30/21 30/22 31/25 32/1 32/9 32/14 32/16 32/25 33/8 33/13 39/18 40/6 42/12 43/25 44/9 50/7 51/19 54/17 57/15 61/5 63/1 63/20 64/1 67/20 68/2 68/5 69/16 70/12 72/4 72/11 73/4 73/11 73/14 75/7 75/15 75/16 75/21 75/23 76/10 76/13 77/5 77/25 79/12 79/24 80/22 81/15 82/17 85/21 91/9 92/22 96/22 96/24 97/11 98/25 99/13 100/14 101/14 102/18 106/7 106/11 106/12 107/16 107/16 108/10 113/4</p>	<p>115/16 115/17 115/20 117/18 118/25 119/1 119/24 120/11 122/4 122/21 124/6 124/15 124/18 124/19 129/1 129/10 132/19 133/12 133/22 134/19 135/20 138/23 139/8 139/14 139/20 141/20 142/4 143/5 143/11 144/3 144/10 145/16 145/16 145/17 146/8 147/17 148/18 149/6 149/11 149/17 149/18 152/16 153/8 153/10 154/5 154/6 154/24 154/24 155/7 157/4 158/2 160/25 162/4 162/21 163/20 165/25 166/16 166/22 167/15 168/6 168/25 169/6 169/11</p> <p>note [6] 42/18 89/1 90/4 101/3 122/8 139/6</p> <p>noted [1] 122/1</p> <p>notes [2] 101/2 101/6</p> <p>nothing [2] 58/21 122/21</p> <p>notice [2] 98/9 104/25</p> <p>November [17] 1/1 13/23 64/14 111/4 114/15 115/14 117/25 118/13 118/24 137/17 138/13 141/18 141/25 142/10 165/14 165/24 170/16</p> <p>November 1997 [6] 111/4 114/15 115/14 117/25 118/24 165/14</p> <p>November 1998 [2] 142/10 165/24</p> <p>November 2001 [1] 13/23</p> <p>now [56] 5/17 12/24 13/15 14/24 16/13 17/1 28/12 30/2 33/9 33/14 35/6 41/16 45/20 46/5 52/12 53/21 54/10 55/20 61/11 67/22 68/4 68/14 68/23 74/2 77/2 77/2 77/13 79/22 84/23 85/6 87/12 87/25 89/11 90/2 91/1 92/5 96/18 97/13 97/24 99/6 99/18 110/1 121/21 129/12 135/1 135/11 139/2 140/5 143/14 147/9 150/17 153/14 155/4 165/1 166/1 168/24</p> <p>nowadays [1] 111/23</p> <p>NPV [1] 65/24</p>	<p>NR2 [2] 67/20 159/24</p> <p>NT [1] 72/17</p> <p>number [27] 15/4 20/14 23/17 24/17 26/22 39/7 53/4 55/9 68/19 77/5 86/12 90/2 91/15 93/1 95/18 99/22 100/20 101/11 131/24 133/4 138/5 150/15 150/21 156/17 161/3 168/12 168/16</p> <p>Number 10 [2] 20/14 138/5</p> <p>numbers [1] 160/13</p> <p>nutshell [1] 120/9</p> <hr/> <p>O</p> <p>objective [6] 44/13 48/23 53/10 59/11 104/2 132/25</p> <p>objectives [14] 4/15 5/5 5/7 5/10 5/22 44/12 63/23 120/10 120/14 123/8 132/21 132/22 133/2 141/14</p> <p>obligations [1] 69/8</p> <p>obtained [2] 124/9 164/1</p> <p>obvious [1] 5/21</p> <p>obviously [8] 3/15 4/6 5/9 53/6 66/20 74/19 144/9 144/11</p> <p>occasion [2] 17/23 32/21</p> <p>occasionally [1] 89/8</p> <p>occasions [2] 20/2 170/7</p> <p>occupied [1] 2/24</p> <p>occur [1] 78/24</p> <p>occurred [1] 93/22</p> <p>occurs [1] 25/11</p> <p>October [6] 38/16 57/6 57/8 58/6 109/3 141/18</p> <p>October 1998 [1] 38/16</p> <p>odd [1] 65/18</p> <p>off [9] 27/4 67/14 71/8 74/3 76/22 87/5 87/10 87/11 118/3</p> <p>offer [15] 30/21 65/3 66/2 66/5 68/23 80/18 80/20 80/22 81/2 81/4 81/15 83/5 83/7 106/25 136/8</p> <p>offering [1] 136/9</p> <p>offers [4] 46/15 50/23 81/5 81/11</p> <p>office [126] 4/13 4/17 4/18 4/23 6/11 6/13 6/16 7/3 7/8 7/10 7/19 7/20 8/2 8/11 8/13 8/17 8/19 9/1 10/11 10/17 10/18 11/16</p>	<p>11/18 11/19 11/22 12/2 12/13 13/16 13/22 14/7 14/12 15/9 15/25 35/15 37/9 37/19 48/25 50/24 54/14 54/15 54/19 55/5 55/9 56/14 58/2 58/12 78/10 79/7 79/13 80/9 81/4 81/14 81/20 82/1 82/14 82/20 86/7 87/25 89/16 90/3 90/13 91/25 93/7 96/25 97/25 99/20 99/23 100/7 101/12 101/13 101/14 101/25 102/12 103/8 103/17 104/4 105/7 105/9 106/7 106/9 106/11 106/16 106/20 107/4 114/3 118/21 118/22 119/2 119/4 120/8 128/10 130/1 132/20 133/21 134/1 135/21 135/23 137/6 137/10 137/13 138/4 138/6 138/11 143/5 143/9 143/17 145/3 153/17 154/5 157/12 157/14 157/19 157/24 159/25 160/4 160/6 160/16 160/20 161/1 161/5 163/1 164/3 165/17 168/2 168/23 169/3</p> <p>Office's [2] 132/24 150/10</p> <p>offices [10] 72/20 72/25 73/2 73/10 81/5 86/10 89/8 90/15 166/5 166/8</p> <p>official [5] 41/21 70/1 125/6 163/22 167/1</p> <p>officials [15] 12/17 14/23 15/1 15/9 15/11 18/2 18/4 53/15 66/24 69/15 69/22 70/25 125/16 138/2 165/7</p> <p>often [8] 6/22 9/21 10/4 43/21 44/4 94/12 96/19 136/12</p> <p>Oh [1] 106/2</p> <p>Okay [7] 21/8 21/18 37/23 47/6 96/7 97/23 108/15</p> <p>oldest [2] 98/1 113/12</p> <p>on [228]</p> <p>one [79] 3/11 4/7 5/17 12/3 13/21 14/14 16/22 17/11 22/9 28/10 29/11 31/17 31/24 32/9 34/5 34/9 35/20 36/15 38/20 44/14 46/17 48/8</p>	<p>48/24 51/2 51/10 52/16 53/5 53/5 54/12 55/1 56/25 57/20 58/1 60/13 60/17 60/22 66/6 75/3 78/16 86/4 86/14 87/18 88/8 90/19 93/20 96/22 96/22 99/12 100/20 101/2 102/21 103/14 104/3 109/18 112/22 113/7 113/22 115/25 116/8 117/23 121/9 121/13 121/22 122/13 122/19 122/22 123/8 125/23 126/10 129/20 137/15 142/21 143/15 149/21 160/1 162/19 166/4 166/12 167/25</p> <p>ones [1] 139/21</p> <p>ongoing [2] 88/10 151/9</p> <p>online [2] 29/19 128/15</p> <p>only [21] 15/13 19/16 25/13 52/22 60/17 66/6 80/18 80/24 108/9 113/5 121/8 131/10 139/20 141/12 142/25 159/2 161/3 161/9 166/2 166/4 166/6</p> <p>onto [4] 4/17 100/5 118/2 126/22</p> <p>open [1] 139/3</p> <p>opening [1] 51/8</p> <p>operate [3] 25/25 28/17 77/18</p> <p>operates [1] 52/22</p> <p>operating [3] 15/4 28/17 72/18</p> <p>operation [11] 28/20 28/25 30/16 39/4 51/7 79/6 88/17 92/25 96/10 96/14 112/4</p> <p>operational [10] 38/16 78/5 88/2 112/16 126/15 141/20 143/18 147/3 148/24 165/13</p> <p>operationally [1] 112/3</p> <p>opinion [3] 51/16 147/11 149/1</p> <p>opportunities [1] 88/14</p> <p>opportunity [4] 84/4 93/24 136/6 138/25</p> <p>opposed [2] 75/10 157/13</p> <p>option [16] 19/5 19/9 20/11 20/15 47/8 131/7 133/8 133/20 135/1 135/12 135/20 135/25 136/8 136/9</p>
--	--	---	--	--

O
option... [2] 139/1
 139/4
Option 1 [2] 131/7
 133/20
option 2 [4] 135/1
 135/12 135/20 136/8
options [13] 45/9
 46/13 85/10 130/13
 130/20 131/6 131/18
 132/6 133/12 134/22
 158/14 159/6 162/20
or [134] 5/22 7/12
 8/25 9/2 9/16 10/15
 10/16 10/23 11/4
 11/20 11/20 11/24
 12/9 12/16 14/7 14/14
 14/21 14/22 14/23
 15/10 15/23 16/23
 16/25 17/2 17/15
 17/16 17/21 19/7 19/9
 19/14 19/16 19/18
 19/20 21/9 23/22 24/3
 26/3 27/15 27/15
 28/17 28/21 29/22
 29/23 30/5 30/21
 31/14 31/19 32/6
 32/19 34/10 35/2
 35/16 35/20 35/23
 36/8 36/10 38/18
 42/12 43/25 49/23
 52/16 53/6 54/2 55/4
 55/14 55/21 56/10
 58/22 58/22 59/13
 62/6 63/8 65/4 66/18
 67/21 69/22 71/8
 72/11 73/4 74/3 77/9
 79/9 80/4 83/23 83/25
 87/1 88/17 88/18 91/7
 96/17 96/17 97/8
 100/13 101/5 104/13
 106/14 107/2 113/1
 113/10 115/16 118/21
 119/10 120/10 121/6
 121/9 124/11 124/13
 124/15 126/8 132/3
 139/2 139/4 142/4
 142/5 142/5 142/15
 143/5 144/13 145/16
 146/8 149/15 150/20
 157/3 157/24 159/24
 160/22 161/3 161/19
 162/19 162/19 163/18
 164/12 168/1 168/7
order [8] 51/23
 115/24 119/6 122/14
 125/20 145/5 167/11
 167/13
organisational [1]
 22/2
organised [1] 154/9
original [9] 116/21
 117/13 117/16 120/13

137/4 139/15 140/2
 142/20 145/2
originally [7] 38/15
 97/25 124/25 131/12
 134/20 140/1 165/19
other [38] 4/20 4/21
 5/12 9/16 13/24 14/14
 15/23 21/2 35/20 40/8
 40/10 45/6 51/18
 52/16 55/5 58/2 66/2
 77/2 83/23 86/4 106/5
 113/19 115/6 121/16
 122/17 131/16 132/19
 132/22 135/11 144/9
 149/6 149/8 156/24
 157/1 157/14 163/17
 163/21 163/23
others [8] 37/24
 59/16 105/6 116/9
 116/18 122/23 149/15
 150/6
others' [1] 163/24
otherwise [4] 82/5
 92/12 109/21 166/11
ought [2] 45/17 93/23
our [73] 1/14 22/16
 23/1 32/15 33/14
 33/25 34/13 36/10
 51/1 51/6 51/15 51/16
 51/19 55/20 59/11
 60/12 65/3 65/12 66/2
 66/24 68/23 69/2
 69/11 70/6 75/11 78/7
 87/9 91/18 95/24
 96/23 104/24 108/21
 113/6 113/20 114/3
 114/3 116/1 118/24
 118/25 119/6 121/2
 121/14 121/24 122/3
 122/9 123/18 128/1
 129/1 129/3 132/15
 132/21 141/2 144/11
 145/5 145/10 145/12
 145/16 147/9 148/4
 148/17 149/1 149/6
 150/2 150/3 150/9
 153/24 154/23 154/24
 155/18 160/17 161/1
 167/22 168/4
ourselves [1] 132/20
out [56] 16/24 17/4
 17/6 17/17 19/4 19/9
 19/10 19/15 19/20
 19/22 19/24 20/15
 31/9 42/14 44/12
 48/22 52/1 57/22 60/8
 60/18 66/4 66/11
 68/21 68/22 74/6 77/5
 80/15 83/20 90/4
 90/19 94/16 99/14
 100/3 101/3 104/1
 120/13 120/14 121/16
 125/24 130/22 135/13
 137/19 138/20 139/8

143/19 146/18 147/3
 147/18 147/25 148/13
 148/23 157/25 167/25
 168/7 168/22 169/3
outcome [4] 39/6
 39/18 46/14 61/2
outcomes [2] 79/11
 79/13
outfall [1] 56/25
outlay [1] 153/5
outlined [2] 40/8
 145/23
outlining [1] 152/8
outset [5] 39/17 72/1
 114/12 136/11 153/10
outside [1] 10/7
outstanding [1]
 38/23
outweighed [1]
 134/4
over [43] 9/13 18/18
 24/15 27/1 36/5 45/2
 49/19 52/24 57/10
 57/22 58/3 59/9 60/4
 65/21 67/15 70/15
 70/20 72/3 72/25 73/2
 73/10 77/15 83/20
 90/11 90/18 92/12
 92/16 100/24 101/3
 104/14 104/16 113/17
 115/21 140/6 140/13
 141/6 151/10 153/1
 153/15 155/20 156/1
 161/15 166/10
overall [11] 6/15 7/7
 7/19 8/18 13/6 37/18
 61/2 112/6 112/7
 112/8 157/21
overbudget [1] 64/2
overnight [1] 86/11
overpromoting [1]
 74/13
overrun [2] 111/16
 111/16
overruns [1] 117/14
overseas [1] 7/5
overseeing [1] 158/4
overseen [1] 160/14
oversight [6] 3/18
 9/13 9/17 11/20 15/10
 98/16
overview [3] 3/12
 6/23 7/3
own [9] 5/2 9/7 19/22
 19/24 35/15 86/9 97/1
 97/24 144/2
owned [1] 11/19

