**UK government Covid19 press conference 29 May 2020**

**Jeremy Hoad**

(usual caveats apply to this live transcript / commentary)

(press conference preceded by advice video with trancey dance music)

**Attending**

Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Prof Stephen Powis, NHS England

**Figures**

4,043,686 tests carried out (131,451 tests carried out yesterday)

271,222 positive (2,095 increase since yesterday)

(XXX no figure given hospitalised)

38,161 dead

324 increase in dead over last 24 hours

**Sunak**

Thoughts as always with those who have lost their lives

We are past the peak, flattening the curve, protected the NHS and deaths are falling

Can now take careful but deliberate steps to reopen our economy

Across the country office lights will be turned on and windows thrown open

Work clothes and school uniforms will be pulled out of the wardrobe

Shops and factories will start to hum with activity

As we enter this new phase things will change

(come off it, we know how to turn on lights and get dressed, stop with the daft pseudo-poetic nonsense. The Churchill reference to lights is pathetic. Stop it.)

Businesses will need to become covid secure

Need to adapt emergency programme

We all need to stay alert

Economic prsopects better than they would otherwise be

(summary of existing measures)

No British govt, Lab or Con has ever done anything like this

(you don’t reaqlly to make a political point)

I believe it has made a real difference

Consensus across political and economic spectrum that furlough scheme cannot continue indefinitely

Will remain open until Oct

Will ask employers to contribute

Flexible furlough

Right in final phase to ask employers to contribute

Understand businesses and employers gone through difficult time

Modest contribution introduced slowly

Jun-Jul

no employer contribution

Aug

taxpayer stay at 80%, employers to pay NI and pensions

By Sept everyone will have been able to adapt then start paying

Sept

70/30

Oct 60/40

Scheme will close at end of Oct

To protect jobs and help businesses new more flexible furlough to be introduced critical to kickstart the economy

People want to work

Nobody wants to be unable to contribute

Noone wants to be at home on furlough

July 1

employers will have max flexibility to decide on right arrangements for them

Employer could bring someone back to work two days a week and the furlough pay them for the other three days

Old scheme closed to new entrants on June 30 – deadline June 10 for employers

Self-employed, 2.3m supported

Will be extended with second grant applications in August, same arrangements as before, single instalment covering 3 months of average yearly profits

Value of final stage will be 70% for self-employed

Aim to keep pple in work, protect incomes and businesses

Measures on scale unmatched in history

Acknowledge we could not support everyone

Want to say you were not forgotten

Our thoughts, energies and resources must be to plan for the economy

Need dynamism of whole economy as we fight our way back to prosperity

We can’t put key in lock, open the door and step into the world as it was January

(no shit)

New measures will be developed

New skills and opportunities

New national collective effort begins today to reopen economy

**Powis**

Slide

Social distancing

Good evidence of compliance

Slide

Testing and cases

Tests increasing through April and May

Steady decline in new cases

Slide

Hospital data

Steady decline in new daily admissions since middle of April, slowed recently

Ventilator bed occupations steadily declining since April

Slide

People in hospital

Steady declines throughout UK, most in London

Slide

Deaths

7-day rolling average continuing to decline

**Questions**

Will from Manchester

Drastic fall in C02 emissions, what is govt doing to maintain low emissions rates as lockdown eased and will these be central to rebuilding the economy

Sunak

Most obvious trend more pple cycling

Absolutely, ref budget in March with initiatives next few years

New Nature for Climate Fund

Carbon Capture and Storage – investing several hundred million pounds over next few years, benefits p’tic in NE and Teesside

Powis

NHS concerned about playing our part

Long term plan published over a year ago eg reduce face to face appointments to cut down related transport

Crisis has shown rapid movement to implement changes incl remote, digital and telephone consultations and we really want to hold onto that

Sunak

Brilliant

Simona for Eastbourne

Childcare question

Sunak

Ref support through existing schemes, grants and loans etc.

Hard work of everyone enables opening primary schools from 1/6 that will help more pple get back to work

Is general message to workers without cashflow to pay NI and pensions that unemployment will spike?

Joint Biosecurity Centre – what is the Alert level?

