



Brian McBride

Interviewed by

Jane Bird

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Via Zoom

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Welcome to the Archives of Information Technology where we capture the past and inspire the future. It's Thursday 5th January, 2023 and we're talking on Zoom as has become customary during the coronavirus pandemic. I'm Jane Bird and I have reported on technology and the IT and telecoms industries for newspapers such as The Sunday Times and The Financial Times since the early 1980s. Our contributor today is Brian McBride, president of the CBI – that's the Confederation of British Industry – Britain's most influential employers' group. Brian has spent much of his professional life in the tech industry, beginning at Xerox and spending ten years in IBM in the UK and also the US where he held senior roles. He also worked for Dell and for T-Mobile during the UK launch of 3G. Then Jeff Bezos hired him to be chief exec at Amazon in the UK during the time that the company was undergoing transition from books and CDs to a vast range of online products and services, such as Kindle and Prime. His numerous other past roles include chairing ASOS, the online fashion retailer, being senior adviser to Lazard, the investment bank, and serving on the boards of AO.com, the BBC, Huawei UK, Celtic Football Club, Computacenter, Kinnevik, a Swedish digital investment company, and SThree. In addition to his CBI presidency, Brian is also an NED at Standard Life Aberdeen, a senior adviser with Scottish Equity Partners, he chairs Trainline.com, the rail ticket booking platform, and is the lead independent director of the MoD. Brian, welcome. I'm very much looking forward to hearing more about your life and experiences in the world of technology and business.

Good morning, Jane. Delighted to be here with you.

So if we could start at the beginning, I think you were born in 1955 in Glasgow on, well, what's now a part of Glasgow, originally obviously was a village on the side, but I guess it was part of Glasgow by the time you appeared?

Oh yes. No, it was pretty industrial. I lived out in the East End of Glasgow, it was a fairly, it was a fairly rough part of town and I think people would still say that now, but it never felt like it when you were growing up in it. When you look back it does, but at the time it was just a very normal place to be.

So did you have a happy childhood? You're one of eight, I think, is that right?

Yes.

Many brothers and sisters.

Yeah, one of eight children. Dad was a teacher, my mum was a nurse when she wasn't producing children. And at the time, you know, we didn't have a lot of money, we lived in a council house, there was ten of us sharing a toilet. So again, when you look back, when I talk to my kids about it, think, oh my goodness, that must have been hard. But I think we were loved, we were well educated, we were- my mum made much of our clothing and, you know, but we were well fed. You know, it never felt like poverty, it felt like a very normal life.

And were you, did you sort of run wild in the... what were your hobbies and how did you spend your leisure time as a child?

Yeah, well in those days in Glasgow if you were a young lad, you probably spent almost all of your non-school time playing football. And in those days, you know, it wasn't even an organised football park, so it was just on any patch of ground, which there wasn't a lot of green grass spaces out in Ruchazie in Glasgow. But, and again, you know, you never owned a ball but you would always join in a group. But it was just what you did, it was just everyone playing on the streets or in a park. And you could quite often have two or three different games going on in the one space, it was almost like a game of 3D chess. I look back with amusement at how inventive children can be.

But you never owned your own football, is that right?

Never, well, I mean, you know, as I say, we didn't have a lot of money. I think the money we had went on food and clothing and so there wasn't a lot of room for accessories like toys or things. But there was enough people around that there was plenty of footballs around, there was always somebody who was able to have one.

And you went to the local state schools?

Yes, I did, yeah. And, you know, I went to the state schools, because that's what you did, you know, when you came from that background. And the education I got then has certainly not held me back, it was a very good education system, I thought. The Scottish education system in general is pretty strong, and around Glasgow I think we had some great schools. Because of the critical mass, probably.

[00:04:48]

So, in terms of academe, it was a secondary school, was it a comprehensive school?

Yeah, it would have been called a comprehensive school. It was called Lourdes Secondary School, it was on the south side of Glasgow. I think, you know, we probably had, you know, 7/800 pupils. Again, it wasn't a high-achieving school, although the standard of education on offer was good, I think probably in those days the biggest issue was just a lack of aspiration amongst the students. I went to university and I think there were four from our whole year went to university. I mean we have, some of the private schools in Glasgow could probably boast of more Prime Ministers than we had going up to my university from school. But again, that was just a fact of life in those days.

