would be agile and universal, able to apply its principles to support, at short notice, new demands on the economy and UK government, providing **resilience to cope with any future national requirements or crises**. This would future proof the UK to flexibly develop and support yet-to-be-conceived technologies.

- The system will enable faster, more productive and efficient transfer of science into innovation to disseminate best practice for data assessment, interpretation, curation and reuse. It will form a new national infra-technology that supports technologies and challenges equally.
- It will place innovation at the heart of economic recovery and future growth and accelerate progress towards the government's 2.4 % R&D target.
- Lastly, a digital infrastructure will provide equal support across the regions and nations of the UK, supporting the levelling up agenda, as well as a progressive approach that ensures the UK attracts and retains a highly skilled, diverse workforce.

This proposed world leading measurement infrastructure is essential to the rapid, harmonious and widespread adoption of the digital economy, made even more crucial now as the UK seeks to recover from COVID-19. Read further evidence in Richard Brown's 2020 paper.

Footnotes

1 https://www.npl.co.uk/measurement-for-recovery

2 https://www.npl.co.uk/measurement-for-recovery/partners

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COVID-19: LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM PARLIAMENTARY SCRUTINY

The Right Honourable Greg Clark MP

Chair of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee

Throughout the course of civilisation, great changes—societal shifts, wars, revolutions—have engendered great innovation in medicine, technology and automation. It is a privilege to Chair the House of Commons' Science and Technology Committee. Our country has a rich tradition of scientific discovery and is recognised around the globe as a world leader in scientific advancement. Perhaps now more than ever, the world appreciates the true importance of science and technology in our society, be it the video platforms connecting us with our loved ones, the software allowing some of us to continue to work from the safety of our homes, or the tireless work of medical researchers around the world racing to develop vaccines to help in our fight against COVID-19.

The times we are living through are unprecedented in our lifetimes. During the last six months the whole country witnessed the tireless work of NHS staff, civil servants, researchers and indeed all key workers. I speak not only for myself but for all of my colleagues when I say that their work is truly recognised by the Committee.

Yet much as crises spark innovation, they also deliver valuable lessons. In early March,

my Committee and I spoke privately with eminent scientists, epidemiologists and vaccinologists to assess the seriousness of what we could already begin to see was a rapidly escalating global health emergency. From there, it was clear that we would need to embark on an inquiry that would scrutinise the Government's response to our own COVID-19 outbreak.

I should make clear that the purpose of our inquiry has never been to cast a finger of blame. Rather, as a Committee which is able to scrutinise many Government departments, we are in the privileged position of being able to survey the spectrum of Government policy and assess the scientific evidence base on which decisions are made. Our place within Parliament has allowed us to take evidence from education, health and technology bodies, experts advising the Government and independent thinkers. It was clear to me that we needed to collect all of this information even as the pandemic took its course around us. Whilst it may be easy to lament missed opportunities or find reasoning for decisions taken in hindsight, the contemporary nature of Parliamentary scrutiny is one of its greatest strengths — forcing policymakers to consider the outcomes of their decisions before they are taken.

The inquiry has always sought to assess the UK's place within the global science community. Perhaps uniquely, the pandemic has both brought the world's scientists together and highlighted national differences. My Committee cast around the globe for answers and opinions, speaking with great interest to world-leaders in epidemiology, economic theory, biostatistics and public health. While clearly many factors — geography, culture, leadership style and policy decisions — have affected various countries' outcomes to date, hearing from scientists in Germany, South Korea and Sweden brought to light various ideas, strategies and actions from which the UK might learn. The international community's differing approaches to and reflections on controlling the outbreak were invaluable in informing my Committee's own views.

In May, my Committee and I wrote to the Prime Minister. It is common practice to wait until the end of an inquiry to present findings and recommendations to Government, but these were not normal times. There were specific lessons already to be learned that were imperative to implement without delay. Notably, and still pertinently as we head into the winter, it was apparent that testing and contact tracing capacity and capability needed to be urgently scaled up. Clearly, this is something that the Government has been necessarily prioritising, as national lockdown has lifted and restrictions eased somewhat, enabling the economy to re-open and a semblance of a normal life to resume.

We were also pleased to see that the Government accepted our recommendation to increase the transparency around its decision-making. The publication of SAGE papers, along with the names of most of those attending SAGE meetings, is of great importance in building public trust that decisions that are being taken are well informed.

Our other recommendations are issues which remain to date. While we still struggle to provide the required magnitude of testing, I would urge the Government to make full use of available public and private sector laboratories. This will, I believe, also be crucial in the situation where effective vaccines are developed, and the UK must be prepared for such an eventuality.

The power of Select Committees is largely through their collaborative nature, and my colleagues from my own and other parties have been instrumental in raising their own questions and concerns during our evidence sessions. In our next report, which we will publish this autumn, we will present our findings and recommendations to Government.

I hope that my Committee's findings will be useful in informing policy as we continue to live with COVID-19. The effect of the pandemic has important implications for our other inquiries. We are considering the Government's proposal for a new funding agency for UK research inspired by the US Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). One of our eminent witnesses has recommended that it should take as its mission and focus a response to the global pandemic we are living through. Equally, our inquiry into 5G, and how the UK might build up domestic telecommunications infrastructure capability, will be in the context of the increasing reliance on communications that the crisis has brought about. Our newest inquiry will explore to what extent our renowned research and innovation sector can help to bolster economic recovery, and how to achieve that end.

However, I am mindful that the pandemic is far from over, and that Parliamentary scrutiny will still be required as the Government continues to navigate its way through COVID-19. Along with the Health and Social Care Select Committee, the Science and Technology Committee will continue to investigate policy decisions and hold evidence sessions. The new joint inquiry will bring together the skillsets and interest areas of colleagues across the House, and will ensure that the Government is held to account as the situation evolves. □