58/13
pace [1] 80/1
pack [1] 150/4
page [86] 1/20 3/23
 13/4 13/5 16/17 17/18
 18/18 20/19 21/3
 21/18 22/13 24/9
 24/10 24/15 26/17
 26/18 27/1 29/8 30/25
 36/14 37/4 37/4 37/5
 37/23 40/17 43/2 45/2
 47/16 49/19 56/24
 57/10 57/10 57/23
 57/24 58/3 58/17 59/9
 59/19 60/4 65/19
 65/21 67/15 67/15
 70/20 71/1 71/10
 71/12 75/4 76/18 80/2
 80/3 80/6 84/8 84/9
 90/11 90/12 101/9
 101/10 101/20 106/3
 106/3 109/8 109/14
 109/15 119/17 120/2
 120/18 123/13 127/18
 130/23 130/24 133/16
 137/23 138/16 140/14
 146/12 147/7 148/12
 148/16 151/21 152/4
 158/22 159/14 164/18
 171/2 171/9
page 1 [3] 37/5 37/23
 71/10
Page 11 [1] 24/9
page 12 [2] 26/17
 159/14
page 13 [1] 76/18
page 16 [1] 13/4
page 17 [1] 109/8
page 2 [5] 40/17
 71/12 101/20 109/14
 146/12
page 22 [1] 84/8
page 3 [10] 3/23
 17/18 22/13 29/8 37/4
 56/24 71/1 106/3
 127/18 147/7
page 34 [1] 84/9
page 4 [5] 36/14
 57/10 123/13 140/14
 148/16
page 5 [1] 16/17
page 6 [3] 20/19
 21/18 43/2
page 7 [2] 30/25
 130/23
page 8 [2] 133/16
 164/18
pages [4] 1/18 38/5
 76/7 109/6
pages 4 [1] 38/5
paid [2] 166/1 166/3
paint [1] 88/18
painted [1] 88/20
panel [10] 16/15

16/20 20/21 21/10
 21/20 126/19 127/4
 130/16 131/5 134/7
panel's [4] 127/18
 128/17 130/9 131/8
paper [19] 64/23
 69/14 69/15 70/24
 72/13 72/14 74/21
 76/4 76/6 124/15
 124/15 137/18 137/21
 138/19 140/15 140/25
 147/10 147/12 148/1
papers [17] 32/6
 33/22 33/24 42/8
 44/25 117/10 117/19
 117/20 117/24 129/23
 137/2 152/1 156/3
 156/7 156/10 157/22
 167/25
para [1] 155/10
para 5 [1] 155/10
paragraph [62] 3/22
 13/2 16/14 16/17
 18/24 20/21 20/21
 21/19 24/3 24/11
 29/11 30/25 37/24
 38/1 40/18 41/7 41/15
 43/3 45/16 47/16
 48/23 49/12 51/9 57/7
 57/15 57/15 59/7 64/8
 68/5 75/5 76/12 76/14
 76/16 84/8 84/8 90/7
 92/3 101/20 101/21
 103/24 104/2 106/4
 109/14 117/2 120/3
 120/19 122/6 123/13
 123/14 124/22 129/17
 130/23 133/18 138/20
 139/10 146/15 147/24
 152/4 152/18 155/5
 158/10 159/22
paragraph 1 [4]
 20/21 37/24 138/20
 146/15
paragraph 101 [1]
 84/8
paragraph 11 [1]
 124/22
paragraph 12 [3]
 16/14 16/17 18/24
paragraph 13 [1]
 122/6
paragraph 17 [1]
 130/23
paragraph 18 [1]
 133/18
paragraph 19 [1]
 30/25
paragraph 2 [2]
 20/21 152/4
paragraph 22 [2]
 41/15 158/10
paragraph 24 [1]
 24/11

P	45/1 45/8 45/11 49/16 51/15 54/12 57/17 58/1 58/5 58/10 58/20 61/5 61/15 61/22 63/2 67/18 69/21 79/1 93/12 99/19 118/9 121/19 122/11 127/23 135/16 136/10 136/12 139/20 141/18 158/15	112/19 113/6 115/4 115/6 115/7 115/9 119/11 120/8 123/9 123/17 123/19 123/25 124/3 124/25 126/4 126/23 128/24 128/24 129/3 129/3 129/21 132/10 132/23 135/4 135/6 136/2 139/22 139/23 141/12 144/15 147/12 148/3 149/7 149/9 160/22 161/15 162/13 166/2 166/3 166/25 167/8 167/9 167/12 167/14 167/25 168/1 168/5	129/21 132/16 136/7 158/5 persuading [1] 65/4 persuasion [1] 52/23 Peter [6] 2/15 37/12 42/19 43/17 48/14 104/21 Peter Mandelson [5] 2/15 37/12 42/19 43/17 48/14 PFI [21] 3/13 3/16 3/19 4/2 16/9 16/10 33/1 33/3 39/15 39/22 39/25 67/8 67/11 78/18 79/6 84/21 109/16 109/18 134/4 140/2 154/8 PFI/PPP [1] 3/13 phase [1] 148/11 phrase [3] 9/2 23/18 23/21 pick [1] 95/22 picture [2] 88/18 88/20 pilot [3] 72/24 73/2 73/10 pinpoint [1] 129/10 place [16] 12/23 14/3 22/2 22/7 44/17 49/2 84/13 86/17 90/9 92/12 92/16 99/21 104/6 150/8 160/24 162/1 placed [6] 15/11 38/13 134/11 141/17 157/20 165/14 places [1] 23/18 placing [1] 134/16 plan [1] 44/18 planned [4] 16/25 131/12 165/11 165/19 planning [1] 110/13 plans [7] 25/22 26/14 102/1 102/3 102/16 155/6 165/15 platform [6] 81/5 92/11 92/14 126/21 127/11 131/10 platforms [2] 24/17 24/23 play [8] 44/1 61/8 61/12 61/21 74/19 123/23 131/17 157/16 played [1] 138/8 playing [1] 82/17 plays [1] 43/21 please [103] 1/5 1/15 2/2 3/5 6/4 7/13 13/3 15/19 16/14 17/14 17/18 18/14 18/19 20/19 21/18 22/13 24/9 26/16 27/1 29/7 30/25 36/13 36/14 37/4 37/23 38/5 40/17	41/14 43/1 43/2 46/4 46/23 50/11 50/15 56/23 56/24 57/10 58/3 58/15 59/6 59/7 59/9 62/17 62/21 62/24 65/11 65/21 66/1 67/15 68/7 68/9 70/20 71/1 74/24 75/4 76/17 80/1 80/3 80/6 87/3 89/10 89/12 90/11 91/19 91/23 101/15 101/20 106/3 108/24 109/8 111/10 111/20 115/11 116/7 116/22 117/2 117/3 119/16 120/1 120/17 123/13 127/16 127/18 130/23 130/24 132/13 133/16 133/17 138/9 138/16 139/10 140/14 141/3 145/1 146/1 147/8 148/12 151/19 152/5 158/22 159/14 164/18 167/2 pleased [1] 49/8 pleases [1] 95/13 plug [1] 139/3 plus [1] 82/6 pm [5] 108/16 108/18 151/1 151/3 170/14 POCL [43] 11/18 12/6 21/23 29/16 33/7 60/9 60/15 60/17 60/23 66/11 66/20 66/23 67/5 69/3 69/13 69/19 70/3 70/5 70/7 78/17 79/22 81/6 81/23 82/2 82/3 82/8 83/7 84/3 93/8 102/3 102/5 102/7 102/16 102/18 102/20 102/25 104/25 139/17 140/13 146/4 157/18 160/14 161/25 POCL's [1] 102/1 point [48] 11/15 13/10 18/22 18/23 22/14 23/10 23/12 25/12 26/2 26/23 27/20 28/1 28/9 29/9 29/10 36/15 39/14 46/17 47/7 51/12 63/22 67/11 71/15 73/6 76/8 95/22 95/24 96/8 102/13 103/12 105/21 114/14 115/13 115/15 115/20 122/5 130/22 133/18 134/12 135/10 135/11 139/15 141/4 144/12 145/5 152/23 156/23 163/3 point 14.1 [1] 95/24 pointing [1] 42/14 points [10] 18/12
----------	---	--	--	---

<p>P</p> <p>points... [9] 46/24 64/25 65/22 94/20 101/4 102/14 102/24 104/23 155/10</p> <p>POL [1] 83/4</p> <p>POL00028094 [3] 15/20 36/15 127/17</p> <p>POL00028098 [1] 56/23</p> <p>POL00028610 [1] 80/2</p> <p>POL00028635 [1] 137/22</p> <p>POL00031114 [1] 146/1</p> <p>policies [1] 129/4</p> <p>policy [12] 7/1 7/24 32/6 49/22 110/12 111/7 112/6 120/15 123/6 134/4 141/14 168/5</p> <p>political [14] 8/3 10/10 10/15 32/9 32/10 33/11 33/12 35/24 52/23 53/23 75/21 98/16 99/11 103/19</p> <p>politically [1] 155/17</p> <p>politics [1] 32/15</p> <p>population [1] 123/18</p> <p>port [1] 100/8</p> <p>portraying [1] 154/9</p> <p>posited [1] 39/18</p> <p>position [22] 30/18 40/24 41/1 47/3 49/5 50/20 52/9 58/4 60/9 70/14 96/9 104/9 115/17 121/5 121/9 131/16 147/10 150/3 152/19 153/20 155/17 162/15</p> <p>positive [8] 8/7 39/19 40/6 42/21 50/2 71/9 88/24 136/6</p> <p>possession [1] 56/5</p> <p>possibilities [1] 102/10</p> <p>possibility [3] 20/5 77/21 126/17</p> <p>possible [20] 16/21 17/2 18/19 19/13 20/13 28/14 49/3 49/6 102/5 104/7 104/10 112/10 126/8 126/25 131/6 132/6 133/6 134/2 156/21 168/25</p> <p>possibly [3] 59/18 113/16 140/11</p> <p>post [120] 2/14 2/19 2/20 4/13 4/17 4/18 4/23 6/11 6/13 6/16</p>	<p>7/3 7/8 7/10 7/19 7/20 8/2 8/11 8/13 8/17 8/19 9/1 10/11 10/17 10/18 11/16 11/18 11/19 11/21 12/2 12/13 13/15 13/22 14/7 14/12 15/9 37/19 48/25 50/24 54/14 54/15 54/19 55/5 55/9 58/2 72/19 72/25 73/2 73/10 78/10 79/7 79/13 80/9 81/4 81/5 81/14 81/20 82/1 82/14 82/20 83/24 86/6 86/10 87/25 89/8 90/3 90/13 91/25 93/7 97/25 99/20 99/23 100/7 101/12 101/13 101/14 101/19 101/25 102/12 103/8 103/17 104/4 105/7 105/9 106/7 106/9 106/11 106/15 106/20 107/4 114/3 118/21 118/21 119/2 119/4 120/8 128/10 132/20 132/24 133/21 134/1 135/21 135/23 137/6 137/10 137/13 138/6 138/11 143/9 145/3 150/10 153/17 154/5 157/13 157/24 161/5 166/5 166/7 168/2 168/23 169/3</p> <p>Post Office [86] 4/13 4/18 4/23 6/11 6/13 6/16 7/3 7/8 7/10 7/19 7/20 8/2 8/11 8/13 8/17 8/19 9/1 10/11 10/18 11/16 11/19 12/13 13/22 14/7 14/12 15/9 37/19 48/25 50/24 54/14 54/15 54/19 55/5 55/9 58/2 79/13 80/9 81/4 81/14 81/20 82/1 82/14 87/25 90/13 91/25 93/7 97/25 99/20 99/23 100/7 101/12 101/13 101/14 101/25 102/12 103/8 103/17 104/4 105/7 105/9 106/7 106/9 106/11 107/4 114/3 118/21 119/2 120/8 128/10 132/20 133/21 134/1 135/23 137/6 137/10 137/13 138/6 138/11 143/9 145/3 153/17 154/5 157/24 168/2 168/23 169/3</p> <p>Post Office's [2] 132/24 150/10</p> <p>postdated [1] 64/17</p>	<p>Postmaster [1] 73/23</p> <p>postmasters [3] 86/7 89/8 168/21</p> <p>posts [2] 2/24 3/4</p> <p>potential [2] 113/1 134/2</p> <p>potentially [7] 117/14 121/1 131/10 131/23 147/2 148/25 154/23</p> <p>pounds [2] 27/5 76/22</p> <p>power [3] 2/5 14/22 45/10</p> <p>PPP [1] 3/13</p> <p>PPS [1] 91/20</p> <p>PR [1] 74/6</p> <p>practical [5] 26/6 49/2 104/6 114/20 140/8</p> <p>practice [12] 9/20 15/4 23/6 60/6 60/21 68/4 86/24 88/10 147/23 148/6 160/6 164/23</p> <p>practice' [1] 147/16</p> <p>precedent [1] 24/25</p> <p>preceding [1] 59/19</p> <p>precise [1] 9/11</p> <p>preconditions [2] 51/21 52/3</p> <p>prediction [1] 108/8</p> <p>predominantly [1] 148/3</p> <p>prejudice [4] 40/12 51/1 57/19 58/5</p> <p>premise [2] 114/25 115/2</p> <p>preparation [2] 46/20 138/21</p> <p>preparations [2] 57/12 162/4</p> <p>prepared [12] 34/19 40/16 47/18 51/1 64/10 65/6 65/23 71/8 75/16 75/23 80/18 80/25</p> <p>preparing [2] 41/18 168/20</p> <p>present [5] 81/17 116/14 116/16 139/14 152/7</p> <p>presentation [1] 139/12</p> <p>presented [1] 47/9</p> <p>press [3] 94/4 100/11 156/8</p> <p>pressure [4] 83/4 83/5 83/25 83/25</p> <p>pressures [1] 8/3</p> <p>presumably [2] 159/16 166/18</p> <p>presumption [2] 40/4 108/13</p> <p>pretty [2] 42/2 101/22</p>	<p>prevent [2] 35/1 54/18</p> <p>prevented [2] 34/21 35/2</p> <p>preventing [1] 54/16</p> <p>previous [12] 3/17 21/15 32/7 32/13 33/22 33/24 35/2 37/25 52/21 61/1 78/20 160/8</p> <p>previously [1] 29/11</p> <p>price [3] 64/24 81/1 139/23</p> <p>prices [1] 47/15</p> <p>primarily [4] 85/19 128/23 131/13 159/6</p> <p>primary [4] 59/11 123/8 123/24 144/11</p> <p>Prime [10] 37/8 89/13 89/20 89/22 91/21 91/24 110/17 119/14 120/4 125/8</p> <p>Prime Minister [6] 37/8 89/20 91/21 119/14 120/4 125/8</p> <p>Prime Minister's [2] 91/24 110/17</p> <p>principal [3] 35/15 67/7 167/3</p> <p>principle [2] 39/22 85/6</p> <p>principles [1] 70/8</p> <p>printers [1] 72/21</p> <p>prior [5] 67/19 81/20 110/16 112/13 168/22</p> <p>priorities [2] 97/1 119/5</p> <p>prioritised [1] 77/15</p> <p>priority [2] 31/10 106/14</p> <p>private [19] 3/13 3/14 7/22 27/5 35/15 35/16 39/23 76/23 89/14 89/16 89/17 89/20 89/21 91/21 95/2 96/25 102/6 120/7 140/3</p> <p>privilege [1] 140/10</p> <p>probably [17] 6/8 8/20 9/5 10/24 12/19 28/11 35/13 42/3 78/1 90/2 91/1 91/1 99/2 123/24 127/20 155/19 156/22</p> <p>problem [6] 4/21 44/2 72/6 90/5 146/23 154/23</p> <p>problems [42] 24/24 32/12 33/20 53/25 55/15 60/14 78/23 79/3 86/18 88/4 88/14 88/16 89/3 92/21 92/25 93/13 93/15 93/17 94/7 95/20</p>	<p>114/22 117/6 117/9 118/1 118/2 119/11 120/6 123/19 124/2 124/3 124/13 125/12 136/17 147/3 150/11 152/9 154/7 160/12 161/4 163/1 165/21 165/23</p> <p>procedures [2] 5/2 86/18</p> <p>proceed [5] 62/8 87/13 95/14 131/20 136/20</p> <p>proceeded [9] 62/4 85/8 85/10 85/14 86/1 86/13 86/14 87/16 87/23</p> <p>proceeding [5] 40/7 44/15 76/10 78/4 162/8</p> <p>proceedings [2] 40/9 87/11</p> <p>process [27] 10/22 32/3 33/4 33/14 34/2 34/14 36/6 39/1 40/1 40/21 42/21 43/19 45/15 46/8 48/12 51/19 52/8 55/4 55/16 64/21 84/22 123/4 139/9 140/18 143/12 143/23 164/25</p> <p>processing [2] 113/13 148/24</p> <p>procurement [8] 31/20 36/6 39/10 51/14 55/4 112/22 114/6 114/7</p> <p>produce [1] 45/5</p> <p>produced [10] 15/23 46/9 58/23 77/8 145/20 145/25 146/9 151/14 151/24 160/5</p> <p>producing [1] 140/18</p> <p>product [4] 30/5 57/4 75/12 142/3</p> <p>production [1] 149/22</p> <p>products [2] 29/15 128/9</p> <p>professional [1] 110/3</p> <p>Professor [2] 147/5 148/12</p> <p>Professor Andrew Davies [1] 147/5</p> <p>Professor Davies [1] 148/12</p> <p>profound [1] 155/9</p> <p>profoundly [1] 59/10</p> <p>programme [31] 15/6 22/16 23/2 23/3 24/12 31/4 36/20 38/24 50/22 58/8 58/9 58/11 59/14 74/16 112/17</p>
---	--	--	---	--