Yeah. And so did you, what sort of A levels did you study? Were you interested in tech from the beginning?

No, not really. I mean in my days, you know, it was called Highers in those days, and I think, I did maths which I was very good at, I did French and Latin, which I was decent at. Latin was hard, but it was just a very good intellectual discipline, I think. And it's been very helpful for English and for understanding where words come from. And then I did something called Modern Studies, which was about really politics and economics and economic history, and it gave me a great hunger for what was going on in the world out there, because in these days, this was the, you know, the mid-sixties and you had the, you know, the whole Russian/Eastern Europe/Soviet Bloc thing which was very interesting, you had the Cold War. So I got a taste for politics and economics through that at school.

And what about technology? Did you come across computers at school?

No, no. They really hadn't been, you know, in those days there were certainly no, the PC hadn't come along at that stage, there was no mobile phones. I think most people in most normal walks of life would not have known what a computer was for, would never have seen one. In those days, even when I left and went to university, computers were things that big banks and huge companies had hidden away in some air-conditioned, water-cooled, special factory set-up. So most people had no exposure to technology of any sort. When I think back, as a curious teenager in Glasgow, my exposure to technology would be the television and the radio. And when I was living at home in the mid-sixties there were two TV channels, and it was black and white of course, so we had BBC and we had ITV. And then a thing called BBC Two came along and then I think in the early mid-sixties colour television started coming along, but again, in a working class household like ours, you know, we wouldn't have had a colour TV or anything. So TV and radio was about your exposure to technology. But when in school we occasionally, you know, had a film of, you know, what was going on in Africa or Canada, and this was quite exciting. And we went to the cinema occasionally, but that was, there was nothing beyond that to inspire you technology-wise.

No, okay. And before we sort of leave your schooldays, you did, you obviously were doing jobs, I suppose, to earn pocket money because you were not given pocket money by your parents, I think. And I think you did a milk round when you were sort of ten. So you had odd jobs...

I did, yes. I was pushing a milk float around the streets of Glasgow at 6 o'clock in the morning, delivering milk. And nowadays it would be seen as slave labour, would be completely banned. But actually, it was a good source of income and it was the only way that you had any pocket money. I then graduated from there to a much more white-collar occupation of being a paper round boy, so I then got to deliver newspapers, which was not quite as physically onerous. And, you know, you had to collect money at the door and stuff. Again, this was at the age of eleven or twelve.

So it taught me, it gave me a bit of responsibility, I think, as well as some pocket money so it was a good discipline.

Where were you in the order with your family, were you the oldest child?

I was nowhere, I was fourth out of eight. So I wasn't an oldest, I wasn't a youngest, I wasn't an oldest boy or a youngest boy. I once, when I was with IBM we had all of these psychologists trying to profile you and they said they can tell the characteristics of an oldest child and an only child and a youngest child, when you get to a family of eight and you look at number four, there's nothing you can- all you can tell is that they're a survivor, that's what you have to be.

Yes, yes. That's interesting. Well, maybe we can come back to that later on. Okay, so anyway, you've got to university and you were studying economics and, economic history and politics, I think, at Glasgow, weren't you? And that would have been in the late seventies then, about?

No, I went to university in 1972. One of the quirks of the education system in Glasgow was because I was an October baby, I went to school when I was four, and then in Scotland you could go to university after five years, not six. So I ended up being sixteen for about a week when I went to Glasgow University and I looked sixteen, I looked like a little schoolboy and I was still quite small then. And of course, part of university is corporate life, and I was not old enough and shouldn't have been trying to get into bars anyway, so you know, you missed out on a certain amount for your first six months or so. But no, 1972 is when I went up to university.

[00:10:10]

Wow, at the age of sixteen. So, and how was university, did you enjoy it, did it go well?

