

## Prime Minister's Questions: 6 May

DISCLAIMER: This document contains a scientific fact check of the statements made at the opening of the Prime Minister's Questions Session of 29 April. This summary was compiled in near real-time (before the Hansard transcript) was publicly available so may contain mistakes or other inaccuracies resulting from misunderstanding. Our usual detail of fact-checking has not been performed due to the short turnaround time. Volunteers from Scientists for Labour have undertaken to ensure that the commentary provided in this report is accurate, but it should be taken 'as-is'. Readers are encouraged to check both the original statement made and the actual text of the source below before using this information.

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Links are **orange** for news articles

Links are **green** for papers in academic journals or commentaries by learned groups

Links are **purple** for governmental statistics or advice

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### 0. Opening Response

#### Statements:

- Adding £1.3m to assist the tourism industry in the South West of England
- The priority of the house must be to suppress the disease further and restart the economy

#### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Tourism Minister launches £1.3 million fund to support Destination Management Organisations</a>	Confirmation that the Government has provided £1.3 million to DMOs
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#### Summative commentary:

At the beginning of April the Government launched a £1.3 million scheme to support destination management organisations (DMOs). The money for this scheme was repurposed from the Discover England fund.

*This response was accurate in its content.*

## Question 1 - Statistics

### Statements

- When he returned to office last week, the PM said that people were looking at the apparent success of the government's approach.
- As of yesterday, 29,427 people have lost their lives. This number is the highest in Europe, and the second highest in the world. This is not success or apparent success.

### HOW DID IT COME TO THIS?

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Johns Hopkins COVID-19 map</a>	Confirms the death toll
<a href="#">Coronavirus: UK death toll passes Italy to be highest in Europe</a>	Confirms that the UK has the highest confirmed death toll in Europe

### Summative commentary:

The UK's death toll is indeed the worst in Europe and the second worst in the world by reported deaths.

*This question was accurate in its content.*

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## Answer 1

### Statements:

- Prof. David Spiegelhalter and others have stated that there is insufficient data at this stage to draw conclusions about differing international responses.
- The overriding principle taken for each decision throughout the crisis has been to save lives and protect the NHS.
- The PM says he has no doubt that the people of the UK want to continue to suppress the disease and to get the economy back on its feet.

THERE WILL BE A TIME TO LOOK AT WHAT WE DID, THE OVERRIDING PRINCIPLE HAS BEEN TO SAVE LIVES AND PROTECT THE NHS.

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Coronavirus deaths: how does Britain compare with other countries?</a>	Professor David Spiegelhalter stated in a Guardian article that direct comparison of national death statistics is difficult due to the variation in counting methodologies amongst other factor, he has stated it may take
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	many years for a true picture of all of the impacts of the pandemic to emerge.
<a href="https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus">https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus</a>	Our World in Data (University of Oxford) offers comparisons of speed of the outbreak with the trajectory for each country beginning on the day when that country first reported 5 daily deaths It includes the caveats that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the actual total death toll from COVID-19 is likely to be higher than the number of confirmed deaths – this is due to limited testing and problems in the attribution of the cause of death; the difference between reported confirmed deaths and total deaths varies by country</li> <li>- how COVID-19 deaths are recorded may differ between countries (e.g. some countries may only count hospital deaths, whilst others have started to include deaths in homes)</li> <li>- the reported death figures on a given date do not necessarily show the number of new deaths on that day: this is due to delays in reporting</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Documents contradict UK government stance on Covid-19 'herd immunity'</a>	'Herd immunity' policy not synonymous with “overriding aim to save lives”.
<a href="https://yougov.co.uk/solutions/sectors/covid-19-monitor">https://yougov.co.uk/solutions/sectors/covid-19-monitor</a>	Whilst the steps taken by the Government remain broadly supported by the country, this YouGov poll indicates that this is decreasing (from 77% approval to 70% approval) over the month of April.

**Summative Commentary:**

An answer was not given to the central question posed to the PM, “How did it come to this”, and appears to be a defence of the Government’s decision-making philosophy and a rebuttal of attempts to compare to other nations. Whilst the PM is correct in his interpretation of the article written by Prof. David Spiegelhalter in the Guardian last week, there are other bodies and experts which are making comparisons of the efficacy of policy decisions in different nations (*see past daily briefings for examples*).

The Prime Minister’s claim that all decisions have been taken to preserve life and protect the NHS also appears to be in contradiction with the “herd immunity” ‘policies’ pursued at the beginning of the crisis, however, it is impossible to confirm the motivations for those choices.