(question ignored)

Sunak

Employer contributions – scheme very generous

Total employer contribution will amount to 5% over entire 8 month period so this is reasonable and affordable

Around 40% of employers don’t pay NI or pension contributions at all anyway

Cashflow – imp qtn we have range of loan products available 600k bounce bacj loans have been issued

Powis

JBC currently under development feeding info into 4 CMOs

NHS needs to ensure links to JBC to identify early warnings for planning

(they ignored the alert level question which flatly contradicts the easing of measures)

£100bn total cost?

Has gap in testing numbers been sorted?

Sunak

OBR provided estimates, Treasury produces weekly updates

Diff to say what total cost will be as scheme adjusts

Powis

Testing increasing all the time

Big moment where UK taken off extraordinary support scheme – difficulties with unemployment rising?

Flexible furlough scheme – if second spike will you switch scheme back on?

Sunak

Many businesses and pple faced enormous amount of difficulty

We can;’t protect every single job and business

Tried to make scheme as generous as possible to protect jobs

OBR, BoE agree scheme has achieved that aim

Will be hardship ahead for many, rests heavily on my shoulders

Scheme will end in Oct, compares favourably, generous

(so no changes if second spike happens. We are on our own if government policies and actions cause further harm)

Etxra tax and stimulus measures – what might these be – emergency budget?

Sunak

Always say can’t and won’t talk about future budgets

Planning to have autumn budget

Govt always said it is following the science but No10 confirmed Alert Level remains at 4 but only at 3 relaxation of restrictions to happen so are we no longer following the science?

How worried are you about relaxing restrictions, Powis?

Sunak

We are meeting the 5 tests so in position to carefully relax restrictions, measured and phased way progressively

Set tests out, meeting tests, progressive and measured, keeping an eye on everything

Remain engaged with scientific advice

(avoided question. Government policy, rules and guidance still confusing and contradictory)

Powis

Imp to keep R rate below 1

Still have 7-8k infections in community, need to minitor closely

Any sign R rate going above 1 action would be advised to avoid second peak

PM hoping 4 to 3 but that didn’t happen but pressed ahead regardless

Sunak

Always made decisions in conjunction with latest scientific advice

Ability to keep an eye on things using new info and test track trace scheme ability to measure and react quickly in targeted faschion

Confidence to move forward

(not convincing)

Businesses saying they’ll struggle to stay afloat – shld 2m rule be reduced?

Sunak

Will keep under review

Powis

Ref Vallance response yesterday

Time an element in infection as well as distance

If new evidence becomes available that will be taken into account

PM reaffirmed commitment to all manifesto pledges – will you confirm this as well?

Sunak

I agree with PM and won’t write future budgets today

Possible to shield public sector workers from economy from affects of virus?

Can you really safely have BBQs?

Sunak

Public sector workers in middle of multi-year pay deals

Process and pay review bodies will go on as normal

(basically, don’t expect the govt to dramatically improve pay for the public sector and care workers)

Powis

Fundamental rules apply 2m rule, washing hands, need to apply in any setting as lockdown measures are relaxed

Sunak

Brilliant

Localised data suggests Hull still has high infection rate – is Hull still succesptible and will we wee local lockdowns?

Hull has one of worst unemployment rates in ctry – what is your message to pple in Hull struggling during crisis

Can this Tory govt pledge to nsupport workers after these scheme end as money spent is fraction of £500bn spent on banks in financial crash

Sunak

Referring to existing schemes

Range of investments in regions over next few years, Hull wld benefit from this eg cabon capture, lots of opportunities govt will provide to pple in Hull

Govt has stood behind workers

Furlough scheme strongest expression of standing behind Britain’s workers

(avoided comparison to throwing money at the banks a decade ago being much, much larger expenditure than these covid costs for government)

Powis

Will be variation in infection around the ctry

Estimate of R number across all areas of UK below 1 trend downwards

Local lockdowns or restrictions – will see much more localised outbreaks that will require local public health interventions

JBC and PHE will ensure we detect outbreaks early and take action early

(didn’t say what interventions might be)

Sunak

Thanking everyone together

Things are improving

Getting back to new normal filled with opportunity for all of us

Start to reopen ctry and kickstart economy today

(no warning video at the end now)