I enjoyed it, but again, in those days in Glasgow university was, it wasn't the same immersive experience that it is today. I mean I got the bus to university and the bus back at night and I quite often got home for my tea and my evening meal, I would go

out on a Friday night, but I'd come back again. So I wasn't living in a flat, you know, I wasn't living in student accommodation. It was, so it was different from being at school, you know, you felt more of a younger, you know, a growing up adult, but it wasn't the way that it is for youngsters today. Not that it was any downside, I still thoroughly enjoyed it and I was able to take part, apart from getting my degree, I was president of the union, I was involved in debating, so I was quite active in the corporate life of the university.

Ah, you were president of the union, that's interesting, given how relatively young you were.

Yeah, I think I was nineteen when I was president, so I was probably about the youngest. And in Glasgow the president of the union, it wasn't just an honorary position, you actually had a physical student union building and, you know, you had bars and restaurants and staff, you'd a general manager, and the board of which you were the president literally did determine things like, you know, the pricing policy for beer and food and, you know, which bands to hire. So it was a great exposure at an early stage for me to really running a business, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

So, and were you quite left-wing, were you quite militant? Did you have strong politics at that time?

Yeah, I would have said I was left of centre. I mean I wasn't particularly, you know, I wasn't an international socialist or anything. In those days I would have been round about the kind of Labour [incomp 00:12:01]. There was a group, really social democratic, I would have said, would have been how I described myself. So probably to the right of the Labour Party but certainly not Conservative.

So after, so you got an MA, but did that involve four years at Glasgow?

Yes. Well, I got an MA. And at Glasgow I converted to do, I did an honours degree which ended up, because of my year of being president, so it took five years in total to get the honours MA.

Okay. So then it's 1977 by the time you leave.

Yes.

And then you become a photocopier, a door-to-door photocopier salesman.

Yes.

What made that, was that random, I mean how did you come to do that?

It wasn't really random, and it's not quite as bad as it sounds. It wasn't quite door-to-door. But when I was coming out, I was actually involved in the student newspaper, the university *Guardian*, so I liked writing, I liked journalism, I wanted to be a journalist. And back in those days in the mid-seventies, Jane, there was newspapers closing down all over the place, you know, it was just a difficult time to try and get in. I think I was, I got one interview with *The Press and Journal* to go up to Aberdeen, and I think it was over the phone and it never really went much further. And so then I thought, well, what do I do. And again, I remember the array of glittering choices in front of me were to become a teacher; my father was a teacher, many of my brothers and sisters were. Or I could become a tax inspector, and I just thought, imagine turning up at a party and telling people you're a tax inspector, you'd be banished to the kitchen. So I thought maybe not that. And then I looked at some industrial trainee jobs with Procter & Gamble or Colgate, some of the FMCG companies, and then I saw an advert for Xerox, for photocopiers, and they were paying 50% more than a standard graduate salary. They offered you a car, they offered you training. I'd never sold anything in my life, but I thought it's worth giving it a try. And I did very well at the interviews, I enjoyed the training very much and I enjoyed having a car. And although it wasn't quite door-to-door you were selling photocopiers to businesses, so you had to literally phone up companies and try and get an appointment and then turn up with a photocopier on the back of an estate car and do a demonstration. And these things were, in those days, you know, they were kind of ten, thirty, £50,000 devices, so they were probably the equivalent of selling something that's maybe £100,000 today. So it was quite technical, quite a technical sell. And this was in fact my first exposure to real technology, it was quite exciting. Even in those days, the thought of

being able to take effectively a print or a photocopy of a document or something was unbelievable.

[00:14:44]

And did you, so that was really your first hands-on encounter with technology?

Yes, it was.

And you found you liked it, did you? I mean you describe yourself as a sort of technophile, I mean, yeah.

Yes. I mean I've never been a scientist, I've never known how to, how the physics and the chemistry of it all works, but I think what was of more interest to me was what can you do with these things, you know, what business problem does it help you fix. Rather than the underlying, you know, electrons and protons and neutrons and things.

Yeah. Yes, because you're obviously in that sense quite versatile. I mean obviously I've known lots of journalists in my life, but not very many of them would, yeah, be able to sell you a computer, I think. So it's a different set of skills really. You obviously were quite versatile.