<p>P</p> <p>programme... [16] 112/25 125/13 127/20 127/24 128/1 129/8 131/9 138/10 145/22 146/13 149/25 158/4 159/9 162/3 162/12 166/9</p> <p>progress [11] 38/15 49/4 49/6 59/13 61/4 67/17 104/8 104/10 107/1 159/9 167/17</p> <p>project [177] Project Mentors [6] 143/7 144/25 145/20 147/21 153/23 165/2</p> <p>Project Mentors' [1] 145/2</p> <p>project's [3] 118/19 125/25 155/12</p> <p>projects [2] 21/16 112/14</p> <p>promotional [1] 74/21</p> <p>prompted [1] 125/8</p> <p>proofing [5] 23/13 27/25 28/1 29/13 128/7</p> <p>prop [1] 155/2</p> <p>properly [4] 75/22 77/17 87/24 100/9</p> <p>property [1] 86/9</p> <p>proposal [11] 31/23 35/3 49/21 65/3 65/14 68/21 68/25 69/2 70/14 70/16 126/13</p> <p>proposals [25] 31/19 36/5 44/25 45/5 45/21 63/8 64/11 64/22 65/13 65/14 69/11 70/6 70/22 75/6 138/24 139/11 139/13 139/19 141/25 142/19 142/21 143/15 144/1 144/17 158/14</p> <p>propose [1] 38/2</p> <p>proposed [8] 23/9 40/22 46/6 46/11 48/22 75/7 126/5 164/12</p> <p>proposing [2] 39/1 40/2</p> <p>proposition [1] 84/3</p> <p>prosecuted [1] 168/23</p> <p>prosecuting [2] 14/24 98/7</p> <p>prosecution [4] 98/1 100/2 168/21 169/10</p> <p>prosecutions [15] 13/24 14/2 15/5 96/4 96/5 96/6 96/15 97/13 97/16 98/17 99/17</p>	<p>99/21 100/8 100/19 169/5</p> <p>prospect [2] 83/21 85/16</p> <p>prospects [1] 91/2</p> <p>protect [1] 52/9</p> <p>protocol [1] 32/4</p> <p>protracted [1] 76/25</p> <p>prove [1] 25/23</p> <p>proved [3] 49/6 104/10 160/3</p> <p>provide [10] 39/6 39/11 45/8 46/12 47/18 55/3 73/20 83/9 153/13 161/2</p> <p>provided [16] 1/13 18/18 32/1 32/7 46/5 55/13 60/19 75/1 77/11 79/22 96/16 97/15 99/16 99/19 100/13 169/2</p> <p>provider [1] 74/15</p> <p>provides [1] 138/20</p> <p>providing [1] 72/14</p> <p>province [1] 129/1</p> <p>provision [4] 69/9 72/3 80/21 80/23</p> <p>provisional [1] 147/9</p> <p>PS [1] 151/23</p> <p>public [21] 3/10 3/14 27/5 43/22 46/16 64/19 65/16 66/18 67/9 67/12 76/22 82/21 120/7 121/3 121/19 122/4 139/19 140/7 155/25 157/11 167/1</p> <p>publication [1] 76/14</p> <p>publicise [1] 155/12</p> <p>published [1] 80/22</p> <p>puff [2] 74/4 74/8</p> <p>pull [1] 139/2</p> <p>purpose [5] 6/7 24/11 51/3 116/7 147/17</p> <p>purposes [1] 96/3</p> <p>purse [1] 67/12</p> <p>pursue [1] 133/19</p> <p>pursuing [1] 156/14</p> <p>pushing [1] 31/5</p> <p>put [26] 4/12 4/22 5/22 6/20 30/13 49/2 86/17 91/7 96/4 104/6 104/12 105/16 122/5 123/19 126/10 132/7 139/7 139/18 140/5 142/16 155/2 158/14 160/13 161/13 161/15 169/16</p> <p>puts [1] 161/18</p> <p>putting [2] 83/4 107/5</p>	<p>Q</p> <p>quality [4] 87/19 131/13 132/1 142/3</p> <p>question [18] 11/15 22/22 26/19 27/8 27/10 27/21 34/25 54/21 73/5 94/18 96/1 97/3 97/11 117/4 117/15 122/24 131/2 134/13</p> <p>Questioned [10] 1/8 95/17 101/9 108/23 168/14 171/5 171/7 171/9 171/13 171/15</p> <p>questioning [1] 167/7</p> <p>questions [31] 1/11 2/2 32/22 36/2 52/16 52/19 72/2 84/17 85/2 89/11 93/19 94/8 95/12 95/14 98/9 100/21 101/13 107/20 107/21 108/1 109/25 110/3 150/15 150/19 150/21 168/12 168/13 168/17 169/14 169/17 169/19</p> <p>quickly [2] 49/2 104/6</p> <p>quite [25] 4/15 4/22 5/4 5/5 5/19 16/3 41/20 42/24 43/23 44/9 59/25 63/20 63/23 83/18 94/12 113/25 119/9 121/2 130/4 139/13 142/11 143/10 152/19 154/22 168/25</p> <p>quote [1] 146/21</p> <p>R</p> <p>raise [4] 10/11 88/16 89/9 153/2</p> <p>raised [10] 31/19 31/19 31/22 36/4 81/8 89/3 89/9 95/22 120/16 160/7</p> <p>raising [4] 85/2 85/3 118/18 163/15</p> <p>ran [1] 83/15</p> <p>range [1] 127/24</p> <p>ratcheting [1] 131/13</p> <p>rate [2] 38/14 91/25</p> <p>rather [20] 10/25 11/2 23/23 25/4 26/11 28/16 31/4 43/7 52/2 59/3 80/14 91/12 100/9 103/10 114/16 125/16 130/5 141/10 143/17 162/2</p> <p>re [7] 83/2 115/1 140/1 140/3 140/22 147/1 147/18</p>	<p>re-draws [1] 140/3</p> <p>re-reading [1] 140/22</p> <p>re-stating [1] 115/1</p> <p>re-work [2] 147/1 147/18</p> <p>re-write [1] 140/1</p> <p>reach [6] 51/23 59/11 90/3 116/1 121/18 122/14</p> <p>reached [3] 69/12 70/7 115/19</p> <p>reaching [2] 70/16 72/19</p> <p>read [17] 16/7 17/20 18/16 47/4 49/13 49/20 49/23 59/7 68/13 76/6 76/11 80/10 81/16 91/13 122/13 154/2 159/2</p> <p>readers [1] 72/21</p> <p>readily [1] 133/22</p> <p>readiness [1] 159/11</p> <p>reading [6] 121/22 140/22 142/13 142/24 149/12 151/24</p> <p>reads [9] 101/21 123/14 146/15 147/8 148/16 152/5 155/5 159/21 164/19</p> <p>ready [3] 87/12 87/14 95/6</p> <p>real [6] 26/6 28/14 29/4 59/14 119/3 144/12</p> <p>realise [2] 79/25 167/16</p> <p>reality [2] 73/11 76/11</p> <p>really [10] 35/9 35/16 60/17 62/14 103/7 106/7 107/4 107/16 107/17 163/7</p> <p>reason [11] 23/16 26/16 33/17 86/4 90/7 90/17 115/12 129/5 157/4 167/7 168/5</p> <p>reasonable [2] 19/12 108/7</p> <p>reasoning [1] 34/2</p> <p>reasons [15] 24/15 32/9 67/7 86/4 90/14 90/17 99/22 102/21 116/1 118/4 143/10 145/2 145/22 163/5 167/3</p> <p>reassurance [1] 58/22</p> <p>recall [61] 11/6 11/23 11/24 11/24 12/1 20/17 30/2 30/13 30/15 31/11 31/13 31/14 31/16 35/5 35/13 35/22 61/7 65/10 68/2 68/6 72/12</p>	<p>76/1 90/25 92/20 98/12 104/21 117/8 117/19 119/22 119/24 121/21 122/12 122/19 124/5 124/12 124/15 124/20 125/2 131/22 135/12 137/1 137/6 137/14 140/18 140/21 142/12 142/23 142/24 143/6 146/8 146/11 149/12 149/13 149/16 151/11 151/23 151/25 152/1 156/4 159/12 159/13</p> <p>receipt [1] 72/21</p> <p>received [8] 18/7 36/3 63/13 77/10 80/8 83/1 106/13 124/10</p> <p>receiving [2] 12/18 128/19</p> <p>recent [4] 52/25 90/7 90/13 159/9</p> <p>recently [6] 18/16 124/17 141/13 159/3 164/21 165/15</p> <p>recipients [4] 81/18 123/17 123/25 167/23</p> <p>recognised [2] 127/1 150/22</p> <p>recognition [2] 81/24 121/17</p> <p>recollect [2] 159/1 168/24</p> <p>recollection [19] 11/11 11/13 12/25 17/8 33/25 61/14 61/16 63/17 93/16 96/12 96/16 104/12 104/15 125/14 127/10 152/13 152/14 158/24 169/7</p> <p>recommendation [5] 3/25 36/23 41/4 41/8 133/19</p> <p>recommendations [6] 16/21 17/2 17/11 36/16 57/1 63/8</p> <p>recommended [1] 133/10</p> <p>reconcile [1] 162/2</p> <p>reconfigure [3] 78/15 80/13 80/25</p> <p>reconfigured [2] 80/16 81/22</p> <p>record [1] 90/4</p> <p>recorded [5] 14/23 14/24 91/24 127/19 154/20</p> <p>recording [1] 95/24</p> <p>records [7] 57/7 93/15 95/24 120/5 151/15 151/22 154/17</p> <p>recruit [1] 106/23</p> <p>rectitude [1] 108/13</p>
---	--	--	--	--

