

A Conversation with Hilary Benn, MP – Transcript

This is the transcript of an event held on 8 October 2020. The video is available on the Policy Scotland website at <https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/a-conversation-with-hilary-benn-mp/>

- Hilary Benn, MP, Chair of the Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union in the UK House of Commons.
- Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, Vice-Chancellor, University of Glasgow
- Des McNulty, Deputy Director of Policy Scotland and Assistant Vice-Principal, Economic Development and Civic Engagement, at the University of Glasgow.

Des McNulty: Good morning everyone. On behalf of the University of Glasgow can I welcome you to the Policy Scotland Brexit series of events? My name is Des McNulty. I'm Deputy Director of Policy Scotland. Today's event, we'll have an 'in conversation' event where I will be asking our guest a series of questions for about 45 minutes and after that we'll be taking questions that people put in through the Q&A box on the bottom, so if you want to put forward a question perhaps you'd like to do that. I suspect it might be good to think about doing that later on in the event so that we can gather these questions together. We probably won't be able to get every question answered but we'll try and filter through the ones that we've got. I'd like now to hand it over to the Principal of the University Sir Anton Muscatelli to introduce our distinguished guest.

Anton Muscatelli: Well thank you Des, and good afternoon everyone. It's a real pleasure to be able to join you and to welcome our distinguished guest to the University. Hilary Benn actually requires very little in the way of introduction but I'm very happy to provide him with one. Hilary has been the Labour Member of Parliament for Leeds Central since 1999. Prior to that he was a special adviser to David Blunkett at the Department for Education and Employment and he worked for the MSF trade union during the 1990s. He was appointed to his first ministerial job in 2001 and was named Secretary of State for International Development in 2003. Whilst at DfID Hilary played an important part in increasing the UK's aid budget and in winning agreement on debt relief for the poorest countries at the 2005 Gleneagles summit. Hilary moved to DEFRA in 2007 and was Secretary of State through to the 2010 General Election and after the period as a shadow Leader of the House of Commons and shadow Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government Hilary then served as shadow Foreign Secretary through June 2016. In recent years Hilary has chaired the Exiting the European Union Select Committee and he's currently Chair of the Select Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union. As many of you will know, last year he was the driving force behind the European Union Withdrawal Number Two Act also known as the Benn Act which forced the Government to act to stop a No Deal Brexit last October. A year on and Brexit is once again climbing up the news agenda. Negotiations continue on the future relationship but a deal remains to be struck and I'm sure I'm not the only one getting a powerful sense of déjà vu in this space. Hilary will be in conversation with our very own Des McNulty who introduced himself earlier. I want to thank Des, and the broader Policy Scotland team for bringing this afternoon session together. As a University we are absolutely determined to continue to provide leading thinkers and policymakers with a platform to discuss the most pressing issues of the day and, like me, I'm sure you're looking forward to hearing Hilary's perspective on the current state of the UK/EU negotiations and the likelihood of a deal emerging before the transition period ends at the turn of the year. The two sides remain divided over a variety of issues such as state aid, fair competition, fisheries and provisions contained within the Internal Market Bill, and each day seems to bring a new and often

contradictory briefing on the prospectus of an agreement being struck and, as somebody who follows the internal market also from a Scottish perspective, I really look forward to hearing what Hilary has to say. Hopefully Hilary can help us clear some of the fog and we look forward to his assessment of where we go from here. And, of course, the conversation will take in also much more than Brexit. I'm also very keen, I'm sure others will be also, to hear about Hilary's view on Britain's place in the world, there's many issues here around DfD's absorption into the Foreign Office. So this proves to be, this promises to be a fairly jam-packed session and, as Des said, there will be an opportunity for questions afterwards and these will be collated by the Policy Scotland team. So thank you Hilary and Des and over to you Hilary.

Des McNulty: Thanks very much Principal. Just as a first question, Hilary, as Chair of the Committee you've had a unique opportunity to scrutinise, to quiz experts and indeed ministers. Would you be able to share with us any of the highlights or low points or reflections from leading that scrutiny process before we move on to the substantive issues?

Hilary Benn: Oh Des, I don't think the time that we've got would even permit me to start doing that but before I answer your question can I just thank you, Anton, for that very kind introduction. It's a great pleasure to be back at the University of Glasgow, even if it is virtual, and I look forward to coming back at some point in the future when we can see each other. And, secondly, to thank you for this very kind invitation to join you today.

It's been a very interesting experience and I say that deliberately, Des, because clearly Brexit politics - the fact that people were one or other side of the divide in the referendum in 2016 - has continued to echo through the last four years and every step, every decision is seen through that prism. You either think it's a good thing and therefore you will cast your eyes away from some of the obvious difficulties. So last week we were taking evidence from a company representing the chemical industry and they said, having to move from the arrangements we have at the moment for registering our chemicals under what's known as the Reach System to the new UK reach system that we're creating because we can't apparently stay in the EU Reach System, it's going to cost the British chemical industry about 1 billion pounds for no purpose whatsoever. That's costs that businesses don't want and don't need at the very moment when we are facing the worst economic crisis in our lifetime as a result of COVID. So, I mean, there have been moments, of course, when it's been an interesting select committee to chair because members have strong views and I respect that. Mostly in select committees in the UK Parliament we try and reach a consensus on reports; we only managed that, we've managed it twice so far, and the Brexit Committee is divided because in the end you have to take a view about what the Committee's reports are going to say. So that has made it quite challenging but we've spoken to and taken evidence from a very, very large number of people and I think - what would I say - this is the first negotiation in British history where we're going into it knowing for certain that we will come out with a less good arrangement, worse terms of trade than we had going in. So this is completely unique. No one's ever left the European Union before and no one's engaged in a trade negotiation trying to preserve things but knowing that you're likely to lose. And the reasons for that are very clear and simple; the EU clearly has to demonstrate when you leave the EU you're not going to be able to keep all of the benefits without paying the membership subscription and being a member. So I think it's a very difficult time and it's made for very difficult politics but we also have to recognise the strength of feeling on both sides including those who voted to Leave who will say 'I don't care what economic damage we suffer', some of them, 'my sovereignty is more important than that'. Perhaps we can come on to discuss the nature of sovereignty in the future and many people who felt that they had not benefited from the world as it had been, who didn't feel they had a stake in the relationship that we'd created with the European

Union and think, 'well it can't be any worse than it is for me, I've seen old industries disappear, old certainty, well-paid jobs and we want something better in the future'. Now, whether it will be better only time will tell.