Yeah. I mean I think- and it does, it does require a training in it, you do have to understand, you know, how... and it's very much similar, I think, to journalism. You have to ask the right sort of questions to elicit the answer. You know, again, if you, with selling photocopiers, and selling anything, it's about talking to the potential customer and letting them talk, asking open questions so they tell you all of their issues, all of their problems and from which you can pick through in real time and figure out what the solution you've got that you can apply to it.

Yeah. You mentioned, I should have asked you about your parents, your father being a teacher and so on, just whether they had really encouraged you, your education and

been very concerned for you to go to university and get an education and so on and move on. Did you get lots of support from them on that?

Yeah. I mean my father was a very strong advocate of getting educated. I mean if you could get to uni, great. If you could do teacher training, fine. One of my brothers did an accounts qualification through a firm. So my dad was just a great believer in self-development, you know, as a way to advancement. And in those days a lot of my friends were encouraged by their parents to leave school at fifteen, which you could do, so that they could start earning immediately and contribute to the family keep. And my father and mother, that was a sacrifice they made, they did without that money by allowing us to go to university. So great encouragement from them, and I think that was a major part of me being able to embrace it and give it that time.

Did all your siblings go to university?

Not all of them. But I think my – one, two, three, four, five of us did. One did teacher training, one did an accountancy thing, and one just was not academically, you know, inclined at all, which was fine, and he went off and worked for a furniture company, you know, delivering furniture and it ended up being bought by an entrepreneur who took it public, who gave him shares, and so he ended up by a very different route, managed to get himself, you know, some financial security.

So after Xerox then – no, 'scuse me – you went to IBM?

Well, I think although I enjoyed selling photocopiers and I was advancing quite well and was being offered promotions and did I want to move to England, I think Coventry I was being offered a job, certainly Coventry it felt like. And I thought after three and a half years, I thought I've probably taken this as far as I can, although it was an exciting piece of technology when you start, it's relatively simple, it can only do one thing. And at that time, computers were becoming much more accessible, you had mainframes, obviously you had smaller computers, and IBM was the big company. But you had Digital and Burroughs and, you know, Univac, people like that around then as well. So I moved into IBM which was the market leader. And again, I'd taken a step back almost to be retrained, that took me probably nine months.

And then I started selling what were mainframes to big insurance companies and manufacturing companies. And that was a very different industry, very different skillset, much more complicated, long-term sale. Some of these products were several million pounds and it took, you know, not just you, but a team of specialists to sell them. So it was a much more collaborative, collegiate type of role. But I really loved it and I really loved where computers were going, the fact that they were just simplifying and speeding up and making much cheaper a whole bunch of manual labour. When you think of what it used to take to produce payroll for a big company in the old days with people writing out things, and then with computers you can do it in a couple of seconds. So I loved what computers could do in terms of automating and modernising business.

[00:19:29]

So, you went to the US as well, how was that?

Oh well, I mean I think that option did come along. With IBM I started off in Glasgow, I then moved to Manchester to take up my first management role, moved down to the south-east and that's when we moved to Camberley. And I did four or five jobs there, including running one of the biggest branches. And then a role came up in the US, in New York state where they were headquartered. And it was quite a big, it was quite a big move, because again, at that time my children were, my daughters were five and seven and my wife's parents lived in St Andrews, so it's quite disruptive on the family and we thought about it, but then I thought, these chances won't come along very often in a lifetime, and I would hate to look back and regret not doing something. So we just went for it and we weren't there long, as it turned out, I had to come back when another big job came up in IBM. But I had about eighteen months there and the family had a full school year. So we lived in a place called Connecticut just outside New York, and it was just, it was wonderful to sample a very different style of living, different culture. And again, we were there 1991 to 1992. This was before the internet. I mean there was no internet, no social media, no mobile phones, and so you were very much, although it was an English speaking nation, American culture, American TV and American newspapers were quite different from ours. You did feel quite isolated. But we met some great friends, great

neighbours, great colleagues and we now look back, my daughters are now forty and thirty-seven, and they remember and look back very fondly with, about the time in the US. So it was a great thing to do. And again, when you get to the headquarters of any big company it does help your advancement within the company as well.