R	106/19 154/18 169/9	117/4 130/14 134/13	148/2 148/5 148/8	retaining [2] 82/14
recurrent [1] 91/16	relationship [15] 5/7	repeated [1] 143/2	148/9 148/15 148/17	119/7
red [1] 48/6	5/10 5/16 5/23 6/21	repeatedly [1] 154/12	149/2	retirement [1] 110/16
reductions [1]	7/22 10/4 14/21 15/8	repercussions [1]	research [1] 90/13	retirements [2] 92/11
165/18	94/12 94/13 99/23	154/13	reservations [1]	92/15
refer [10] 26/13	111/20 135/15 155/14	reply [2] 48/14 48/18	105/13	return [2] 39/19 40/6
36/11 83/21 83/22	relationships [4] 4/6	replying [1] 50/4	reset [2] 118/9	returned [1] 110/25
83/24 103/3 129/9	4/9 12/23 102/20	report [66] 15/20	118/12	review [20] 4/1 4/8
137/21 144/23 152/18	relatively [4] 29/19	16/3 16/5 16/16 16/21	reshaping [1] 60/7	28/13 28/15 66/15
reference [29] 20/20	52/8 128/14 160/5	17/1 17/6 17/9 17/14	resignation [1] 90/18	111/7 111/11 111/17
21/19 22/8 22/23	relaxation [1] 143/15	18/3 18/3 18/5 19/2	resignations [4]	112/12 117/7 119/23
27/11 31/18 39/5	release [4] 159/24	19/15 19/22 20/18	90/14 90/20 92/12	125/12 125/24 130/12
40/22 41/6 42/8 43/2	165/11 165/18 165/20	21/3 24/3 24/8 27/7	92/15	130/19 131/19 132/5
49/11 51/5 57/3 61/13	released [1] 169/17	27/23 28/23 29/6 29/7	resigned [2] 2/15	137/4 144/23 169/22
61/19 61/25 70/25	relevant [13] 3/7 6/6	30/7 30/20 31/17 36/9	2/22	reviewed [1] 20/11
75/24 84/7 88/8 117/2	9/24 12/20 51/10	36/14 37/1 39/3 43/4	resigning [1] 90/23	reviewing [1] 38/9
119/15 137/22 142/18	54/19 55/8 56/13 68/5	44/13 49/5 56/25 57/8	resilience [1] 24/16	reviews [1] 164/20
145/25 152/15 158/17	79/1 84/24 97/19	58/14 88/9 104/9	resistance [1] 136/8	revised [1] 65/12
164/5	158/7	105/22 118/4 127/13	resolve [3] 58/19	rework [1] 148/21
referenced [2]	reliability [5] 58/22	127/16 129/7 129/12	119/11 154/7	Rich [2] 138/5 146/6
117/10 159/15	87/20 123/16 128/20	131/4 131/5 143/7	resolved [5] 38/24	Richard [1] 37/20
referred [7] 55/16	135/19	145/14 145/24 146/3	127/25 131/25 141/13	right [60] 2/13 2/23
71/25 78/6 116/25	reliable [1] 86/15	146/9 146/14 146/17	165/25	6/18 12/10 17/1 23/16
124/2 143/14 146/5	reliably [1] 143/23	147/7 149/13 149/22	resolving [1] 64/9	33/3 35/21 37/11 41/9
referring [5] 28/5	reliance [1] 30/3	151/13 151/19 151/21	resources [1] 127/23	41/10 41/12 41/20
59/25 75/25 103/7	reliant [3] 97/8 97/8	151/24 153/23 154/2	respective [1] 42/20	42/16 45/18 47/10
103/21	156/3	154/16 165/2 165/6	respects [1] 23/4	50/11 53/2 54/5 54/23
refers [1] 72/6	relied [2] 18/3 124/7	report's [1] 27/11	respond [1] 8/7	55/18 55/23 58/20
refined [1] 68/20	reluctance [1]	reported [1] 94/4	responds [1] 92/1	58/24 61/17 62/23
reflect [4] 63/17	162/11	reports [4] 34/19	response [1] 103/22	66/11 67/13 72/1 76/9
94/16 107/15 165/1	reluctantly [1] 70/17	100/11 124/10 145/21	responsibilities [12]	77/25 78/8 78/11 80/7
reflected [6] 49/10	rely [1] 23/18	represent [6] 95/15	3/6 3/12 6/5 6/8 6/25	80/13 83/17 94/2 97/3
93/22 123/12 141/24	remain [7] 13/18	95/18 101/10 125/20	8/16 11/20 42/15	97/20 99/3 100/12
149/22 162/11	38/14 66/19 67/10	157/20 168/15	42/20 78/3 112/23	106/6 108/11 108/12
reflecting [3] 44/8	87/5 127/24 161/25	representatives [7]	123/20	110/6 110/18 111/1
85/1 99/18	remained [2] 13/6	88/7 93/8 137/5	responsibility [27]	116/15 124/8 125/21
reflection [2] 59/4	158/4	150/20 150/22 168/13	3/10 6/16 6/20 7/4 7/8	131/20 133/14 136/25
73/11	remaining [1] 153/2	169/15	7/9 7/18 8/10 8/13	137/20 144/5 150/23
reflective [1] 84/11	remains [1] 107/25	representing [2]	8/17 8/18 8/21 8/24	156/20 156/25 160/13
refreshment [1]	remedy [2] 60/24	64/23 100/17	13/8 14/22 16/6 37/19	163/7
105/7	78/19	represents [2] 65/7	43/22 64/7 67/13 85/6	right-hand [1] 50/11
refusal [1] 162/10	remember [22] 5/14	66/5	98/5 106/9 106/21	rightly [1] 143/6
regard [3] 82/10	11/1 17/23 21/6 31/14	reputation [3] 42/11	112/6 112/7 127/5	rights [1] 51/2
93/25 139/22	36/1 51/25 55/12	86/3 154/11	responsible [7] 7/25	rigorous [4] 25/2
regarded [1] 132/14	62/10 63/6 67/22	reputational [2] 85/8	36/18 63/14 93/7	46/7 102/8 103/1
Regarding [1] 51/8	71/16 72/5 72/10	134/3	112/3 116/16 166/23	ring [2] 37/17 124/17
regime [1] 3/13	79/16 83/7 83/14	request [2] 35/15	rest [2] 57/22 82/5	risen [1] 165/23
Regions [1] 2/21	107/7 117/24 121/21	36/1	rested [2] 67/2	risk [27] 22/17 25/10
regroup [1] 118/9	126/24 140/22	requested [1] 69/3	157/11	25/20 25/24 26/8
regrouped [1] 133/8	remembering [1]	requesting [1] 11/6	restructured [1]	39/22 39/24 64/19
regular [2] 49/4	144/7	requests [2] 11/3	65/12	65/24 66/17 66/18
104/8	remit [3] 48/22 104/1	92/1	restructuring [10]	67/9 75/23 76/24
reimburse [1] 165/22	131/18	require [2] 29/21	16/22 16/23 17/3	85/14 120/9 123/20
reject [1] 50/17	remitted [1] 136/24	128/16	18/23 18/24 19/7	128/2 130/4 134/2
rejected [1] 161/5	remotely [1] 77/5	required [8] 29/20	19/17 118/6 132/9	134/3 135/20 139/18
related [4] 142/21	remove [4] 60/21	57/8 77/18 79/12	135/3	140/3 161/14 161/15
144/8 145/17 162/22	132/10 135/3 135/13	127/22 128/15 141/19	result [4] 68/20 119/1	161/18
relating [5] 53/11	removing [1] 135/5	148/22	148/21 162/8	risked [1] 153/4
69/12 70/6 96/17	renegotiated [1]	requirement [2]	resulted [1] 165/21	risks [13] 22/5 22/20
147/14	79/15	47/19 147/14	results [2] 148/25	39/16 75/21 127/2
relation [12] 6/11 7/7	renegotiation [1]	requirements [16]	159/10	127/15 128/5 129/8
7/12 11/21 15/1 35/22	79/20	66/17 106/18 118/11	retail [6] 8/5 106/8	131/8 134/1 134/5
69/8 74/15 101/6	renounce [1] 70/17	141/12 141/23 142/19	106/24 107/9 107/13	141/1 156/14
	repeat [4] 71/19	146/18 147/1 147/10	107/13	Robins [1] 21/5

R	said [33] 8/20 11/8 28/7 30/3 33/10 35/16 41/13 45/23 47/4 61/7 62/19 68/17 69/23 76/17 77/10 80/23 84/16 88/4 92/4 109/15 109/17 111/12 117/15 121/22 135/25 136/11 140/21 142/11 143/3 144/3 144/16 155/4 156/24	113/21 115/17 118/14 121/10 123/1 127/14 145/10 says [6] 65/1 90/7 92/18 103/24 140/9 148/1 scalability [5] 22/17 24/21 128/2 129/16 130/2 scale [4] 4/5 24/23 127/21 153/5 scan [4] 18/15 18/19 57/23 63/25 scandal [1] 94/5 scant [1] 139/22 schedule [1] 64/3 scheduled [2] 12/7 38/15 schedules [1] 82/24 scope [2] 24/23 134/25 screen [1] 13/4 scroll [17] 18/13 21/3 37/5 46/4 50/11 50/11 57/23 58/15 59/6 62/23 66/1 80/7 91/23 120/17 133/16 138/16 140/14 scrolling [4] 44/22 48/20 51/11 65/11 search [1] 116/15 seat [2] 11/12 157/15 second [18] 18/22 22/14 41/5 47/7 64/8 65/14 69/10 75/4 75/5 81/21 102/23 103/24 119/17 120/18 132/9 134/22 138/16 143/16 secondly [3] 3/2 6/2 67/11 secretary [72] 2/12 2/16 2/20 3/1 3/2 3/6 3/9 3/11 6/2 6/22 7/15 7/25 8/18 9/15 10/1 10/2 10/5 10/8 11/22 12/5 12/8 12/21 13/11 13/11 13/19 14/1 16/1 17/19 18/7 18/7 19/23 20/8 20/8 20/9 21/10 27/18 34/10 35/9 35/16 35/19 37/7 37/12 37/21 41/5 43/5 43/9 43/21 44/4 48/4 48/15 55/14 66/13 66/16 71/7 74/10 77/23 78/2 85/18 89/14 89/17 89/21 89/21 91/21 98/25 119/18 120/4 122/3 125/9 151/23 158/20 158/24 163/15 Secretary of [1] 10/2 section [3] 101/16 138/14 161/24	sections [1] 129/12 sector [16] 7/23 39/23 46/16 64/19 65/16 66/18 67/9 102/6 120/7 121/19 139/20 140/3 140/7 156/1 157/11 167/1 secure [2] 72/18 123/9 secured [1] 45/20 security [21] 5/1 10/1 21/6 24/16 43/17 71/8 71/17 73/21 73/22 111/8 111/14 111/21 112/5 120/21 125/21 141/11 155/7 157/13 157/17 158/21 166/14 see [84] 1/3 4/16 12/12 12/20 15/22 17/15 19/1 20/3 24/8 27/12 28/8 30/9 31/17 32/6 32/11 34/6 34/9 34/16 35/10 36/15 37/1 37/2 37/5 38/7 38/21 44/12 46/18 49/8 50/12 50/25 54/1 55/11 56/2 61/23 62/23 65/17 74/24 80/3 86/23 90/19 105/21 106/2 106/4 108/19 109/9 117/5 119/13 119/17 120/2 120/18 122/1 123/12 123/13 127/13 127/19 129/5 129/17 130/22 131/1 133/17 137/25 138/13 138/17 140/14 142/7 146/2 146/12 146/20 147/24 148/15 151/4 151/7 151/21 152/1 152/18 154/16 158/16 158/23 159/14 163/9 163/14 163/24 164/11 169/1 seeing [2] 35/2 151/25 seek [2] 82/8 120/23 seeking [1] 58/18 seem [3] 75/6 94/21 144/5 seemed [6] 15/5 88/22 100/8 134/25 136/11 168/9 seems [5] 100/4 133/20 133/22 165/1 166/17 seen [19] 30/9 34/21 55/12 57/5 57/11 74/12 94/4 103/3 115/22 121/8 124/15 125/5 129/23 153/22 156/4 157/16 157/22 160/25 166/19 sees [1] 45/6	Select [1] 88/21 self [1] 47/11 self-explanatory [1] 47/11 seminars [2] 96/23 154/8 senior [3] 124/9 125/16 150/6 sense [11] 54/17 54/24 67/1 115/25 117/22 118/8 119/10 126/7 131/22 135/25 144/4 sensible [2] 30/23 137/12 sent [11] 38/8 50/7 51/15 124/16 137/18 146/3 146/19 158/19 163/24 164/3 169/23 sentence [4] 17/5 26/3 26/8 92/17 sentiment [1] 121/11 separate [4] 12/2 69/18 145/20 159/24 separated [1] 24/14 separately [1] 69/19 September [6] 37/3 46/2 48/19 50/16 57/8 165/16 September 1998 [1] 165/16 sequence [1] 142/13 serious [11] 38/10 50/19 91/16 117/11 120/9 124/24 146/22 147/12 152/8 152/21 154/13 seriously [1] 38/14 seriousness [2] 74/10 153/9 servant [1] 55/8 servants [6] 12/18 34/1 55/5 94/14 94/16 94/17 server [1] 25/10 service [18] 5/18 37/21 56/8 75/11 96/11 96/13 96/18 97/9 97/14 97/21 104/24 110/6 110/8 110/16 110/22 123/17 148/3 148/8 services [9] 21/13 73/19 73/22 81/7 82/13 82/18 102/12 113/20 128/13 sessions [1] 91/4 set [28] 3/25 20/22 38/3 44/12 48/22 51/20 57/21 63/2 68/21 78/24 80/15 87/9 88/3 90/19 93/6 93/11 97/24 104/1 112/1 120/13 130/22
S	saying [20] 17/5 28/13 42/18 47/23 52/1 53/22 54/17 56/21 60/19 84/25 98/8 106/6 107/19			
safely [3] 47/14 124/1 170/5 safer [1] 167/11				