Des McNulty: When we had Sir Ivan Rogers speaking to us a few months ago one of the points that he made was that, in a sense, the process of leaving the EU is something that dates back; that Britain had to some degree disengaged from the EU under the Blair administration and then obviously when David Cameron came into power because the particular issues in his own party that precipitated the actual act of leaving. Do you think more could have been done previously to highlight the benefits of the EU and actually share them out across the country as you suggested.?

Hilary Benn: Well, I wouldn't agree that there had been a disengagement from the EU. What the UK had showed was that it was possible to chart a slightly different path in that. We were never a member of the Euro and you will recall the moment when the famous (six) five tests were produced to justify the decision not to join. I think it was the right decision for the UK not to join the Euro. The political argument was 'it's being communitaire to chip in' and the economic argument was never, in my view, a strong one. We weren't part of the Schengen free movement area and I think what that demonstrates is that the UK had great influence in the European Union. I've spoken to many European parliamentarians since the referendum result who said 'I just don't get it Hilary, people in Britain say 'I voted Leave because the EU is always riding roughshod over Britain and telling us what to do'. You have been the most successful country in getting your own way'. And now how do you get your own way in life or achieve the objectives you want, or exercise sovereignty on behalf of your citizens to their benefit? However you want to describe it, you do it by building alliances with others and we built a lot of alliances. And having served on the Council of Ministers for seven years as a cabinet minister in the two roles that I undertook, I saw that for myself.

I think the second thing I would say is that when people argue 'my old industries have gone' and some of them blame the EU even though the EU was not the cause and 'I used to have a well-paid job which could look after my family. Now I have to have two jobs to raise a sufficient income, the job prospects are poor', I think that is a reflection of our domestic politics not our European politics. That we failed to address the fact that globalisation brought benefits overall to the country but they were not evenly shared and that is the story about economic prosperity. I represent part of a city - Leeds - which is very successful economically but within one, two, two and a half miles of the city centre you will find communities where people don't feel part of that prosperity and don't sense that they share within it. And I think what that brings home to us is there are two great political forces at work in the world at the moment on the one hand is the desire for greater control self-determination, sovereignty, independence, whatever name you give to it and that is a desire to shape what happens because many of my constituents would say 'do I have any control on what happens over my life in my community? I have no control whatsoever, none' so when someone comes along and says 'would you like a bit more control?' don't be surprised when people say 'well, if that is going to give us more control, I'd like that'. But on the other hand, there is the absolute necessity, particularly at the beginning of the 21st century, for international cooperation, because how are we going to deal with the great challenges the world faces - dangerous climate change, the biggest threat if we don't deal with it; the movement of people around the globe because they're fleeing war and persecution; the search for a better life, many people who get into boats on the north coast of Africa are in search of a better life than they were able to find in the land where they were born and brought up and, because of technology, they could see what life is like elsewhere - which is a very strong argument for our international development role because we should want everyone to be able to prosper, to grow up, to raise a family, to have a decent income wherever

they live in the world. And if we don't tackle climate change, believe you me - and I've met climate refugees who left their village because it had stopped raining - well, people are not going to stay where they live at the moment to drown or to die of thirst as the climate changes if we let it run away, they'll be coming to live near you and I. And it is, and the EU is a really good example of the need to balance these two political forces, and I think part of the Referendum result was those who voted Leave saying we don't think the balance is quite right and I think that is a lesson for the rest of the EU because those forces, as you know Des, are just as present, those arguments just as present, in other EU member states as they were in the UK during the Referendum campaign.

Des McNulty: Just - I'll come on to climate change and other issues later - but just going back to Brexit itself, this time last year the Benn Act required the-then Prime Minister to seek an extension to the Brexit withdrawal date. Obviously that's, that possibility wasn't it wasn't successful in the end because of the General Election result, so a year on, another No Deal is potentially back on the table. Or possibly some kind of deal might emerge. Have you got any thoughts on where we might be going? Do you think some kind of deal is possible? And what do you think the balance is between No Deal and a deal of some sort?

Hilary Benn: Well, it was certainly the case in the last Parliament when, of course, Theresa May had lost her overall majority, that there was not a majority in the House of Commons for No Deal and that is why, first of all the Cooper Act, and then the Benn Act were able to be passed. Wrongly portrayed as 'you are trying to block Brexit'. 'No, we are simply saying, in the campaign the Leave side promised us a deal, they were absolutely clear about that 'we'll get a deal', 'we'll get a great deal after the referendum'. David Davis, the first Brexit Secretary, said it'll be a deal with exactly the same benefits. Now one can go through all of the statements of the past and therefore the one thing we agree on is - those who voted for the Bill - is we don't support No Deal. And that included MPs who were in favour of any other kind of deal so the one thing that united us was our opposition to No Deal but people who voted for the Bill said if the Government comes along with a deal today I'll vote for it and the irony of Brexit is that we would have left earlier if all the people who had - all the MPs who had voted and campaigned for Brexit - had actually voted for it when the original proposals were put before Parliament. So it's a bit off to blame people who are opposed to Brexit for blocking its enactment when the principle cause of it, including on one occasion is the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

As far as where we are at the moment, my rational side has always said to me surely there will be some sort of agreement and I'm thinking particularly here of tariffs because it makes no sense whatsoever for two trading blocks that are trading an enormous amount with each other to move from what we have at the moment to a world in which we start charging each other tariffs on lamb and beef and motor vehicles and things like that. There is no rational economic case for doing that whatsoever. And given the economic crisis we're facing why would you want to add to the effect of COVID by imposing further difficulties on industry. Now, of course, it would - and services - it would affect us most of all, it would affect the Republic of Ireland, it would also affect to a lesser extent other EU member states.

Outstanding issues, well, principally fisheries. Fisheries was always going to be the last item to be agreed because it's the one thing the UK holds that the EU wants and needs. Without a deal on fisheries there will be no agreement and on state aid I just wish that the UK Government would be clearer about what kind of regime it intends to put in place because it would help the negotiations. It would also help to deal with the Article 10 problem to do with the Northern Ireland protocol. State aid rules will apply to Northern Ireland - there's a debate, does it then reach back into the rest of the United Kingdom or not? Time is running out. In the last week or so the UK side has been saying, well,

we think we can do a deal but issues remain. The EU side has been a bit more, well, there's really quite a long way to go. Each side is waiting for the other to move. There has been movement during the course of the negotiations and we have to acknowledge it. The EU began by saying you must in effect follow our state aid rules. Well, that was never going to fly and the EU then said, all right, all right, all right, could you be so kind as to tell us what rules you are going to follow yourselves and you'll have to have a dispute resolution mechanism. If there is an agreement and I hope there will be and I think there will be because I hope rationality will win out over something that is much worse it'll be quite thin because the other thing to understand is that since Boris Johnson became Prime Minister the level of ambition for an agreement that the UK Government is proposing is much, much less than what there was before. And I think there will be questions that will have to be negotiated with the EU after the end of the year because not everything is going to be agreed at this stage. So that's one part of it.