But you didn't stay, you wanted to come back?

No, no. No, and we had no intention. I mean the same thing came up later when I was running Dell and Dell were headquartered in Austin, Texas and I was running a large part of Europe and the next role would have been to go to the US, and I just knew at that stage that I didn't want to spend, you know, a lot of my life there.

Yes, I was going to ask you next about, because you obviously went to Amazon after IBM- oh no, you had T-Mobile...

I had Dell and then T-Mobile.

And you had Crosfield Electronics as well, so...

Yes.

... one after another, quite a lot of, yeah.

Yeah, well Crosfield was really, it was a company in the printing industry, but it was starting, it was making electronic equipment that made the printing process much more efficient. And it was at a cusp, because they had very expensive custom-built machines and then suddenly the PC was starting to come along and the Apple Mac and software packages that allowed you to do desktop publishing. So I lived through two years of an industry being completely disrupted and turned upside down. And although it was really, really tough, you know, we had to lay lots of people off and cut back, I look back at Crosfield as being my MBA. I never did an MBA, but this was when I was really leading a business in crisis. It was a company owned by [inaudible 00:22:50] Fujifilm of Japan and DuPont of the USA, so again, being the chief exec of a joint venture with an American and Japanese parent. I mean a lot of the time you

were almost like a diplomat trying to kind of keep both sides on side with your agenda. Really tough, hardest thing I've ever done, but I'm glad I did it, again and I enjoyed it. And from there I moved into what became, you know, by that time the PC had come along and then PCs were getting joined up together with technologies called Ethernet and Token Ring. And I joined a company called Madge Networks which made Token Ring cards to allow PCs to talk to each other. And then they moved into different forms of networking. They ended up getting bought by Lucent Technologies who I was part of for a little while. So I was starting to see where the internet was taking computers and making business again much more affordable, the ability to communicate globally without needing a massive big mainframe. So I really managed to, I was lucky in my time at IBM I lived through the revolution that took it from a mainframe company that then had PCs. And then when I left IBM I could see how PCs becoming connected allowed people to put together very simple local area and wide area networks. And then when I left that I went to Dell and I ran Dell in the UK and in northern Europe for about four years. And so again, I was running the UK, I had the Scandinavian countries, I had Belgium and Holland. So I got to experience again a lot of different cultures, which was great, and I saw that PC industry completely eat into the mainframe business so that computing now was starting to go to a server based architecture where you didn't need the big huge expensive ten million mainframes that the banks still had. You could actually run your business with, you know, a number of servers put together and when you needed more power you just add on a new server.

[00:24:52]

So I lived through that, that revolution again with Dell. And then moved on to T-Mobile. And T-Mobile had been an old mobile phone network called One2One, it was purchased by Deutsche Telekom of Germany, who were building a European network, and they renamed that T-Mobile. And that was based up in Hatfield. And at the time it was a very exciting, I mean the mobile phone had come along in the late nineties, this was 2003, so it was a very well developed industry, but the underlying technology was still what was called GPRS, or 2.5G, so you could do- and when I started at T-Mobile, 70% of our phones' usage was voice, 25% was text messages, and the other 5% was for those who were crazy enough to try to send internet

messages using a numeric keypad. And so you then suddenly in that time saw the arrival of the smartphone. We launched 3G which was the real first, you know, mobile data, mobile internet. And these were very, very exciting times. These were technologies and capabilities that put the power of the mainframe into the pocket of consumers and small businesses. So again – and it wasn't just T-Mobile doing it, every mobile telephony company in the globe was doing this – but it was a very exciting time, it was pioneering.

And so that was until 2011, was it, from 2002?