S	sight [4] 14/18 31/21 48/11 156/14	skin [1] 157/18	software [6] 73/16 141/19 159/24 160/10 161/21 164/24	6/20 6/24 7/4 7/23 7/24 8/4 9/20 10/3 11/3 15/10 32/10 33/5 33/13 42/13 43/20 43/23 48/5 60/21 62/13 74/3 74/14 78/5 78/15 84/1 88/2 88/13 93/3 95/9 99/9 100/5 103/15 113/13 130/5 133/4 144/6
set... [7] 138/20 147/24 159/19 161/2 163/9 168/7 169/3	sign [5] 67/14 71/8 75/16 81/14 82/24	skipping [1] 43/3	solution [9] 24/10 24/22 25/25 39/3 121/18 121/25 136/12 136/17 144/2	sought [2] 64/12 116/8
sets [4] 57/22 66/4 90/4 148/12	sign off [2] 67/14 71/8	slew [1] 66/10	some [61] 2/2 5/11 10/14 15/9 20/18 20/20 22/17 23/4 40/8 41/17 42/8 45/20 46/24 48/6 51/13 52/19 59/12 60/24 63/12 70/21 71/20 72/5 77/23 78/19 80/1 83/7 95/11 98/19 98/20 102/14 103/3 104/17 104/19 105/7 107/1 110/20 110/22 112/21 112/24 113/11 113/12 114/10 114/22 116/24 120/14 120/15 121/16 125/6 128/2 130/3 131/11 132/22 136/10 139/6 140/3 140/12 142/24 145/13 156/8 160/21 165/1	sounds [1] 137/15
setting [5] 52/1 101/3 104/18 137/19 153/3	signature [3] 1/20 1/21 109/9	slightly [2] 34/25 112/1	something [19] 5/15 10/7 14/17 15/13 17/12 23/23 31/6 54/3 91/5 97/18 99/7 100/9 104/22 113/3 113/24 122/18 126/7 126/8 144/5	source [1] 17/16
settlement [5] 51/16 51/22 51/24 78/12 93/5	signed [1] 80/4	slow [1] 38/14	soon [3] 37/13 59/23 60/2	spades [1] 141/25
several [1] 44/3	significance [5] 60/11 65/9 67/24 83/12 130/9	small [3] 109/13 150/21 168/12	somewhere [1] 72/9	speak [5] 35/12 102/24 112/16 155/22 163/23
severe [1] 145/6	significant [16] 25/8 39/16 80/21 81/22 90/21 90/22 91/15 93/1 117/14 118/6 118/12 131/12 139/14 139/23 148/21 160/2	smartcard [5] 29/18 32/25 72/20 73/23 128/13	somewhat [1] 94/14	speaking [3] 7/14 19/16 135/2
shake [1] 68/11	significantly [2] 47/15 135/8	so [139] 5/4 7/3 7/19 7/23 8/7 8/22 10/6 10/6 10/22 10/24 12/17 14/20 16/3 17/2 18/3 18/9 18/22 19/25 21/8 21/11 22/8 22/25 24/23 29/10 32/8 33/21 35/12 35/15 38/6 40/1 41/15 41/21 42/22 43/10 43/11 43/12 43/15 43/17 43/19 44/1 45/16 47/23 51/18 51/25 52/7 52/24 53/18 54/16 57/9 58/18 58/18 60/8 60/24 62/25 63/11 66/19 67/23 68/13 68/22 69/25 70/19 71/19 76/4 78/19 79/2 79/11 85/11 85/24 86/12 88/6 88/13 91/7 91/23 92/23 93/13 94/20 94/23 95/4 95/9 96/8 96/12 97/11 97/20 99/6 100/17 101/2 101/5 102/7 102/14 102/25 103/7 103/20 103/20 104/19 106/2 106/4 107/2 107/3 108/6 112/2 112/9 112/16 112/21 113/15 115/5 115/25 117/5 119/9 120/11 122/3 122/21 124/18 128/24 129/17 131/1 132/2 133/11 134/6 135/1 135/7 135/9 135/24 140/20 142/9 144/9 144/21 145/12 149/9 150/9 150/16 156/8 162/23 163/10 163/22 168/4 168/5 168/10 169/25 170/10	special [1] 111/7	
shall [3] 55/20 105/8 108/12	signing [3] 82/2 83/2 83/3	social [24] 5/1 10/1 21/6 43/17 71/8 71/16 102/8 102/11 103/1 103/8 103/20 110/9 111/8 111/14 111/21 112/5 120/21 125/21 133/3 155/7 157/13 157/17 158/20 166/13	somewhere [1] 72/9	specialist [1] 156/8
shared [1] 163/17	signs [1] 81/4	soften [1] 143/3	soon [3] 37/13 59/23 60/2	specially [1] 131/4
shareholder [1] 65/4	similar [1] 111/23		somewhat [1] 94/14	specific [7] 8/10 8/12 36/1 37/18 46/17 75/6 106/21
sharing [1] 97/19	simple [4] 112/10 118/14 119/5 135/5		somewhere [1] 72/9	specifically [2] 72/6 131/17
she [3] 8/25 35/16 169/17	simpler [2] 135/14 136/3		soon [3] 37/13 59/23 60/2	specification [9] 21/22 22/11 28/18 72/17 79/12 116/22 117/13 117/17 140/5
she's [1] 108/9	simplified [1] 135/6		somewhere [1] 72/9	specifics [2] 116/12 117/9
shed [1] 166/14	simply [9] 16/25 54/19 87/4 126/16 132/7 146/2 154/24 162/11 167/23		somewhere [1] 72/9	specified [1] 125/1
sheet [3] 137/23 146/2 158/21	since [11] 56/13 68/16 68/24 100/15 100/15 100/17 109/13 127/23 141/17 148/9 153/16		somewhere [1] 72/9	speedy [2] 63/4 70/16
shines [1] 163/8	single [2] 85/21 155/21		soon [3] 37/13 59/23 60/2	spell [1] 120/14
short [3] 55/25 108/17 151/2	sir [25] 1/3 4/1 28/12 30/18 37/20 52/11 55/22 56/2 56/5 56/22 87/4 87/12 95/13 95/23 107/21 107/23 108/5 108/19 150/14 150/25 151/4 151/15 154/2 169/14 170/12		sores [1] 59/20	spending [1] 43/22
shortcomings [1] 28/19	Sir Adrian [1] 28/12		sorry [20] 6/10 16/17 18/9 21/17 23/15 35/17 40/4 43/11 61/10 62/19 65/22 84/23 86/22 86/25 106/2 122/12 129/11 130/14 130/15 164/15	spent [3] 112/24 153/1 162/21
shortfalls [1] 77/8	Sir Adrian's [1] 30/18		sort [57] 3/12 3/13 5/25 6/12 6/20 6/23 6/24 7/4 7/23 7/24 8/4 9/20 10/3 10/14 10/23 11/3 15/5 15/10 24/6 32/10 33/5 33/13 41/24 42/13 43/20 43/23 44/1 48/5 53/22 60/15 60/21 62/12 62/13 74/3 74/14 74/16 74/20 78/5 78/15 84/1 88/2 88/13 91/5 91/8 91/10 93/3 95/9 99/9 100/5 103/6 103/15 113/13 130/5 133/4 135/1 144/6 156/16	spider's [1] 43/15
shortly [1] 106/6	Sir David Wright [1] 151/15		sort of [37] 3/13 6/12	spiders [1] 44/7
should [54] 1/17 1/20 7/21 7/22 20/15 23/17 25/23 29/16 29/18 32/25 33/1 39/17 42/15 46/21 60/7 60/16 61/25 62/19 64/1 64/13 68/17 76/17 82/1 82/16 82/19 82/20 84/2 95/4 97/14 98/9 99/7 106/15 107/17 109/2 109/17 117/19 120/23 120/25 121/11 121/12 122/24 128/10 128/14 136/3 139/7 141/5 145/18 148/10 156/20 160/4 160/10 160/15 166/1 166/5	Sir David's [1] 154/2			sports [1] 18/24 88/12 105/19
shouldn't [1] 132/21	sits [1] 56/8			sponsoring [1] 6/12
show [6] 55/13 74/21 93/16 103/14 146/22 156/10	sitting [2] 99/5 133/5			sponsors [3] 69/7 140/8 144/24
showed [1] 27/24	situation [6] 85/12 103/16 121/23 140/23 153/9 161/20			spring [3] 117/8 124/4 159/7
shown [9] 33/13 119/16 146/8 151/13 152/11 152/12 152/16 154/19 164/4	situations [1] 26/7			squabbling [1] 63/16
Sibbick [2] 138/3 140/9	six [3] 76/7 91/23 140/25			SSR [1] 148/7
side [4] 50/11 114/23 126/20 138/1	six days [1] 91/23			staff [2] 74/1 113/4
	six pages [1] 76/7			stage [23] 25/3 26/22 28/21 30/12 33/17 36/6 42/3 43/9 69/17 92/24 93/16 107/15 121/6 123/4 123/23 128/21 135/12 138/9 142/9 143/8 152/16 153/20 162/16
	size [2] 4/5 25/19			stages [2] 15/2 165/10
				stand [4] 56/17 131/7