The other bit which gets attention from time to time is the changes that will be taking place whether there's an agreement or not and, in particular, what happens at the Border. And there it is pretty clear from the evidence we've been taking with we're not ready and the Government is not sure which is why it published that document a couple of weeks ago saying in a reasonable worst case scenario if enough lorries don't have the right paperwork we could see large queues. And that will affect businesses all over the country because it could affect lorries full of fish from Scotland or car parts or pharmaceuticals or anything trying to get to the European market and once you have a queue of lorries in Kent, the lorries aren't where they should be in Stuttgart or Paris or Rome or Milan picking stuff up to bring it back. And this is a huge change for businesses that export to Europe that have never had to fill in a customs declaration before. So there is real anxiety about the potential for disruption at the beginning of January and any of the things that they haven't managed to reach agreement on will then begin to play out as businesses discover, well, we used to be able to do that but we can't do that anymore because they haven't reached an agreement on that.

And then there's the question of Northern Ireland that perhaps we could come on to, because there's a very specific set of circumstances there that have been absolutely centre of the argument over the last month or so because of the Internal Market Bill as well as in Scotland and Wales.

Des McNulty: So one of the things that I think the pandemic has demonstrated is the limits of the capacity of government to handle exceptional circumstances and obviously there's been tensions between officials and ministers which has led to the removal of, I think, five permanent secretaries now in the last few months. Brexit promises to be an added burden, to say the least of it, if we go ahead with a no deal Brexit or a weak deal Brexit. Do you see further upheavals in terms of either the capacity of government to deal with the tasks that are set or frustration from the the elected government about the capacity of civil servants and other organisations to deal with some of these consequences?

Hilary Benn: Well that's a really interesting question because this is not a new issue in British politics. I think back to when I worked for a couple of years as a special adviser to David Blunkett and when the Labour Government was elected in '97 and it wanted to bring in the literacy and the numeracy strategy to raise standards the officials, and they were excellent officials at the Department for Education and Employment, had never ever been asked to do something as direct and directive towards schools as that and what the Government decided to do was to set up the standards unit and brought in Michael Barber to lead that work because that is not what the officials had done in the past. The relationship between the education system at that time and DfEE was - I mean there were policy directions and so on - but basically people were left to get on with things. And you go back to a time when inspection of schools was a pretty rare event where local

authorities inspected their own schools and wrote their own inspection reports - I know that from my time as a chair of an education committee before I entered Parliament - so that I think is the first point. Secondly, from my experience, and I've worked with many terrific civil servants over my career, if there is clear direction and a clear policy then your job as the Secretary of State is to make sure the Department works to achieve those objectives. And the third thing I would say is that there has been, of course, this trend towards outsourcing some decisions or administration to non-departmental bodies and quangos and so on and so forth and you end up sometimes with a lack of clarity about who is actually calling the shots and a very good recent example of that would be what happened with the GCSE and A-level results. Now in Scotland you went through precisely the same process and the Scottish Government decided very quickly, er well the algorithm is not working, we'll go back to the teacher predictions of the grades. It astonishes me it took the Government in Westminster quite so long to come to the same conclusion because it was patently obvious after the experience of Scotland that it wasn't going to work but then you had this kind of standoff – well, is it the Qualifications Agency that is leading here, is it the Secretary of State for Education - and the truth is, even if you do outsource some things ultimately you're the Minister, you're responsible for everything, everything that goes well and everything that goes badly.

The final point I'd make going right back to the start of your question, is that COVID is a really, really difficult challenge. I was on a cabinet committee in 2009 where we were preparing for human pandemic flu. I have to say it was the scariest thing I ever did as a Minister as we contemplated what that could mean, because our society functions as it does because of the way things are organised but it is a very complex ecosystem of relationships, arrangements, expectations, laws, you name it, and it only takes something to come along and disrupt it for a lot of things to then become really, really quite difficult. And the truth is that COVID is a different virus to the one that a lot of countries had been preparing for and, you are, all countries around the world are struggling with the balance between how do we protect our economies not destroy them in the process of trying to suppress the virus while at the same time protecting health. And I think that that is a difficult challenge for governments, not least when, of course, scientists don't have one view. People talk about following the science, well, excuse me, I've talked to a lot of scientists during the epidemic and they will tend to say 'this we know pretty much for certain', 'this we're not sure, we need some more evidence', 'it could happen there, it could happen there but it's over to you now, as the Government, to make the decision as to how you're going to balance all of these things.' And I got people who wrote to me at the beginning of the crisis saying 'why haven't we locked down earlier?' And now I get people writing to me saying 'well, they're scientists, they're saying the whole lockdown is ridiculous and we should just get rid of the lot.' And elected politicians have the responsibility to balance all of these things and we noted with interest the announcements that were made in Scotland yesterday and I think we are clearly heading for stronger restrictions in England given what's happening to the virus at the moment.

Des McNulty: Going back slightly one step to Deal or No Deal. David Martin has put in a question to say that if we get a deal on tariffs, which I think he agrees we may well do, will this not temporarily mask the fact that the real long-term economic damage from Brexit comes from a failure of regulatory alignment? So, it's not the short-term problem, it's the longer term problems we need to pay attention to.

Hilary Benn: Now this is a really, really interesting question because Theresa May made a speech in which she confronted the nation with the choice between alignment and divergence, and she said, famously, you know if we diverge we're going to lose access so we have a choice to make. As the new government has come in every policy decision is informed by the mantra 'control of our laws,

our borders, and our laws, we are not being subject to European rules, we're not going to be subject to the European Court of Justice, and we want the absolute freedom as a sovereign state to go our own way'. Question: does the government have a really, really, really long list of things that it wants to change, diverging from the European setup on the first of January? I'm not entirely sure that they do one reason I say that is that they spent a long time legislating to pick up European laws and move them across and put them into UK legislation so that businesses and others say 'well, you know what's going to be the water quality standard?' 'Well, we've moved this across in into UK law'.