*Numerous experts disagree that international comparisons are not useful at this time. There is much to be learnt from responses in countries that have dealt better with this crisis than the UK.*

## Question 2 - Care Homes

### Statements

- The UK was slow to begin lockdown, testing, and tracing; and slow to supply PPE
- The in-hospital death rate is falling, but the in-care home rate is still rising
- At yesterday's daily press conference, the deputy scientific advisor said we have to get to grips with what's happening in care homes
- We have now spent 12 weeks dealing with the health crisis

TWELVE WEEKS AFTER THE HEALTH SECRETARY DECLARED A HEALTH CRISIS, WHY HAS THE GOVERNMENT NOT GOT TO GRIPS WITH THIS?

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Europe's coronavirus lockdown measures compared</a>	Lockdown timings
<a href="#">Deputy chief scientist: We need to get to grips with coronavirus care home deaths</a>	Words of the Deputy Chief Advisor on care homes - appears that numbers are still rising

### Summative commentary:

In the twelve weeks since the crisis was declared, the government appears to have failed to prepare adequately or respond suitably to the situation in care homes.

*This question was accurate in its content.*

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## Answer 2

THERE IS AN EPIDEMIC IN CARE HOMES BUT THE LOTO IS WRONG TO STATE THAT THE SITUATION IS NOT IMPROVING.

### Statements:

- There is an epidemic [sic] in care homes
- Working hard for weeks to get the numbers down
- Tens of thousands working to get PPE to care homes
- There has been a palpable improvement in care homes

**Relevant links:**

<a href="#">Care home fatalities to be included in daily coronavirus death toll</a>	Comments from Vic Rayner, the chief executive of the National Care Forum.
<a href="#">COVID-19: Managing the COVID-19 pandemic in care homes</a>	COVID-19: Managing the COVID-19 pandemic in care homes for older people.
<a href="#">Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK</a>	Graph ‘Total number of COVID-19 associated UK deaths by date reported’, shows total deaths to be increasing up to 5 May.
<a href="#">Deaths from all causes in care homes double over course of pandemic</a>	Deaths from all causes in care homes double over course of pandemic.
<a href="#">UK Government document says PPE suppliers will only supply care providers in England</a>	Commentary on comparative provision of PPE
<a href="#">Covid-19: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Plan</a>	Set up of the National Supply Disruption Response (NSDR) by the NHS to deal with PPE supply issues.

**Summative Commentary:**

The Prime Minister has repeatedly used the word ‘epidemic’ where the word ‘pandemic’ (which is more serious and widespread) would be more appropriate. The British Geriatric Society has written a good practice guide for managing the COVID-19 *pandemic* in care homes. Whilst the Nursing Times reports ‘a deeply alarming spike in deaths has been recorded in care homes ... as the coronavirus *pandemic* continues’.

We are unable to fact check the claim that ‘tens of thousands are working to get PPE into care homes’, but the Government have published a COVID-19 PPE plan, which included the NHS setting up the National Supply Disruption Response line, where providers with urgent requirement for PPE can contact 24/7.

One controversy arose in that some PPE manufacturers [e.g. Gompels] were told they can only supply PPE to English care homes through the Care Quality Commission, with no mention of the Scottish or Welsh equivalent, thus could not supply to Scotland or Wales. Therefore, provision of PPE has been harder in some areas of the U.K. than others.

Commenting on the latest data released on care home deaths, Vic Rayner, chief executive of the National Care Forum, said figures [24 April 2020] showed “the very urgent need for a daily tracking of all Covid-19

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deaths as a key priority for the government". Whilst Sam Monaghan, chief executive of MHA, said the figures were starting to show "what we have known for some weeks now, that care homes are sadly the most affected area of society in terms of deaths from Covid-19".

*It is unclear by which metric the government considers the situation in care homes is improving, unless they are using data which is not yet publicly available? Graphs that we have been able to access, including Total Deaths up to 5 May, show deaths to be increasing (gov.uk). The PM may have incorrectly asserted that LOTO is incorrect.*

## Question 3 - Testing

### Statements

- A slide from last night's briefing showed that the in-care home death rate is still rising (as of 24 April)
- On 26th April, the First Secretary said that care home death rates were falling
- On 30th April, the government claimed success in meeting 100k tests, but on Monday only 84,000 tests were used, 24,000 available tests unused

WHAT WAS SPECIAL ABOUT THE 30TH APRIL, THAT MEANT THAT TESTING WAS SO HIGH?

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional</a>	<i>Office for National Statistics (ONS) publication: Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional: week ending 24 April 2020. Confirms figures and trends stated.</i>
<a href="#">Number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and risk in the UK</a>	May 4: testing numbers drop below 100,000.

### Summative commentary:

LOTO noted disparities between government messaging about death rates, noting that the government had discussed a drop in the in-care home death rate. Keir noted that, in fact, a rise in the rate can still be observed in the most recent public statistics, citing the numbers generated by the ONS and presented as part of the government's daily briefing as his source.