S	step [2] 97/20 141/9	stuff [1] 163/1	suited [1] 77/17	97/15 102/11 113/4
stand... [2] 143/18 162/4	Stephen [4] 1/5 1/7 1/16 171/3	style [1] 155/14	suits [1] 81/19	113/5 113/6 114/8
standard [3] 29/15 78/18 128/9	Stephen Byers [1] 1/5	subject [3] 109/20 131/12 165/18	summaries [1] 17/21	115/4 115/9 119/7
standing [2] 125/19 154/14	Stephen John Byers [1] 1/16	submission [6] 9/15 9/15 15/14 158/19 159/5 159/15	summarise [1] 69/1	120/8 123/16 128/3
stands [1] 110/1	stepping [2] 165/1 167/8	submissions [2] 34/6 149/19	summarised [2] 120/2 128/17	128/10 128/20 134/11
start [10] 2/2 5/21 16/3 67/19 81/15 101/15 118/3 121/1 121/12 161/8	steps [2] 112/2 160/13	submitting [1] 169/21	summarises [1] 147/6	134/16 134/19 135/20
started [4] 13/25 115/15 133/9 157/8	Steve [3] 41/4 41/16 41/21	subpostmaster [1] 89/4	summary [10] 3/5 6/4 17/18 18/2 18/11 22/14 127/17 147/25 152/3 152/19	135/22 142/22 143/17 144/11 146/24 147/2 147/3 147/13 147/17 148/4 148/18 148/23 149/2 149/4 149/7 149/9 149/11 153/17 153/18 159/11 161/4 161/10 166/5 168/23 169/4 169/10
starting [3] 21/25 96/8 152/4	Steve Robson [3] 41/4 41/16 41/21	subpostmasters [16] 13/25 14/2 48/12 77/6 77/18 79/2 88/7 88/11 91/15 93/2 93/9 95/19 101/11 107/12 107/17 168/16	summer [2] 117/8 124/4	169/4 169/10
state [61] 2/16 2/20 3/2 6/2 6/19 6/22 6/23 7/15 7/25 8/12 8/17 8/18 8/21 9/15 10/1 10/3 10/5 10/6 10/8 10/12 10/13 11/22 12/5 12/8 12/21 13/12 13/19 14/1 17/19 18/8 20/8 20/9 28/5 34/10 37/7 37/12 37/17 48/4 48/15 55/14 63/16 66/13 70/13 71/7 73/6 78/2 85/18 93/7 98/24 98/25 118/17 119/19 120/5 122/3 128/6 141/7 151/23 158/20 158/24 163/15 165/9	still [16] 15/3 19/4 44/4 61/5 84/24 105/10 107/23 118/12 119/6 119/7 123/24 128/21 133/21 135/23 139/1 150/17	subpostmistress [1] 13/21	Sunday [3] 80/8 80/20 83/3	system's [1] 163/11
stated [4] 17/9 17/15 131/22 145/14	stimulated [1] 117/25	subsequent [3] 129/23 148/9 160/6	sunk [2] 86/1 86/3	systematic [2] 15/5 139/25
statement [53] 1/12 1/17 1/23 3/22 6/10 6/14 13/3 16/14 17/6 26/17 26/18 28/13 30/24 41/6 41/7 41/13 41/15 41/18 42/1 43/15 68/22 73/12 76/17 84/5 93/20 109/3 109/6 109/9 109/11 109/13 109/21 110/1 111/12 114/17 116/5 116/20 117/1 121/4 123/7 123/12 124/6 124/22 125/23 130/8 130/16 130/23 132/5 132/12 133/17 144/23 148/8 158/10 169/21	stimulating [1] 117/21	subsequently [4] 23/21 101/19 130/11 130/18	supported [1] 152/25	systems [11] 21/23 21/24 22/12 24/14 72/23 73/19 75/10 112/20 113/13 113/18 148/17
statements [1] 93/21	stone [1] 167/9	subsidiary [1] 11/19	supportive [1] 155/14	T
States [2] 112/25 113/3	stood [1] 24/4	subsidy [3] 103/6 103/8 103/17	sure [24] 11/14 41/16 41/17 42/20 53/17 61/7 63/20 64/16 68/3 68/5 72/4 73/11 75/22 78/22 86/23 99/1 99/13 114/24 115/16 125/5 129/10 144/10 145/13 159/19	table [2] 114/2 157/4
stating [1] 115/1	stopping [2] 66/9 73/1	substance [2] 149/25 165/2	surprise [3] 9/6 9/9 149/17	take [28] 16/5 16/13 19/20 24/4 28/11 29/20 29/22 30/7 45/6 46/25 49/3 52/13 59/5 60/8 60/18 63/1 74/9 75/23 94/1 96/25 104/7 105/5 110/19 128/16 129/11 150/23 157/1 164/12
status [3] 69/2 162/6 162/9	straight [1] 74/6	substantial [1] 81/11	surrounding [2] 69/11 152/8	taken [29] 23/22 25/8 32/11 39/25 44/20 49/1 50/19 62/6 64/14 66/10 66/21 67/2 84/19 87/21 92/12 92/16 100/24 104/5 104/15 105/1 106/11 118/16 131/3 133/6 139/13 156/11 160/1 160/24 164/9
statutory [2] 7/10 54/13	straightforward [4] 29/19 73/18 128/14 136/4	substantive [3] 49/6 104/10 110/19	surprise [3] 9/6 9/9 149/17	taking [18] 14/3 37/14 80/20 90/5 98/5 99/21 101/3 101/25 104/16 108/9 108/11 136/2 136/4 136/14 157/21 162/1 164/23 169/21
STEIN [4] 95/17 168/14 171/7 171/15	strategy [9] 46/22 81/6 90/9 102/7 102/23 102/25 110/17 112/17 149/23	subsumed [2] 104/17 104/20	surrounding [2] 69/11 152/8	talking [7] 12/24 13/10 19/7 56/7 66/25 75/17 126/7
	stream [1] 110/6	successful [7] 44/21 72/24 73/2 73/9 82/9 82/14 161/18	switch [1] 153/16	targeted [1] 161/6
	streamlined [1] 60/16	successfully [6] 28/16 29/1 131/21 134/10 134/15 134/20	sworn [2] 108/22 171/11	targeting [1] 160/24
	streams [1] 37/25	successive [1] 55/10	system [94] 14/4 14/25 21/22 22/10 22/18 22/24 23/9 23/24 24/4 25/5 25/13 25/19 26/11 27/10 28/7 28/19 28/24 29/16 29/23 30/5 30/6 30/17 30/22 33/16 46/19 58/23 60/6 60/19 68/4 72/18 75/14 75/18 75/21 77/4 77/8 79/10 86/15 86/16 87/19 87/24 88/18 90/23 91/12 93/1 95/21 95/25 96/2 96/14 96/18 97/12	taskforce [5] 3/19 3/25 4/8 16/6 20/23
	strength [3] 25/7 47/2 155/18	succinctly [1] 152/20	system [94] 14/4 14/25 21/22 22/10 22/18 22/24 23/9 23/24 24/4 25/5 25/13 25/19 26/11 27/10 28/7 28/19 28/24 29/16 29/23 30/5 30/6 30/17 30/22 33/16 46/19 58/23 60/6 60/19 68/4 72/18 75/14 75/18 75/21 77/4 77/8 79/10 86/15 86/16 87/19 87/24 88/18 90/23 91/12 93/1 95/21 95/25 96/2 96/14 96/18 97/12	tasks [1] 125/23
	strengthen [2] 102/1 102/16	such [15] 14/7 25/2 35/5 43/7 45/6 49/5 80/16 82/20 99/24 104/9 112/8 113/17 131/9 148/20 170/2	taxpayer [2] 167/16 168/2	taxpayers' [1] 116/16
	stressed [2] 152/21 154/12	sufficient [1] 46/12	team [4] 12/15	
	strictest [1] 40/11	sufficiently [3] 25/2 137/16 139/14		
	strictly [1] 132/23	suggest [6] 28/4 51/4 84/10 87/16 130/16 165/5		
	strong [5] 71/14 101/22 106/8 144/17 145/12	suggested [11] 63/12 64/4 75/13 79/10 79/19 114/10 122/20 137/12 149/21 162/10 166/12		
	stronger [2] 102/4 104/23	suggestion [3] 49/20 137/14 166/15		
	strongly [3] 35/18 78/1 156/23	suggests [1] 123/8		
	structured [2] 25/6 95/8	suitable [1] 40/23		
	structures [2] 22/2 88/3			
	structuring [1] 24/19			
	study [2] 34/5 84/4			

T	142/8 142/20 152/17 156/4 159/2	48/19 50/10 55/18 56/4 62/16 62/18	118/23 130/10 141/9 142/21 146/22 148/7	thereafter [1] 165/16
team... [3] 146/18 146/21 160/17	test [10] 26/6 28/14 31/8 60/6 60/20 75/9	62/20 62/20 62/21 72/13 76/16 89/25	150/8 153/15 155/12 156/24 164/24 164/25	therefore [12] 3/18 19/6 25/24 39/17
teams [1] 42/21	75/15 148/20 160/4 160/10	101/8 105/1 107/20 107/24 107/25 108/4	them [39] 5/22 5/22 12/20 19/21 27/16	39/23 50/25 67/12 98/8 111/14 111/17
technical [41] 20/25 21/9 21/15 24/13	tested [6] 22/18 25/20 28/24 29/4	108/14 108/20 108/21 109/2 109/20 110/21	27/17 31/10 34/21 40/16 51/10 52/1 53/5	144/16 159/16
24/19 26/24 27/9	75/21 128/3	112/11 114/6 115/11 116/20 118/15 119/16	54/4 60/9 60/21 64/6 65/18 66/4 66/25	these [52] 5/21 14/11 18/16 22/5 22/6 22/19
27/12 27/22 28/6 28/8	testing [20] 25/2 25/4 25/9 25/13 31/3 33/21	120/1 120/18 123/5 123/13 124/21 125/7	74/20 79/21 80/20 83/13 84/20 85/3	24/17 33/19 38/8 39/15 45/20 49/3
30/4 30/11 31/22	129/22 130/1 143/17 159/10 159/21 159/23	127/4 127/17 130/7 130/24 130/25 130/25	90/19 90/19 95/20 101/5 101/14 119/6	51/22 64/25 69/23 72/23 73/1 80/19
32/11 34/19 35/3	160/4 160/12 160/24 161/10 161/23 162/9	142/17 146/1 146/12 150/13 150/25 151/20	124/19 144/15 145/16 167/20 167/24	80/24 82/6 84/10 88/9 98/5 98/21 101/3
35/23 36/2 53/11	163/7 165/17	152/3 152/16 154/17 158/18 159/4 159/21	167/20 167/24	104/7 104/16 104/18 104/23 113/22 118/5
53/25 58/22 59/3 79/9	testing' [2] 31/5 75/8	164/1 164/6 166/21 169/12 169/13 170/4	themselves [5] 19/4 102/24 139/11 155/23	123/19 128/4 130/2 131/1 132/7 133/4
79/21 114/19 114/23	tests [5] 159/25 160/1 160/6 161/6	170/9 170/12	158/3	141/13 142/24 143/2 143/25 144/7 149/7
115/12 124/7 125/25	161/7	than [29] 9/3 9/4 9/12 10/25 15/12 25/5	then [101] 3/2 4/4 7/3 8/1 8/1 8/14 10/2 10/9	149/10 149/16 155/22 156/21 160/1 160/21
126/1 126/12 126/20	26/11 28/16 31/4 43/7 52/2 59/3 80/14 81/1	26/11 28/16 31/4 43/7 52/2 59/3 80/14 81/1	10/11 10/15 15/4 15/6 15/19 17/14 18/11	163/15 163/16 163/23
127/6 130/17 131/2	90/16 91/12 100/9 103/10 114/16 125/16	90/16 91/12 100/9 103/10 114/16 125/16	18/13 18/18 20/18 21/2 21/18 24/20	they [108] 1/25 4/14 5/4 5/18 11/4 12/18
144/2 156/14 157/2	126/16 131/11 141/10 141/23 142/2 143/17	126/16 131/11 141/10 141/23 142/2 143/17	25/18 26/18 26/23 27/1 27/6 27/19 29/8	12/19 19/4 19/6 19/8 19/16 19/18 24/15
158/12 159/23	149/9 152/20 162/2	149/9 152/20 162/2	35/18 36/13 37/6 37/8 37/12 40/6 44/3 44/22	24/16 27/15 28/10 29/20 30/10 33/1 33/6
technically [13]	thank [94] 1/4 1/12 3/24 6/10 7/6 13/1	thank [94] 1/4 1/12 3/24 6/10 7/6 13/1	45/2 45/12 46/23 47/16 48/14 49/19	52/1 53/18 53/20 55/5 55/6 55/6 56/16 64/4
22/16 23/2 23/19 27/7	15/18 15/21 21/4 27/19 29/7 35/21 42/1	15/18 15/21 21/4 27/19 29/7 35/21 42/1	50/4 51/11 52/5 54/1 54/3 57/21 57/24 58/3	64/8 64/25 71/23 73/15 74/13 74/21
27/24 29/1 76/24	42/7 45/25 48/19 50/10 55/18 55/22	42/7 45/25 48/19 50/10 55/18 55/22	58/7 58/15 59/6 59/9 59/16 60/4 60/21	76/13 77/9 77/10 78/6 79/11 80/18 80/23
126/3 126/23 127/1	56/4 56/22 62/16 62/18 62/20 62/20	56/4 56/22 62/16 62/18 62/20 62/20	64/25 65/14 65/16 65/21 66/1 66/4 68/7	80/24 82/10 83/13 84/24 86/18 88/5
127/9 127/12 128/1	62/21 72/13 76/16 87/12 87/15 89/25	62/21 72/13 76/16 87/12 87/15 89/25	70/20 71/8 76/4 76/11 79/3 79/25 90/11 92/3	88/15 88/18 88/20 89/8 91/3 91/5 94/6
techniques [1] 149/9	95/11 101/8 105/1 107/20 107/24 107/25	95/11 101/8 105/1 107/20 107/24 107/25	93/14 94/25 97/24 102/23 103/9 103/16	94/9 97/17 97/18 97/21 98/20 100/7
technological [1]	108/4 108/14 108/20 108/21 109/2 109/20	108/4 108/14 108/20 108/21 109/2 109/20	103/18 103/22 104/14 104/22 105/3 105/15	100/17 104/25 106/15 106/23 106/24 107/8
23/10	109/24 110/21 112/11 114/6 115/11 116/20	109/24 110/21 112/11 114/6 115/11 116/20	106/17 106/22 110/19 111/22 112/2 112/17	107/17 112/3 113/23 117/18 118/9 119/7
technologies [3]	118/15 119/16 120/1 120/18 123/5 123/13	118/15 119/16 120/1 120/18 123/5 123/13	119/18 125/9 132/8 139/10 144/8 151/14	126/24 126/24 127/1 127/8 127/11 127/14
72/24 73/1 73/9	124/21 125/7 127/4 127/17 130/7 130/24	124/21 125/7 127/4 127/17 130/7 130/24	155/2 158/20 162/6 163/10 167/12	128/15 130/1 138/1 139/1 139/12 141/17
technology [5] 29/18	130/25 130/25 138/13 140/16 140/24 142/17	130/25 130/25 138/13 140/16 140/24 142/17	theoretical [2] 126/16 130/5	143/10 144/13 145/4 145/4 145/10 145/11
72/16 91/2 105/12	146/1 146/12 150/13 150/25 151/7 151/8	146/1 146/12 150/13 150/25 151/7 151/8	theoretically [1] 126/8	145/17 150/7 153/14 153/16 154/5 157/1
128/14	151/20 152/3 152/16 154/17 158/18 159/4	151/20 152/3 152/16 154/17 158/18 159/4	theory [4] 29/1 126/21 131/23 160/4	157/15 163/4 166/10 166/19 167/23
telephone [1] 11/1	159/21 164/1 164/6 166/21 168/11 169/12	159/21 164/1 164/6 166/21 168/11 169/12	there [182] there'd [1] 99/24	they'd [4] 39/25 94/10 107/13 115/2
tell [2] 13/2 30/24	169/13 169/18 169/25 170/1 170/4 170/7	169/13 169/18 169/25 170/1 170/4 170/7	there's [15] 10/9 19/1 33/17 36/10 44/1	they're [9] 18/12 21/3 40/16 43/24 60/20
telling [1] 107/3	170/9 170/12 170/13	170/9 170/12 170/13	52/22 54/10 58/21 65/17 68/8 100/18	64/25 94/3 94/15 144/21
tells [2] 20/21 89/25	thank you [78] 1/4 1/12 3/24 6/10 7/6	thank you [78] 1/4 1/12 3/24 6/10 7/6	101/14 102/14 103/14 127/17	they've [2] 72/7
tend [1] 165/5	13/1 15/18 15/21 21/4 27/19 42/1 42/7 45/25	13/1 15/18 15/21 21/4 27/19 42/1 42/7 45/25		
tendering [5] 32/3 33/4 36/6 55/16 84/22				
tends [1] 28/4				
tenor [1] 141/21				
term [5] 50/23 115/3 126/1 132/25 168/4				
terminate [3] 47/10 80/15 161/20				
terminating [2] 19/3 77/15				
termination [10]				
16/23 17/4 17/7 17/17 19/9 19/10 19/14				
19/18 20/14 139/4				
terms [48] 3/5 6/4 7/9 20/19 21/19 22/8				
22/23 38/3 38/8 38/22 39/5 39/16 40/22 43/2				
49/11 51/3 51/5 57/3 61/12 61/18 61/25				
71/22 83/18 88/8 97/7 100/7 100/19 103/25				
116/13 117/10 118/14 118/16 119/5 121/10				
123/6 127/2 130/8 131/25 135/15 136/8				
138/19 140/4 140/8				