Secondly, the Government has said we're not going to seek to undermine standards and, even if they were inclined, I don't think politics in the country is in a place that would permit any government to do that if you came along and said right now we've left the EU we're going to have lower water quality standards, we're going to reduce protection for workers, we're going to allow dirty industries to pollute more. Well, good luck with that is all I would say because I don't think you're going to be getting that through.

The two examples that the Government usually gives is, one is to do with artificial intelligence where they think they think the EU is risk-averse when it comes to embracing new scientific developments - there's been the debate about GM technology - and agriculture also, where the government is looking to make some changes so I think that remains to be seen.

The other question, which goes to the heart of what you've asked, Des, is this: all the way along in this process people have been saying 'we've got to have a proper Brexit, we've got to have a proper Brexit'. Now we have left the European Union, we actually left at the end of January this year - sometimes I need to point out that to people who appear not to believe that we have but clearly the transition period comes to an end - and at that point 'what is Brexit politics for?' because it's over it's over. And then the question is, well, how can we build a pragmatic and sensible close relationship with our friends and neighbours, on the basis of the new understanding the UK is an independent state that isn't going to be bound into things it doesn't want to be bound into but we have a lot of shared interests historically, economically, in terms of cooperation in science and the way we regulate aircraft and lots of other things, people moving around to work, lawyers working in each other's countries. And I hope, although it will be thin, over time that it will become more possible as fears are not realised and that's the other point because the longer the EU looks at the UK and says 'well they're not actually going to scrap all these laws and try and get one over on us broadly we're marching in step' and, of course we're going to have to abide by EU laws to export products to the EU, then maybe the atmosphere will improve. The real danger of No Deal is it so poisons the atmosphere and we leave the transition period with such a bad breakdown of relationship in which each side is pointing fingers at the other that'll take a long time to recover.

Des McNulty: Move on to Scotland in that context. Obviously Scotland voted against Brexit and Scottish Government has been vehement in its opposition to leaving the EU citing the adverse effects of the economy and also potential impacts on legal rights. Are these tensions and those between the two governments over the handling of COVID a matter of governments with different political priorities failing to cooperate or is there something really more profound here that is going to propel a lasting rift, if you like, whether Scotland becomes independent or not. Will Scotland align with Europe but will it be faced with the choice of being able to align with Europe or with the rest of the UK?

Hilary Benn: Well, insofar as Scotland under the devolution settlement has the right to determine its own policies, well, Scottish Government will do what a Scottish government wants to do and that's absolutely right and proper. Now that has been thrown into sharp relief going back to the Internal

Market Bill by the provisions to do with the internal market. Now there is a, there's a bit of a point here, if the UK as an independent country left the EU is negotiating with other countries, the other country will want to know 'are we doing a deal with England? Are we doing a deal with Scotland? With Wales? With Northern Ireland? Otherwise what's the basis of this? If we agree that we can sell these products to you will they be able to circulate in all parts of the United Kingdom?' And there is it there is an issue there. Now the mechanism that was created to try and deal with those were the Common Frameworks and our criticism, the Labour criticism of the Bill is that the Government has failed to rely on that process to resolve these questions rather than seeking to take a power to impose, and that has caused a lot of grief and aggravation. I mean, speculating on the future, if at some point in the years to come, Scotland would become an independent country - speaking personally as someone who's a quarter Scots I hope very much that that does not happen - then, and if Scotland then joins the EU as an independent country - question: will it have to adopt the Euro? Will have to be part of the Schengen arrangements? - I'm not quite sure what the answer to that is - and you'd end up with a border at Berwick and Carter Bar. Now Scotland's largest market is England and I think, and the broader point I'd make, and I respect those who believe passionately in independence for Scotland while fundamentally disagreeing with that view, but in a world where there are plenty of barriers being put up with people who are not in favour of international cooperation, people who are seeking to undermine the international rules-based system that was created out of the ashes of the Second World War, why would we want to add to that, economically? But these are choices that ultimately politics will determine.

Des McNulty: Just pick up a question here that David Bell's put in saying that state aid and fishing are not big issues; why has the deal got stuck on these - sovereignty rather than economics?

Hilary Benn: Well, that's a really good question because the UK has asserted 'right, we're going to have complete control of our fishing waters'. It's not quite as straightforward as that, by the way, because there are agreements with EA countries that contain certain rights. Over the years British quota has been sold to foreign-owned boats and the Government has had to accept that the owners of that quota will still have the right to come and fish in British waters because those the owners of the quota will say 'excuse me, I've got a legal right here. I bought something and I have the right to exercise it even though you happen to be leaving the European Union'.

The third point of course is that we currently don't have the capacity to fish all of the fish in British waters and the fourth point is we catch fish - in Scotland being a really good example of that - which we export a lot off to the EU because tastes differ in different countries and we import a lot. So it's complex, it's very complex. On the EU side President Macron has got to be able to give something to his fisherman because if they think they're going to be completely excluded - how you do that in practice is another matter - then it's going to be politically unsustainable and that's why, I think I said earlier, there can't be a deal without fisheries.

State aid, I can only presume it is a fear that those who have argued for Brexit, who said we really want to do things in a different way, that this very big trading partner, the United Kingdom, will seek - you've heard the phrase, 'Singapore across the channel' - to deregulate, to gain an advantage but then to use that advantage to sell through the door that we have negotiated with the EU, to leave propped open a bit through the form of an agreement. And that's why I made the point a moment ago, Des, is that as time unfolds then maybe some of those fears the EU will come to realise are not such a big worry from their point of view. But while they are big they want some agreement on state aid and I passionately believe it's perfectly possible to reach an agreement as I was trying to set out earlier.

Des McNulty: Yes, and sovereignty rather than economics? Why do you think sovereignty is taking precedence over economics?