***This question was accurate in its content.***

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## Answer 3

THE CURRENT CAPACITY FOR TESTING EXCEEDS THE CURRENT DEMAND. WE ARE NOW WORKING AT ABOUT 100,000 TESTS/DAY AND THE NEW TARGET IS TO REACH 200,000 TESTS/PER DAY.

### Statements:

- At present, capacity exceeds demand
- The government is aiming for 200,000 tests per day by the end of May
- Testing is essential to economic recovery

**Relevant links:**

<a href="#">UK coronavirus LIVE: Boris Johnson assesses easing lockdown as PM vows 200k tests a day by end of May</a>	<i>Evening Standard</i> article based on comments made in today's PMQs by the prime minister's: there is an aim for 200,000 tests/day by the end of May.
<a href="#">Could widespread COVID-19 testing prove pivotal in economic recovery?</a>	<i>Business Leader</i> comment article discussing how testing could be vital in economic recovery.

**Summative Commentary:**

The prime minister noted that the UK's capacity for testing exceeds current demand, but we cannot find published evidence that this is the case. Given the government's intention to increase capacity to approximately double the current capacity, the prime minister's response seems self-contradictory - if demand is currently below 100,000 tests/day, what could we gain from increasing the capacity to double this figure, unless the assertion that capacity is greater demand is incorrect?

Whether or not testing is essential for economic recovery is really a matter of speculation for economists (such as that discussed in the article cited above). Such speculation is beyond the scope of this commentary.

*This response was self-contradictory. If the current capacity exceeds the level of demand then there is no need to further increase the capacity. The reaching of 100,000 tests was clearly not sustainable and the Prime Minister failed to acknowledge this.*

## Question 4 - Contact Tracing

### Statements

- The prime minister has just set a target of 200,000 tests/day by the end of May
- Having a target isn't a strategy in and of itself
- It is clear that the UK also needs testing, tracing and isolation
- Contact tracing was abandoned in mid-March because it was "not appropriate mechanism", but the chief med officer said yesterday that it was abandoned due to capacity

### DOES WHY WAS CONTACT TRACING ABANDONED IN MID-MARCH AND NOT RESTARTED SOONER?

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Why did the UK need 100,000 tests a day?</a>	The rationale for setting a number has been labelled respectively as unclear, as galvanising and as broadly what would be needed given calculations.
<a href="#">Coronavirus: Mass testing earlier 'would have been beneficial'</a>	Mass testing earlier would have been beneficial: Sir Patrick Vallance, Chief Scientific Officer.
<a href="#">Better testing capacity earlier would have led to different strategies</a>	Better testing capacity earlier would have led to different strategies: reported transcripts of radio interviews.
<a href="#">Contact tracing emphasised by WHO and doctors and public health experts</a>	BMJ paper which detailing the efforts of community volunteers organising contact tracing.

### Summative commentary:

The WHO has repeatedly emphasised contact tracing and the decision to abandon contact tracing has been widely criticised by doctors and public health experts ([ref](#)). In a BBC radio interview, according to the Canary and BBC, it was the chief scientific officer and deputy chief medical officer who suggested that greater capacity would have improved the response ([ref](#)).

***This question was accurate in its content although it was only implied in interviews (with the Chief Scientific Officer and Deputy Chief Medical Officer, and not explicitly said) that testing capacity was the reason for lack of contact tracing.***

## Answer 4

[THIS WAS INDEED A CAPACITY ISSUE AND WE WILL HAVE A TEAM THAT IS ABLE TO TRACE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE COUNTRY.](#)

### Statements:

- It is apparent, and scientists would confirm, in mid March that tracing capacity (that was useful in the containment phase) that capacity was no longer useful or relevant when transmission happened internally and exceeded our capacity then
- As we get the new cases down, there will be a team genuinely able to track and traces hundreds of thousands of people across the country, This will drive down cases
- It is easier to do now that we have built up the team on the way out than when the epidemic took off

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Better testing capacity earlier would have led to different strategies: The Canary</a>	Better testing capacity earlier would have led to different strategies: reported transcripts of radio interviews
<a href="#">Track and Trace on the Isle of Wight</a>	Detail of contact tracing pilot and early plans for national tracing strategy
<a href="#">Survey of contact tracing app acceptability</a>	Reports, as of 16th April, ¾ of respondents would probably or definitely install an app in the UK

### Summative Commentary:

From the answer the government seems to confirm that capacity (in tracing - as no explicit mention of testing was made) was the reason contact tracing was abandoned in mid March. Previous radio interviews have instead highlighted testing capacity according to the Canary ([ref](#)). A pilot on the Isle of Wight is being rolled out for app based contact testing, tracking and tracing. A national programme is expected to be rolled out in mid-May and PHE will oversee the deployment of an additional 18 000 contact tracers ([ref](#)). A survey of 6000 potential app users on the 16th April suggested that around ¾ of those surveyed would definitely or probably install such an app in the UK ([ref](#)). Other countries were, however, able to implement tracing in early stages ([ref](#)).