T	104/24 119/6 142/24 142/25 143/1 153/3 160/3 160/7 163/8 167/10 167/13 167/18 168/1 168/1	101/22 120/23 150/10 took [12] 2/16 2/20 15/25 19/8 19/20 67/13 101/19 104/14 104/22 105/5 118/18 160/13 top [6] 9/11 13/5 80/7 148/15 151/21 164/11 topic [1] 168/18 total [2] 92/8 109/6 totality [1] 142/5 totally [1] 94/25 totals [1] 65/18 touch [1] 158/11 touchscreens [2] 72/23 73/25 towards [4] 13/6 39/2 89/10 106/3 Toyota [1] 85/20 Trade [13] 2/16 3/3 6/2 6/12 13/14 37/13 43/16 48/15 78/2 85/19 88/21 138/3 163/18 traditional [1] 78/18 train [2] 92/18 92/22 trained [1] 94/24 training [4] 77/11 91/4 95/4 162/22 transactions [1] 124/11 transcript [1] 2/1 transfer [2] 64/19 139/18 transferred [4] 39/23 66/17 67/9 82/2 transferring [1] 140/3 transition [1] 123/15 translate [1] 49/23 transmitted [1] 151/22 transparent [3] 102/7 102/25 103/10 Transport [1] 2/21 Treasury [27] 2/12 3/1 3/6 3/9 3/19 16/1 20/11 20/22 41/5 43/5 43/10 47/18 51/15 74/10 83/2 83/8 83/14 103/5 125/10 137/18 138/2 157/12 157/19 163/19 164/3 165/7 166/19 treated [1] 106/14 Treaty [1] 121/23 trial [15] 75/10 141/20 143/18 159/11 161/8 161/14 161/17 161/19 161/22 162/5 162/7 162/8 162/11 163/11 165/13 trialled [1] 139/25 trialling [1] 130/2	trials [12] 29/3 68/3 71/15 71/24 76/11 78/22 86/23 143/5 163/1 165/23 169/8 169/9 Tribunal [1] 55/17 tribute [1] 59/16 trick [1] 79/19 tried [3] 62/14 78/15 85/12 trouble [3] 151/5 155/21 169/22 troubleshooter [12] 36/17 36/24 40/20 41/1 43/3 45/17 49/9 50/3 57/2 62/3 62/13 102/22 troubleshooting [1] 104/19 true [5] 1/23 2/18 66/19 109/11 109/21 trust [2] 73/25 82/22 try [4] 54/24 71/20 100/3 162/1 trying [25] 4/23 5/4 5/18 35/13 43/16 43/19 52/9 53/9 54/17 60/24 61/6 61/24 74/22 76/1 78/19 83/19 98/12 116/15 119/11 121/24 144/6 150/7 154/24 156/18 167/19 Tuesday [1] 138/22 turn [15] 3/23 13/3 15/19 29/9 43/1 62/17 64/4 87/4 89/10 109/8 120/1 147/7 158/22 159/14 164/18 turned [1] 68/22 Turning [1] 139/11 turns [1] 58/7 two [35] 2/19 2/24 4/11 4/15 4/19 5/4 5/5 5/19 6/8 9/22 16/21 16/23 17/1 20/10 21/2 33/6 39/11 52/16 58/16 60/14 63/16 63/19 63/22 67/7 69/18 77/20 87/1 114/21 134/22 135/16 143/14 143/18 145/21 160/12 162/2 two months [1] 160/12 Tyneside [1] 89/7 type [1] 143/13 types [1] 124/13	ultimately [4] 66/15 67/2 127/8 166/24 unable [2] 77/9 162/7 unacceptable [2] 64/24 148/24 unavoidable [1] 25/20 unaware [1] 14/9 uncertainties [1] 134/7 uncomfortable [1] 91/11 uncovered [1] 161/12 under [29] 2/22 22/3 24/10 29/9 32/12 39/22 43/7 43/12 53/5 53/7 55/9 57/21 58/10 65/24 67/8 67/15 75/13 78/24 81/17 83/4 83/5 85/17 116/11 127/18 128/21 136/20 155/4 159/7 159/21 underestimated [1] 127/22 undergo [1] 31/3 underlay [1] 112/20 underlies [1] 139/19 underneath [2] 29/11 56/9 underperforming [5] 116/21 117/13 117/16 117/22 118/14 underpinned [3] 123/7 130/11 130/18 underpinning [1] 145/22 understand [32] 22/22 23/1 25/12 25/17 26/2 28/9 28/22 32/9 33/10 33/13 34/5 34/8 34/8 34/9 48/12 53/21 53/22 54/18 54/24 67/21 68/7 69/17 94/5 106/25 118/7 120/20 124/3 125/25 133/22 148/8 153/9 154/6 understandable [1] 144/21 understanding [9] 32/19 34/20 118/21 127/11 144/6 145/4 149/6 153/8 153/24 understood [1] 126/2 undertake [1] 148/5 undertaken [1] 159/25 undertaking [2] 25/3 141/15 undertook [2] 30/17 110/22 underwrite [1]
----------	---	--	---	--

U	upon [9] 97/8 110/5 110/21 124/7 134/12 134/17 142/20 155/25 170/7 urge [2] 59/23 60/2 urgency [1] 119/10 us [29] 1/13 1/14 1/14 13/2 14/21 17/19 20/21 21/8 21/14 24/9 27/23 30/24 32/4 33/18 46/13 46/15 50/21 56/3 70/8 85/2 85/11 86/18 88/4 89/25 113/25 115/10 121/18 129/9 156/5 usage [1] 46/20 use [13] 34/5 56/14 70/22 72/24 73/2 73/9 74/1 74/5 82/12 92/18 92/22 116/16 169/3 used [7] 23/21 29/16 96/3 96/5 97/12 126/24 128/10 useful [2] 69/1 101/5 user [3] 73/25 146/25 149/10 users' [2] 148/19 149/3 using [3] 39/13 149/8 167/24 usual [1] 56/19	108/15 109/24 111/23 114/12 115/20 116/12 117/20 118/14 121/13 122/5 124/16 126/13 128/8 130/17 132/7 132/8 135/5 135/6 135/14 145/14 150/6 153/10 156/3 159/1 159/2 162/17 163/5 168/2 168/11 168/17 169/18 169/25 170/1 170/8 170/13 via [2] 43/4 72/23 viability [17] 27/12 28/8 30/4 31/22 90/16 114/18 115/13 125/25 126/1 126/5 126/6 126/14 127/6 130/17 131/2 155/1 155/8 viable [13] 22/17 23/2 23/19 27/7 27/24 76/24 115/17 127/1 127/1 127/9 127/12 128/2 133/7 vice [3] 150/5 151/16 152/6 view [41] 5/9 20/12 22/16 23/1 23/10 28/11 30/21 38/10 42/4 47/2 51/19 61/2 62/13 64/22 76/4 82/20 84/11 85/1 99/5 103/12 105/6 115/11 116/1 120/22 120/25 121/10 121/12 122/25 123/4 123/24 128/1 131/8 135/18 144/12 145/5 145/13 159/10 160/18 161/5 161/9 161/25 viewed [1] 137/7 viewing [1] 135/24 views [9] 58/16 67/1 89/23 91/22 94/16 121/2 121/5 121/6 162/2 vis [2] 155/18 155/18 vis-à-vis [1] 155/18 visibility [1] 79/8 visiting [2] 112/25 113/3 Vivien [1] 109/1 voice [1] 107/5 volume [1] 70/11 vulnerable [1] 123/18	wanted [14] 32/22 32/24 53/3 54/11 61/5 66/22 68/2 74/14 74/18 78/22 86/16 87/10 87/25 167/10 wanting [2] 91/9 92/22 wants [2] 122/16 122/18 warned [1] 155/4 warning [1] 154/25 was [475] wasn't [12] 10/22 24/6 42/22 43/13 61/7 84/11 87/24 92/20 119/9 132/17 132/17 157/5 watching [1] 15/10 waves [1] 155/16 way [69] 4/12 4/23 6/21 7/1 8/8 10/14 11/2 11/12 14/14 16/22 17/2 18/19 19/13 23/7 25/6 28/5 30/14 35/20 42/12 42/13 42/13 42/21 43/12 46/6 52/11 54/4 59/6 59/12 63/9 63/20 64/1 64/2 69/5 69/22 77/25 80/13 80/25 87/8 90/21 96/9 112/10 116/2 118/2 118/9 121/9 121/11 122/11 122/14 122/19 133/6 133/21 134/24 135/5 136/6 136/14 137/8 141/10 142/12 142/14 144/4 144/8 146/23 156/18 157/5 162/4 162/19 163/6 167/15 167/17 ways [2] 132/19 156/25 we [392] we'd [10] 26/6 33/19 42/3 62/14 67/14 84/17 93/3 93/12 127/13 150/17 we'll [2] 72/10 114/24 we're [16] 12/24 14/24 28/1 29/10 48/17 52/11 56/7 56/16 60/24 78/19 83/19 94/24 95/2 98/13 126/18 129/16 we've [8] 58/18 101/15 103/3 133/12 153/22 157/22 167/6 168/8 weakened [1] 155/19 weaknesses [2] 32/12 54/2 weather [1] 87/8 web [3] 43/15 44/6	73/17 weeds [1] 17/21 week [3] 107/2 161/16 164/22 weekly [2] 91/16 92/25 weight [2] 134/11 134/17 weighted [1] 133/20 welcomes [1] 47/17 welfare [1] 110/9 well [44] 3/9 5/8 6/7 7/15 11/8 20/10 22/20 24/18 32/4 32/16 32/21 35/13 42/7 43/9 44/11 48/6 50/24 56/18 82/20 83/25 84/24 85/1 85/3 87/18 90/22 93/8 94/1 94/10 95/8 105/6 105/15 124/23 128/5 129/13 132/15 134/23 135/5 141/8 142/1 144/3 157/20 162/23 170/1 170/5 went [5] 13/23 30/15 53/10 54/20 115/19 were [228] weren't [5] 54/6 93/3 98/9 156/5 167/24 what [166] 3/18 9/10 9/20 10/20 11/20 12/1 14/22 14/25 17/20 23/1 26/2 26/3 26/3 26/20 27/12 28/7 28/22 30/2 30/3 30/13 30/16 31/20 32/19 32/20 33/24 34/2 34/2 37/1 39/20 39/21 41/12 45/23 46/10 46/11 47/4 47/23 48/1 48/3 48/10 48/21 52/21 52/24 53/1 53/2 53/10 54/16 54/18 54/20 55/21 56/20 60/11 61/2 61/9 61/11 61/18 61/24 63/4 65/9 66/22 67/21 67/23 68/2 69/17 69/23 72/16 73/6 73/12 74/2 74/8 74/13 74/21 76/4 78/7 83/23 85/12 87/25 88/2 89/25 90/4 93/22 94/4 94/5 94/17 95/4 97/20 97/21 98/12 99/13 99/13 99/18 100/12 100/18 101/23 102/8 103/1 103/7 103/12 103/20 105/2 105/18 106/2 106/10 106/20 106/25 107/10 107/19 109/17 111/23 112/2 116/7 116/10 116/19 116/22
	V valuable [1] 74/20 value [8] 46/9 46/15 61/24 102/9 103/2 103/9 103/20 115/10 variation [1] 54/11 varied [1] 108/2 variety [2] 29/17 128/12 various [5] 66/16 138/2 138/18 143/20 158/14 vast [1] 36/3 vehicle [1] 93/10 veil [1] 34/3 Versailles [1] 121/23 version [2] 50/7 147/9 very [80] 3/5 4/25 5/21 5/24 6/4 6/19 6/22 6/25 8/5 9/21 23/3 29/14 35/18 35/21 41/24 42/11 43/23 44/9 44/9 47/25 54/21 55/19 55/22 56/22 71/14 73/14 74/20 78/9 79/8 81/13 83/7 85/11 85/23 86/25 87/2 87/12 87/15 88/24 94/2 95/11 96/20 97/8 101/14 105/9 108/3			
	W wait [2] 9/13 9/14 waiting [1] 133/5 Wallsend [1] 89/7 want [10] 37/1 41/12 67/8 71/18 91/2 91/6 92/18 94/1 121/22 153/15			