Hilary Benn: Oh I think for the reason I tried to explain in answer to your earlier question. This is a world in which we are seeing great change and some people don't like the change that they have seen, and, objectively for some in some communities they are certainly worse off as a result of what they see as globalisation. And for those in politics who have said - I think of that wonderful episode of the *West Wing* where the presidential candidate explains to a group of people - oh no, it's in *Primary Colors*, it's not in the *West Wing*, I've got to get my references correct! - explains that 'I'm not going to be able to bring your old jobs back.' (President Trump said he would and that's part of the reason he was successful in the election). 'I'm not going to bring your old jobs back but let me tell you what I think we can do to help this community to look forward to a better future' and I think people think 'well, if we have more control maybe there's a better chance of that happening' and even if in the case of President Trump people realise he isn't going to bring back hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs to Ohio - where my mum was from - to Michigan to Illinois to Pennsylvania there those voters would say 'you know what at least he talked about it, at least he understood the experience that we've been through' and the other part the other political party hasn't. And I think it's a complex mix of reasons and you have to respect the reasons why people choose to take a decision even though you may have reached a completely different judgment when it comes to Brexit.

Des McNulty: The US elections obviously getting close and very much in the in the spotlight at the minute, do you think you know the possible different outcomes of that election might affect our Brexit future, our post-Brexit future?

Hilary Benn: Well, I think whoever is President of the United States after the beginning of November will have a huge impact on lots of things around the world. On a trade deal with the United States of America, because of course this has been sold as 'well, don't worry about Europe, it's a declining proportion of global trade' which is another way of saying economies in the rest of the world are growing. But we still export 43 percent of our goods to our biggest, nearest and most important trading partner - the European Union - so it's a totally bogus argument. Number two, 15% of our goods trade goes to a country which we don't formally through the EU have a trading agreement: it's called the United States of America and what that demonstrates is that you make good products at the right price you can sell them all over the world even when you're a member of the European Union so that's another nonsensical argument that was put during the referendum. When I last checked the current occupant of the White House was and is a protectionist. So what exactly does he want the UK to sell more of to America? Well, of course as in any trade negotiation you're trying to get better access for your products to the other market with which you are negotiating, and then, of course, there is the very important proviso that Congress has to agree whatever a President agrees and you'll have seen the comments recently about any undermining of the Northern Ireland protocol and the Good Friday Agreement which is taken extremely seriously on both sides of the aisle in Congress. So I think a trade agreement is going to be difficult and is probably going to take longer with the United States of America whoever is the President and if anything goes badly wrong in relation to Northern Ireland, which I hope and pray it doesn't because the one thing that every single side in the Brexit argument is agreed upon is, under all circumstances, that open border must remain because it is a practical symbol, an expression, of that extraordinary political achievement as a result of compromise, leadership and compromise, which resulted in the Good Friday Agreement. And if that started to unravel I think that would make the prospect of a trade deal with the United States even more difficult.

Des McNulty: Can I maybe shift on to the implications of the decision that the Government's made to combine the Department for International Development in the Foreign Office and what you think the implications of that might be?

Hilary Benn: Well, I think it's a terrible mistake. Now you might expect me to say that as a former Secretary of State. This is the third time in history that a Conservative government has abolished an independent development department and stuck it back inside the Foreign Office so they have form when it comes to doing this. Secondly, what really worried me about the Prime Minister's statement was when he said, in the course of answering questions, he referred to DfID as a giant cashpoint in the sky and I was appalled because what that comment revealed to me is here is someone who clearly has not the faintest clue what DfID does, none whatsoever, because how if you know if you knew the contribution that our aid and our ideas and our expertise and our leadership and our lobbying has made you would never ever utter those words. And he also said in that statement later on 'it's important to make sure that British businesses get a fair crack of the whip'. Well, that's another alarm bell because if you go back to the Pergau Dam scandal in the 1990s where the Government used aid to help build a dam, not because it was about reducing poverty, because it was going to benefit British companies when it came to contracts in the building of the dam, and that led to the 2002 International Development Act that said British aid is for the purposes of reducing poverty and you can't have what's known as tied aid so, are they going to move back to that now? They haven't said at the moment they're going to change the 0.7% commitment which is on the statute book and I have to say I pay tribute to David Cameron for doing that because previous Conservative governments had cut aid as well as putting an international development department back in the Foreign Office and he didn't do that. And none of this is an argument against effective cooperation between the Foreign Office and DfID and, in some cases the Ministry of Defence, because I spent a lot of time trying to build those relationships when I was the International Development Secretary because if you're if you're dealing with the case of the crisis in Darfur, for example, where people have been burned out of their homes by the Janjaweed militia at the behest of the Sudanese government, were in camps, the UK was the second largest donor after the United States of America - funnily enough no one came out on the streets of Britain to protest about what was going on in Darfur and I hope that wasn't because the United States and the United Kingdom were actually doing, along with the African Union, more than anybody else to try and deal with that - you tell me where a crisis like that allows you to say 'here is the military element to this. Right, that stops. Here's the diplomatic. Right, it stops there. And over here is the humanitarian and developmental'. The fact is they were one continuum and when I was talking to the Government of Sudan I raised all of those questions. We had a joint unit from the Foreign Office and DfID that was reporting to me on a regular basis about how we were handling this.

So I'm all for cooperation and then I think the final point I would make is that there is a concern that it will lead to more of our aid money being spent in middle-income countries - the Prime Minister's mentioned Ukraine - whereas we have been focusing in recent decades on the very poorest countries of the world which I think is the right thing to do.

Des McNulty: So picking up on the climate change issue, do you think that the decisions in relation to the International Development Department, and actually also Brexit, potentially affect our capacity to contribute to the climate change debate, our reputation in the world in that regard?

Hilary Benn: Well, one of the reasons I was so strongly opposed to Brexit is I think it will diminish Britain's influence in the world because we walked away from one of our most important political relationships, our membership of the European Union. And if the rest of the world wants to talk to Europe they're not going to be picking up the phone to the United Kingdom in the first instance.

Now we still have other influence because of our seat on the UN Security Council and the Commonwealth and others but I think it sends, it sent, a message to the rest of the world, Britain is turning in on itself. Now I know the Government would bitterly contest that and say 'no, no, we are freeing ourselves from the constraints of Europe to reach out into the world' but I can tell you that's not how the rest of the world sees it and they shake their heads in a state of utter perplexity and say 'what on earth are you doing?, Why are you following this particular course?'

Now we have the COP coming up and any government that is hosting the COP will want it to be a success but I know from my own experience leading the UK delegation to the climate negotiations in Bali in 2007, when the context was different because at that time China and India would say 'look, you countries that had the benefit of carbon-based development, you've got to do, you've got to take action first, and we'll do that later but we've got other things to worry about because it's not our responsibility you caused the problem'. Now historically, that was true but it was not the point because we have the emissions already in the atmosphere and we have more emissions coming out - yes from countries like us although we're reducing them, the UK has made significant progress on reduction in co2 emissions since 1990 - the rising emissions from countries like India and China as they develop.