*[This answer appears to confirm that contact tracing was abandoned due to a lack of testing capacity.](#)*

## Question 5 - PPE

### Statements

- The prime minister confirmed that abandoning contact tracing was a capacity problem
- There are clearly ongoing problems with the supply of PPE
- A BMA survey this week found that 48% of doctors had either bought PPE from own funds or relied on donations
- The PPE supply problem will worsen when people return to work and require PPE
- We need robust national plan and people must not return to work before such a plan exists

CAN THE PM REASSURE THE PUBLIC THAT THEY WILL NOT BE ASKED TO RETURN TO WORK UNTIL THERE IS A PLAN BY WHICH THEY CAN DO THIS SURVEY

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">BMA survey reveals almost half of doctors have relied upon donated or self-bought PPE and two thirds still don't feel fully protected</a>	BMA survey quoted by LOTO
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### Summative commentary:

Nearly half of doctors are reporting shortages of PPE that meant they had to rely on donations or to buy their own PPE.

*This question was accurate in its content.*

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## Answer 5

THERE IS A PLAN TO PROVIDE ALL THE PPE NEEDED DOMESTICALLY, NO NATIONAL STOCK OUTAGES

### Statements:

- PM shares frustration about PPE
- Pays tribute to the 100s of thousands working on logistics
- Delivering billions of items
- No national stock outages of any ppe item
- We are able to in the long term to satisfy domestic needs

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Why a billion items of PPE is not enough</a>	BBC article: a billion items of PPE is not enough.
<a href="#">COVID-19: personal protective equipment (PPE) plan</a>	Government PPE plan

### Summative Commentary:

PM acknowledges frustration with supply issues of PPE. More than a billion items of PPE are being distributed which is true and there is a large logistical team behind this operation. However the PM fails to note almost half of this stockpile has been reported to be gloves, potentially still leaving a shortage of other critical PPE items such as face masks and gowns. Further clarity on PPE stockpile numbers and supply is needed for a full assessment if 1 billion items will be enough PPE for the country, as well as the plan to deal with an increase in demand if people require PPE as a part of an exit strategy. These will be guided by answers to the following.

- What is the current assessment of the national usage of PPE? These figures are either not being recorded or they haven't been released.
- What timeframe is this current stockpile expected to last and how long can we manage it for?
- How much of an increase in demand would be expected if PPE is required for people returning to work, on public transport etc.?
- How will we manage an increase in demand when people return to work?
- Whilst there was a national effort to switch some of our biggest manufacturers and universities to making ventilators, what is the progress on manufacturing domestic PPE products and will this be continued when businesses resume normal production?

*The PM is correct that a billion items of PPE are being provided, but it is unclear that this is sufficient, or that the items being provided are what is needed. More is needed on this topic.*

## Question 6 - A Plan

### Statements

- Millions of people are on furlough, struggling with caring
- These people need reassurance before they can safely return to work, so a clear plan is required

WILL THE PM COME TO THE HOC ON MONDAY TO PRESENT HIS PLAN

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Nearly a quarter of British employees furloughed in last fortnight</a>	Furlough numbers
<a href="#">Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain</a>	Survey showing widespread anxiety among the British population

### Summative commentary:

Nearly a quarter of all British employees have taken up the current furloughed scheme, amounting to 6.3m jobs. The ONS has published a study that reveals that 6.2m people were very anxious about their jobs, and 5.3m suffer from very stark economic anxiety as their financial stability is becoming shakier due to the pandemic.

*This question was accurate in its content.*

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## Answer 6

YES

### Statements:

- Will give a statement to the house about the plan on Sunday
- Reason for Sunday - have to be sure that the data will support government ability to do 'this'
- Data is continually coming in
- Wants to get started with measures on Monday
- House will be able to debate and interrogate the plan

### Relevant links:

<a href="#">Boris Johnson's lockdown speech: When is it, what will he say, and how can I watch it?</a>	Summary of the plans for the speech on Sunday
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<a href="#">Rishi Sunak to cut coronavirus furlough scheme</a>	Cuts to the furlough scheme very likely in the short term
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**Summative Commentary:**

While the PM has stated that he does not want to address the deescalation strategy until they are sure to have the data that would support their actions, key details of the plan have been already leaked to the Telegraph, and the Times has reported today that the furloughed scheme will be reduced from 80% to 60% of the whole salary in order to encourage the population to return/find new jobs.

This lack of clarity in the government's communication about the plan will only increase the fears and worries of millions of people, and thus, rather than announcing new measures backhandedly through leaks to newspapers, they should be releasing official communications on the matter. The statement that data is constantly coming in is a truism.

*It is unclear what data exactly the government are waiting for which is not currently available to them.*