<p>W</p> <p>what... [53] 117/15 117/18 117/24 118/13 120/13 121/10 121/22 122/8 122/24 123/4 124/3 124/10 125/25 126/2 126/3 126/5 126/6 129/2 129/5 129/7 130/1 132/3 132/3 138/8 142/7 143/1 143/4 143/4 143/23 143/25 144/16 145/11 145/13 148/13 150/3 152/17 155/3 155/23 155/23 156/18 157/25 159/2 159/19 160/15 163/5 163/9 163/14 163/16 163/24 165/2 167/3 168/6 168/19</p> <p>what's [6] 83/12 89/19 99/6 100/3 100/3 108/7</p> <p>whatever [4] 144/14 155/6 156/11 159/19</p> <p>when [43] 2/15 2/22 7/17 8/14 8/24 15/3 20/7 20/9 27/19 31/9 33/2 33/25 44/1 48/8 58/5 62/6 72/1 75/11 75/17 77/23 78/1 78/12 78/15 79/15 88/24 95/1 98/4 101/17 101/18 104/13 105/18 111/6 114/3 116/12 117/15 121/3 134/9 134/14 136/11 136/23 155/4 162/13 165/20</p> <p>where [20] 25/10 42/3 53/5 56/16 60/17 75/14 94/19 95/7 111/17 115/20 122/13 122/20 122/22 145/6 148/16 148/17 150/10 153/24 156/19 157/7</p> <p>whereas [2] 4/17 6/23</p> <p>whether [60] 5/17 7/21 7/22 12/15 14/6 14/11 17/11 17/15 17/15 21/8 21/15 21/21 21/24 22/1 22/6 22/9 22/23 26/11 28/15 28/16 28/25 29/23 30/2 31/11 38/21 40/16 44/8 44/15 44/17 46/14 48/10 63/19 66/17 66/18 68/4 69/23 72/4 72/10 73/3 76/2 94/20 96/1 96/12 98/4 98/24 99/14 99/16 100/13</p>	<p>112/23 119/22 124/12 126/18 135/12 138/25 139/2 146/8 149/13 149/18 157/3 168/9</p> <p>which [154] 2/21 2/25 3/5 3/8 4/7 4/12 5/13 6/5 6/6 13/10 21/22 22/10 23/24 27/6 31/8 31/9 35/10 38/12 38/15 38/17 39/8 39/12 39/16 39/18 43/2 44/2 44/16 44/20 46/8 47/25 49/9 49/17 51/3 52/17 52/21 52/22 53/25 54/4 54/12 55/16 56/8 56/9 57/1 57/17 60/6 60/17 60/19 60/22 68/20 69/14 70/8 70/24 71/18 72/7 75/18 75/25 76/17 76/23 77/9 78/7 78/17 78/24 79/6 80/21 81/6 81/17 81/19 83/19 84/18 85/12 86/4 86/16 87/9 88/6 88/22 91/9 92/6 92/12 96/10 98/13 101/16 102/15 103/11 103/23 104/22 111/10 111/23 112/17 112/22 113/4 113/6 114/14 115/2 115/13 118/3 118/16 119/18 120/4 120/20 121/22 121/23 122/5 122/13 123/6 125/12 127/3 128/18 130/11 131/1 131/6 132/19 132/25 133/13 135/11 136/9 136/18 136/19 139/7 140/1 140/6 140/12 140/15 141/2 142/22 143/7 144/11 144/24 145/21 145/24 146/19 146/23 147/6 147/10 148/1 148/3 148/7 151/15 154/19 155/7 157/7 158/6 158/17 158/19 159/9 161/2 161/20 164/2 164/9 165/13 165/21 167/10 167/18 167/24 169/22</p> <p>while [5] 40/10 40/14 52/15 119/5 126/21</p> <p>whilst [3] 160/12 163/14 166/22</p> <p>who [34] 6/19 8/12 11/15 11/16 31/11 32/24 34/1 35/7 35/11 37/12 37/20 40/23 41/4 44/5 55/8 77/18 86/8 91/1 91/1 92/18 98/20 98/21 101/11 106/21 107/9 118/18</p>	<p>124/8 125/2 125/6 125/10 138/1 143/22 146/7 167/19</p> <p>whole [22] 3/13 7/23 8/5 43/20 46/16 48/9 49/24 52/7 65/6 67/10 71/9 78/15 91/4 94/5 105/3 115/6 118/3 118/7 129/22 141/21 157/4 163/20</p> <p>wholly [1] 11/19</p> <p>whom [5] 75/19 95/19 123/17 146/5 151/21</p> <p>whose [3] 33/7 125/5 137/3</p> <p>why [45] 4/9 5/9 19/24 23/25 29/2 32/9 32/10 32/11 32/13 33/1 33/6 33/11 33/13 33/17 34/5 34/9 41/23 44/6 53/23 54/1 61/21 62/10 67/5 76/9 78/24 84/20 84/21 84/24 86/12 86/17 92/14 95/9 99/5 102/21 115/11 116/1 116/8 132/13 134/21 141/5 142/8 147/21 154/6 167/3 168/10</p> <p>wider [6] 50/24 74/23 120/15 123/6 162/23 167/18</p> <p>will [64] 6/23 13/4 15/11 18/15 38/7 39/3 39/12 40/9 40/11 40/13 40/19 43/4 44/12 44/13 44/23 45/10 48/24 49/15 50/18 51/6 51/9 51/17 53/15 53/18 59/11 59/14 65/17 67/19 69/5 70/8 80/3 80/17 80/21 80/23 82/14 82/23 84/4 87/2 87/4 87/5 90/3 90/19 95/11 100/5 104/3 108/11 111/24 120/10 120/11 120/11 125/5 126/9 142/4 146/20 146/25 147/17 148/20 149/3 149/11 154/13 161/7 161/7 161/10 161/12</p> <p>willing [3] 52/8 81/24 82/24</p> <p>Wilson [1] 37/20</p> <p>win [1] 167/13</p> <p>wind [1] 105/3</p> <p>winning [1] 82/14</p> <p>wish [6] 60/11 87/17 93/24 107/22 139/1 153/16</p> <p>withdraw [4] 71/20 164/13 166/23 167/4</p>	<p>withdrawal [1] 149/24</p> <p>withdrawing [1] 64/21</p> <p>withdrew [1] 168/10</p> <p>within [25] 8/1 13/8 23/21 30/3 37/18 44/14 48/23 53/25 57/9 104/2 106/7 110/20 111/7 111/13 112/17 113/17 120/11 124/8 128/19 129/1 131/14 132/1 137/13 154/15 165/7</p> <p>without [8] 40/12 51/1 57/19 58/5 76/10 80/14 113/24 155/21</p> <p>WITN03580100 [2] 2/1 3/23</p> <p>WITN03790100 [1] 117/2</p> <p>WITN04200100 [1] 84/8</p> <p>witness [25] 1/17 1/23 3/22 6/10 6/14 9/6 13/2 16/14 17/5 26/17 26/18 28/12 30/24 41/18 43/15 56/15 76/16 84/5 108/8 108/21 109/2 149/21 150/16 166/12 169/21</p> <p>witness's [1] 133/17</p> <p>witnesses [1] 114/10</p> <p>won't [1] 122/15</p> <p>wonder [4] 119/15 120/17 147/7 164/17</p> <p>word [3] 101/22 116/15 126/24</p> <p>words [2] 74/5 115/7</p> <p>work [33] 3/11 5/12 8/2 30/9 30/15 37/25 39/2 40/13 43/13 43/18 50/2 59/16 70/21 75/15 83/23 89/7 98/23 104/17 104/20 110/20 110/22 113/2 121/12 121/25 127/22 146/17 147/1 147/15 147/18 148/10 157/3 164/24 168/20</p> <p>workable [1] 136/17</p> <p>worked [7] 9/20 68/4 86/16 86/24 101/12 110/9 155/2</p> <p>working [26] 6/19 29/4 46/21 49/21 58/9 61/5 78/25 88/6 93/6 93/16 94/15 112/13 112/21 113/9 113/18 113/19 125/11 132/17 136/24 137/3 137/25 138/18 138/22 139/7 157/5 165/15</p>	<p>works [4] 60/6 60/20 75/22 144/11</p> <p>world [4] 73/16 98/2 105/11 113/5</p> <p>worried [1] 153/7</p> <p>worth [3] 113/21 114/25 167/21</p> <p>worthwhile [1] 120/12</p> <p>would [241]</p> <p>would've [1] 115/18</p> <p>wouldn't [26] 9/5 9/9 10/4 12/5 12/20 14/13 14/14 17/24 18/3 21/8 21/14 34/6 34/16 53/23 63/18 67/8 67/8 67/25 87/23 88/1 88/1 89/15 98/6 100/2 121/9 163/23</p> <p>Wright [1] 151/15</p> <p>write [6] 38/3 69/1 74/3 89/20 89/21 140/1</p> <p>writing [4] 27/4 38/17 76/22 120/6</p> <p>written [4] 28/4 63/2 70/23 159/16</p> <p>wrong [6] 41/17 71/18 84/13 100/3 100/10 163/6</p> <p>wrote [5] 84/10 109/13 121/22 122/13 149/19</p> <p>Wylie [1] 21/12</p> <hr/> <p>Y</p> <p>yeah [39] 7/3 16/2 16/4 16/18 18/10 24/1 32/16 37/11 37/15 42/2 49/14 50/3 50/6 52/4 54/8 59/5 60/5 60/10 61/20 62/2 62/5 62/13 64/18 65/20 67/4 76/1 83/11 84/3 84/14 89/18 89/18 89/24 91/13 106/1 107/14 116/6 129/13 129/18 137/24</p> <p>year [11] 2/22 63/15 72/25 73/3 73/10 77/7 90/3 92/7 92/8 109/3 153/4</p> <p>years [11] 2/19 9/19 28/20 55/9 81/23 83/19 98/13 99/6 131/11 140/20 155/2</p> <p>yes [141] 1/6 1/19 2/10 6/17 7/18 7/18 8/12 9/8 10/19 11/11 13/13 13/20 14/20 15/15 15/17 16/8 18/9 18/17 20/1 22/25 23/12 23/13 23/20 26/10 27/14 27/14</p>
--	---	---	---	--

Y
yes... [115] 28/3 28/9
 28/11 29/2 32/18
 33/23 34/8 34/8 34/12
 34/15 36/25 38/19
 40/3 41/2 41/11 42/7
 44/8 44/11 45/19
 45/22 45/25 47/24
 48/3 48/18 49/25 50/1
 50/14 50/14 52/9
 52/14 53/8 53/19 54/7
 54/9 55/1 55/5 55/6
 55/22 56/4 57/13
 58/25 59/20 62/19
 63/7 63/21 66/14
 68/12 69/20 69/25
 70/2 70/4 71/6 71/10
 71/11 75/2 76/1 78/14
 83/5 83/17 87/4 87/14
 87/18 89/2 89/17
 90/25 95/6 95/16 97/6
 97/22 99/12 103/14
 103/22 105/15 106/2
 107/7 108/13 108/20
 109/5 109/7 109/10
 109/23 110/4 110/7
 110/11 110/14 110/24
 111/2 111/5 111/9
 117/5 119/21 122/12
 123/11 125/15 125/18
 125/22 127/16 129/9
 129/14 130/21 131/22
 133/15 134/18 136/22
 137/7 144/19 144/21
 151/5 151/12 151/18
 158/8 163/13 165/4
 170/11 170/12
yesterday [2] 44/8
 139/13
yet [3] 30/22 37/14
 59/13
you [619]
you know [31] 32/21
 55/8 63/23 76/13
 78/16 86/7 88/20 91/3
 98/13 100/16 102/21
 113/12 113/24 115/8
 116/11 122/21 126/15
 127/3 127/14 130/3
 132/21 133/7 142/13
 143/20 143/21 144/10
 145/12 157/3 157/7
 157/18 162/22
you'd [2] 100/3
 100/13
you'll [3] 54/23 55/7
 97/3
you're [16] 13/10
 27/20 38/17 40/22
 41/20 44/6 93/17 95/1
 100/16 100/16 103/7
 103/12 105/9 105/21
 107/4 107/23

you've [37] 11/8 12/7
 16/6 28/4 31/6 37/24
 46/5 48/2 53/13 57/11
 71/25 76/12 78/6 96/9
 100/23 105/18 110/15
 112/12 116/4 118/17
 123/1 123/21 124/2
 124/6 125/23 126/10
 127/4 130/8 132/12
 137/8 139/5 142/8
 143/14 144/25 146/5
 146/14 169/7
your [141] 1/14 1/21
 1/24 2/2 3/5 3/22 5/9
 6/5 6/14 11/13 11/15
 12/22 13/2 13/19
 14/10 14/23 16/3
 16/14 19/24 20/24
 21/14 26/17 26/18
 27/15 28/5 28/10
 30/24 32/19 34/20
 35/1 35/15 35/15 36/8
 40/19 41/6 41/7 41/13
 41/15 43/6 46/2 47/17
 48/19 48/23 49/20
 50/15 51/13 54/6
 57/11 61/2 63/1 63/17
 69/14 69/22 70/24
 70/25 73/6 76/4 76/16
 80/4 80/5 81/8 82/23
 84/11 87/5 89/4 89/17
 89/23 91/14 91/20
 91/21 91/24 92/1
 93/20 95/23 96/7
 96/12 96/20 96/24
 96/25 97/1 97/1 97/4
 97/24 100/23 101/21
 103/5 104/2 106/23
 107/10 108/24 109/8
 109/9 109/12 109/21
 110/1 110/3 110/8
 110/12 110/15 110/16
 111/3 111/19 114/17
 115/11 116/4 116/20
 117/1 119/23 121/5
 123/7 123/12 124/6
 124/13 124/22 125/13
 125/23 126/10 127/10
 130/8 130/15 130/23
 132/5 132/12 135/18
 136/7 137/18 137/19
 142/18 143/19 144/20
 144/23 145/1 146/6
 149/14 152/13 158/10
 159/15 163/16 168/20
 169/7 169/21
yours [1] 34/17
yourself [4] 47/4 59/7
 103/5 142/7