And now we've moved in the intervening period to every country recognising that they have a responsibility and in one sense the task is quite simple because the scientists tell us what they have discovered, what we know. They can warn of what certain temperature increase is going to mean and this is a negotiation where you have to go around the table and say 'right UK, what are you going to contribute over the next 10 years, EU, China, India America?' - we have a problem that the largest economy in the world has gone AWOL when it comes to climate change under the current president - and then you can add all of those up, hand them to the scientists, and say 'well, if everybody does what they've promised, where are we going to end up?' Well, they say 'we're heading for two degrees' and you go back and say 'two degrees: everyone happy with that?' and of course we can't be happy with that at all because what we've learned is, of course, that a lot of our ecosystems are built held in this very delicate balance and even a tiny increase in temperature can result in pest and disease that is currently suppressed becoming dominant and then there's all sorts of consequences for agriculture and communities and so on.

And the final point I would make is it's about what we are doing here in the United Kingdom and the task is very clear. We know where the problems remain - heating and cooking of homes and offices - gas boilers have got to go and they've got to be replaced with something else. Is that going to be electricity? Is it going to be hydrogen? Who's going to make the boilers? What about the economic opportunities in terms of building the technology of the future? We've got to get rid of emissions from cars? We've got to deal with shipping and we've got to deal - most difficult of all - with aviation and we've got to get to zero emission electricity production because we're going to need a lot of electricity to heat the homes with electric heaters and to power electric or indeed hydrogen vehicles because you're going to make the hydrogen in a zero co2 way by using electricity to create it and then you use it and the by-product is water. So it's a practical task now and what I'm looking to the Government to do - and I don't see much sign of it thus far - is where's your plan to do all of these things? And are we going to do it quickly enough? Because most people look at the science and say 'I get what you're telling me, you don't need to lecture me anymore. But how are we going to do this? Show me how, help me to do it.' And that is the political task that we face as a world as well as the United Kingdom.

Des McNulty: The COP event, COP26, is actually in Glasgow in November next year. I mean, having been to a number of these events and thinking about where we are now, is there any advice you'd

like to give to those of us in Glasgow about how we make best use of the fact that COP is coming here and what sorts of things might we look to contribute towards it, or to get out of it as a result of it being in this city?

Hilary Benn: Now that's a really, really interesting question. I think it's important when people arrive somewhere else to protect their interests, advance their cause, I think the most important thing that could be done is that all of them should understand, back home people are watching, people have expectations. And you made reference, Anton, in your kind introduction to 2005 and the Gleneagles Summit and what we were able to achieve there. Well, I remember taking part in the extraordinary march in Edinburgh in the run-up to that and that was an expression of people, civil society, churches, and others in the United Kingdom but speaking for the whole of the world, an expectation being put upon the leaders who came together to negotiate that agreement. And in all these events you have a lot of side events and lobbying and so on and so forth, but I would make it a both a festival of ideas because seeing that change is possible is, I think, really, really important because people will look at the scale of the challenge and sometimes will say to themselves, you know, 'we're sunk'. I spoke to an Extinction Rebellion supporter in Parliament Square about a year and a half ago and he was very gloomy. He said 'I think you know we're done for as humankind'. Now I disagree with that because I'm an optimist, it's how I get up in the morning, but that is not going to bring about the change that we require, it's not. The way you bring about the change is to say 'look folks, it is possible. These are the steps. We all need to make a commitment, we need all of the technology we can lay our hands on'. I know that too is an argument in parts of the environmental movement; I'm not arguing for technology as a cop-out to, get-out clause - we don't have to do the difficult stuff because we think that technology will ride to the rescue - in the future but we will need every single means we've got. It is a numbers game. You've got to get the emissions down. You can measure the fall in emissions. So what are the steps that we have to take? And as countries see others committing, it becomes a bit more difficult to hold out and the memory, defining memory, I have of the 2007 climate negotiations in Bali, the Americans were holding out and their delegation was sitting along the table from me and you could feel the expectation of the room saying 'we can't reach agreement because one delegation is holding out' and I'm sure in Washington they were watching this and eventually someone picked up the phone and said 'you better go along with the consensus' and the American delegate got up and said the United States of America is content now to join the consensus and we, in effect what we did was to open the door to the next phase of the negotiations but it would have been a disaster to leave there with no agreement. And a theme, I suppose, of our discussion today is that no deal, no agreement - whether it's climate negotiations or Brexit - is something we should strive, might and main, to avoid.

Des McNulty: One of the things that seems to be happening in the United States is despite the position of the President, and I suppose the Administration, in opposition to climate change reductions, is that at a practical level, at city level and some in some instances at state level, particularly California, there's actually been quite a lot of progress and a real focus on taking that forward. Is there other lessons in that? That cities and sub national organisations are actually the critical places where this change can actually be driven from, rather than necessarily national governments?

Hilary Benn: I think that is such an important point and I agree with it completely. Now obviously the federal nature of the United States of America is a different political context. I'm a passionate advocate for greater devolution in England because the unfinished business when it comes to devolution is the fact that England remains a very centralised country and it's painfully slow for the part of Britain that I helped to represent as one of the eight MPs in Leeds to get greater control of

our destinies so that we can take decisions for ourselves. Leeds is a city that is exploring how hydrogen technology could be used to power the future and there's a lot of innovation going on. So you don't have to wait for someone else and it's a great mistake to think 'well, if the Government doesn't sort it all out well then I'm not going to do anything' because as people see change for the better taking place, it acts as a spur and encouragement and the question, the obvious question is raised, 'well if they can do it, why can't we?' and we need as much of that as we can possibly find.

Des McNulty: Karl Warner has asked a question related to that: just looking for your views on the movement towards a UK federalist state. This this is something that has been mooted on several occasions, most notably recently by Gordon Brown. What do you think the prospects for making progress on that might be and is it a potential alternative to independence for Scotland and potentially for Wales as well?

Hilary Benn: I don't think there's going to be any progress under the current government at all and having voted - on more than one occasion - for an elected second chamber - in other words to get rid of the House of Lords as we have it at the moment - but having seen a lot of other MPs voting the other way, the next phase of Lord's reform is proving extremely difficult after the first phase which the Labour Government of '97 achieved when it removed the vast bulk of the hereditary peers.

I think the first question is 'what is England going to look like?' because we've had asymmetric - in the jargon - devolution and some of the difficulties we're wrestling with is a consequence of that and David Cameron reacted to the Scottish referendum result by bringing in English votes for English laws. It was a bit strange, to be honest, that MPs representing Scotland were voting on things in England; that English MPs were clearly not voting on things relating to Scotland because of Scottish devolution, the fact that there is a Scottish Government. So is there going to be an English Parliament? But what is the relationship going to be between the English Parliament and the regions of the United Kingdom? So that, I think, is the first question. If you're going to if you're going to have a second chamber, it's got to be an elected second chamber and you could conceive of a federal system in which the second chamber deals with the reserved matters on behalf of the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom. And if, look, if you offer me that as an alternative to Scottish independence, well, I would definitely take it because it goes back to the point I was making about sovereignty earlier. The question about sovereignty is this what do you do with it when you've got it? I don't know, are you in a room on your own, Des?

Des McNulty: Yes!

Hilary Benn: Right, well, I can make you sovereign by locking the door. I can allow no one else in and in that room you have total control of your future, your destiny and everything else but the question 'is where does that get you?' and the answer is 'it doesn't get you very far at all' .

So international relationships, human relationships are all about how we are prepared to share our sovereignty with others to our mutual benefit and by doing that we actually advance the interests of the people that we represent and, you know, there is a view among some people 'oh, I wish the rest of the world would go away, we shouldn't be giving aid to anybody, you know America First, Britain First, and we'll close the curtains, shut the door, get into bed, pull up the covers and hope that the rest of the world and the rest of the future will go away'. Well, that is going to get us nowhere either and therefore finding a way in which we can combine the benefit and the strength that comes from being a collective - in this case the United Kingdom - with getting that balance right between the supranational and the devolved, the self-determination, I think that is the great political question. And we haven't resolved it here in the United Kingdom and I'm all in favour, as I hope you can gather

from what I've said, of a genuine and lively debate because if we could move towards some consensus about what it's going to look like in the future that would be, in my view, a great step forward.

Des McNulty: I mean, what we've experienced, I suppose, in the UK through the Brexit debate is an almost a kind of anti-EU mentality that 'we don't have control over it' but arguably that kind of anti-globalisation approach, a kind of dissatisfaction with what has happened, is a broader is it is a broader phenomena and I think in Scotland that there's a dissatisfaction with the current constitutional arrangements, or the way in which they're perceived to be to be working which underlies that the growth in support for independence. Is it easier to mobilise dissatisfaction with existing arrangements than to come up with a reasoned basis for an alternative system?

Hilary Benn: I think recent history demonstrates that that is indeed the case, Des. It doesn't make it a good thing and I have to say in the context of the debate about devolution in England when I look at the powers that the Scottish people and the Scottish Parliament has and the level of funding that it has, which is more than my constituents get, I have a slightly different perception of whether this is something to be extremely dissatisfied about because I, well, I think actually got the best of both arrangements being part of the strength of the bigger United Kingdom with a great deal of decision-making that rests with the people of Scotland. And the handling of the COVID crisis is a very good example of that now some people find it hard to understand why the rules are different in Wales and Scotland and England but then they're different in parts of England now as the Government has brought in different levels of restriction

Des McNulty: So looking ahead. Obviously you're a member of the Labour Party, I've had several people writing in to say why didn't you put yourself forward for leadership of the Labour Party obviously people who feel very positively about you know your position and the things that that you've done but we've got Keir Starmer now leading the Labour Party. If you were advising Keir, and you may well be doing that, what would you be saying to Keir he should be focusing on both in relation to Brexit and maybe also, slightly more difficultly perhaps, in relation to Scotland?

Hilary Benn: Well, I would say to him, keep on doing what you're doing. Because, look, we have to understand the reason for the terrible election result for Labour last December. There were, for me there were three factors. One is undoubtedly Brexit but then we lost votes from people who voted for Brexit and we lost votes from people who voted against Brexit. And actually in 2017 we gained quite a lot of votes from people who would have voted against Brexit because they were appalled at what had happened, and in 2017 it seemed that Brexit was over so a lot of people who voted for it said 'well I don't have to vote for UKIP, the Brexit Party so I'm, at heart, more of a Conservative than a Labour supporter' and that's why you saw the share of the vote of the two main parties rise to levels we hadn't seen for 40 years.

I think the second was the offer, the offer. It looked like we couldn't make our minds up as to what was a priority and we promised everything and in the end it didn't strike people as credible. And don't forget an Aneurin Bevan famously said 'socialism is the language of priorities'.

And the third reason was our leadership. I'll say that frankly because I've never knocked on so many doors where people have said 'I've always voted Labour but...'. And it's a very wet November and we weren't going to win and we didn't win and the party membership, the majority understood that and elected Keir. Keir knows the first thing he has to do is to begin to restore trust and confidence because it doesn't matter what your policies are, if you cannot within the trust and confidence of the voters - or the voters in the middle who determine which way an election goes - you're never going

to be in government and you can have every policy you want but if you cannot implement them we cannot help the people we seek to represent. We don't have a right to government, we have to earn it and that includes winning trust and confidence.

Secondly he said explicitly 'policy, well there's plenty of time for that because the world is changing very fast and who knows what the challenge is going to be by the time we get to 2024?' so that could wait. Thirdly, a forensic holding of the Government to account which I must say he's done very effectively against the Prime Minister for whom detail is not a strong point and who wildly over-promises and then gets into a terrible mess – world-leading, world-beating test and trace system, I beg your pardon? after recent events - and it's interesting to see the rumblings there are in the Conservative Party about his leadership. I think we all have a responsibility to give him our support. Now that's not to say that there won't continue to be arguments in the Labour Party who about where we should go but I find it slightly ironic that some people who lectured us in the previous four years and said we all have a bounden duty to support the democratically elected leader of the Labour Party are failing to do that now. Now the truth is it's up to you to decide. Jeremy Corbyn wanted to get rid of Tony Blair and people are entitled to their view within the Party but in the end we've got to come together and if we don't win the election we can't do anything. And I joined in 1971 when I got my first Labour Party membership card I joined a party that was seeking political power to change the country for the better. I was not joining the debating society where we can all pat each other on the back and feel good about the wise views that we hold because that doesn't help my constituents who are living in poverty, who are living in overcrowded houses and who want a better life. Sorry I didn't mean to quite... but I think it's important to make the point because we've got a responsibility and we have to live up to it.

Des McNulty: Can, we're reaching the end of our time now, can I ask you specifically a question about universities and policies in relation to universities. Obviously, I'm sure you know everybody is under threats and everybody is facing difficulties as a result of the COVID epidemic and universities are no exception to that. But is there something that universities can do both in aiding a response to COVID at local level - you know we're in Glasgow working very hard with people in the city to try to deal with the economic and social implications of it - I'm sure some other things are happening in Leeds and in other places throughout the UK and this notion of a civic role for universities is coming to the fore. How do you think that universities should respond to the circumstances that we find ourselves in not only in response to COVID but maybe more generally the kind of threatening economic situation that we face going forward? And what kind of advice would you give to Anton and his colleagues as leaders of the university sector in that regard as to what they might focus on in their arguments?

Hilary Benn: Well, I would simply say, and I don't mean this to sound like flattery, but the strength of our university tradition, our university sector, debate, argument, research, knowledge, helping people to develop their own lives, to take up careers they may never have thought of, are absolutely fundamental to our future as a country. Look at the Nobel prizes we win given the size of our population. We went, actually as the Brexit Select Committee on a visit to Cambridge and they said 'would you like a tour?' and we said 'yes, please'. We split into two groups; it's the only tour I'll ever go on in my life where each tour was led by a winner of the Nobel Prize! Now that tells me what I knew already about the importance of our university sector. It's really difficult for lots of people. I suppose it goes to the heart of the debate about what's viable for the future and the Chancellor's words. I have a lot of businesses and those from education contacted me in my constituency to say my job is perfectly viable I just can't do it at the moment because of the restrictions and it's really, really important that even while the restrictions are in place we provide support to allow those parts

of our life as a country - the arts and theatres and restaurants and bars and universities and everything else - to be there when we come out the other side. So that's the first point that I would make and we've argued very strongly as an Opposition that as the furlough scheme and the general furlough scheme unwinds, you should target support on those areas of the economy that you know cannot earn a living at the moment and therefore cannot retain their staff because of the restrictions that, of necessity, have been put in place. So that, I think, is the first point. Secondly there is the contribution that universities are already making to our understanding of COVID and how to deal with it I've never talked to so many scientists, read what they have said, watched them on television, as I have in the last eight months or so because we're all keen to understand better what is it we're dealing with and therefore what is the right policy to pursue in response to help us find our way through.

Thirdly, there are the very practical difficulties of a returning student body and you've had your own challenges of course in Glasgow, as have other cities, that's certainly true of Leeds as the students have come back. Making sure that students are safe, working out how to teach, a lot of online teaching, supporting students who may feel isolated, who may have mental health problems, who may decide in the end to go home, and do their online learning from home but then find that they're in a contract for accommodation where the landlord says 'I'm sorry you got to pay up for the year'. So there are all of these practical things that I and other Members of Parliament have been having to deal with in the last few months. But our university sector is one of our great strengths and this is what enables this remarkable small group of islands off the north coast of Europe which we know is the United Kingdom to be the country that it is, to have had the relative economic success that we have enjoyed. And we need to keep it that way and investing in our universities is absolutely fundamental to that brighter future. I suspect that Anton might nod at that last point but, well, I know there wouldn't be a lot of disagreement; it's obvious but it needs to be said.

Des McNulty: And do you think that there is a sense in which whatever happens in the context of COVID or indeed the consequences of Brexit that we could just wring our hands and say 'this is all terrible'. But there's actually a kind of practical element that that needs to be done, that collaborative approach whether that's a local level or a national level. Should we be looking at how we can get better collaboration, the basis of a better collaboration, to see our way through the crisis? Or do you think that the reality is that the rhetoric of disagreement is actually going to drown out the possibility of cooperation?

Hilary Benn: Well, we absolutely must collaborate because that's the only way we're going to be. We have to collaborate in the United Kingdom, across the nations. We have to collaborate across the world. And, as we speak, scientists all over the world are working together to try and develop vaccines and treatments that will help us if we get the disease and we get it badly and we end up in hospital. And I suppose this, it's the same question that you asked me to do with climate change because both of these are challenges. We can we understand a lot in relation to COVID. There's some things we don't understand - look at the what's called long COVID - the terrible effect that it has on some people who didn't appear to have terribly bad symptoms when they first contracted it but it has a devastating effect on them and their lives and the need to provide support and therapy and rehabilitation. Wringing our hands is not going to get us anywhere. So - again it's a statement of the obvious - and we need to make sure that our politics, the means by which we decide as a nation or nations what we're going to do and how we're going to do it, is absolutely fundamental to overcoming this. And I am genuinely an optimist because what other way is there to live your life? But that's just my own personal outlook. And we faced difficulties before and humankind does have a sort of astonishing capacity to sort things out. It also has an astonishing capacity to make terrible

and catastrophic mistakes and the course of human history has been the interplay between the two. But if, going right back to your questions about development, if our forebears and our ancestors from 250 years ago got into a time machine and arrived - OK, COVID apart which is hopefully, relatively temporary - and they looked around them at the society that we have created here in the United Kingdom and in many other places, countries are industrialising and developing they would be absolutely astonished. And they would say 'how did you do all of this? Because I come from an age where very few children went to school, there was no medical care, lives were short, they were hard, there was extreme poverty, how did you do this?' And the answer is we did it through political economic and social development. And that's people working together to make sure when our time has come and our life has come to an end we can look back and say, 'OK, well, I did something, small or big or in between, that meant that I pass on a better world to my children and my grandchildren.' And that is the great motivation for progress because if you know what you've been able to do thus far it makes you realise, well, we don't have to be gloomy, we just have to roll our sleeves up and do the next bit. And that's what we've got to do with COVID, that's what we're going to do with climate change, that's what we've got to do with a world in which we do collaborate because we've got one planet and we share it with our neighbours whether we've met them or not and our future is bound together inextricably.

Des McNulty: Thanks very much Hilary Benn, and thank you to the Principal Sir Anton Muscatelli for his words of introduction. I'd also like to thank the 75 people who asked who put forward questions I've actually tried to ask a number of them but obviously we don't have unlimited time available but I think it has been an extremely interesting session so I'd like to thank everyone for joining in and once again to thank Hilary and Sir Anton for their participation in this. Thank you very much.

Hilary Benn: Well, Des, thank you and thank you Anton. I've really, really enjoyed it and I wish you all the best.

Anton Muscatelli: Many thanks, Hilary, good to see you again. Cheers.

Hilary Benn: Bye

ENDS