No, no. So I did T-Mobile from 2003 to 2006 and then after three years there – there was only so far you could go when you're really owned by a German company. I got on very well with Deutsche Telekom, I enjoyed the German culture very much, but it was a bit too slow moving and slow pace for me, and again, the whole corporate governance in Germany is very much a supervisory board with about, you know, thirty people on it, and it's more of a parliament than a board. So I found it a little bit frustrating, it took too long for decisions to get made and it was very hierarchical. So I then was called up by Amazon, didn't really think I'd anything to do with e-commerce or online shopping, but I went to the USA to be interviewed, I met Jeff Bezos. Before I got to meet him I had one day in Seattle where I think I met twelve people, so I met his entire team for thirty, forty-five minutes individually, one-to-one. By the time I met Jeff it was 6 o'clock at night, I was punch drunk, I was exhausted, I didn't know whether I was coming or going, and then I had forty-five minutes with, you know, who was at the time one of the most dramatic and revolutionary business people on the planet. But we got on very well. I remember from the interview, I mean he looked at my CV, or a resumé as they call it, and he kind of, he threw it dismissively onto the desk and he said, 'Look', he says, 'I don't need to go through this', he says, 'you wouldn't be here unless that was good anyway, so I'm going to take that as read'. And he was much more into what sort of person I was, you know, what motivated me. And I remember that he threw me a real curveball question when he said, 'Just tell me, Brian', he said, 'how many windows are there in London?' And I'm thinking, my goodness, and I was trying to think, and he said, 'Take your time', he said, 'just think about it'. And then I thought through and I tried in my mind to define London as being the physical city of London, you know, and I thought about

how many people lived there, how many people worked there, and I think, I just took a swag at it, I came up with a number of 38 million. And then I said, 'I think it's 38 million'. He said, 'Okay'. He said, 'And how did you get to that answer?' So I had to then work him back through my homework. And he said, okay, then he moved on. And at the end of it he said, 'Well, I think that was pretty good', he says, 'we'll be in touch'. And I said, 'Oh by the way', I said, 'what was the answer to the question, how many windows are there in London?' And he said, 'Oh, I haven't a clue', he said, 'I just wanted to see what your thought process was'. And that was the sort of person he was. My thought process couldn't have been too bad because I got offered the job and then I became the chief executive of Amazon in the UK on 1st January 2006, and I spent almost six years there.

[00:29:09]

And it proved to be obviously a very exciting time, presumably. That was the transition period, was Amazon going through enormous changes at that stage?

Yeah. I mean I think, when I look back, I just caught some amazing technology waves. It wasn't by planning or foresight, it was by serendipity and luck. I always think of the great Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca. Seneca was around when- he was an adviser to Nero and he was around when we went from BC to AD, so 2,200 years ago. And he said, luck is where preparation meets opportunity, and I think there's a lot of truth in that. So I was very lucky, but I was ready for it when it came along as well. So, landed at Amazon. It was a bit of a shambles. It was a great company but the UK was all over the place, it had a very inexperienced junior team, it wasn't really set up properly, attrition was very high, and it was succeeding despite itself, not because of it. And so, and my mission was really not to invent any technology or to design a better website, it was to build a management team and a structure that would take this thing from, you know, what was at the time probably about a billion and a half up to five billion of sales, which it was when I left. So it was a real, it was a little bit of a rollercoaster, it was like being on a bucking bronco, there was always something new, something happening. But an incredibly exciting time. I mean Amazon was breaking the mould with what they were doing, and going from books and CDs and DVDs all the way through to big electronics and then, you

know, jewellery and clothing and everything. So every six months we were launching some new category. So, great- and then bringing on, you know, the Amazon Marketplace, getting into Prime, getting into the Amazon Cloud, which was a complete accident, they didn't intend to invent it, it just came about as a by-product of the capacity that they already had. So these were great times.

Yeah. Amazon Web Services, you're talking about there.

Yeah.

Because that's sort of almost bigger than the rest of Amazon, I think, wasn't it?

Well, I mean it's almost inverted, that's become the main business and the way that Amazon Web Services came about was that every retail company has to build up massive capacity to deal with the Christmas spike. And the Christmas spike lasts from probably 2nd December to about 17th or 18th. That's when you need processing power for taking your orders, you know, getting the orders picked and packed and delivered. And so you gear up for this massive spike in retail and then for the next fifty weeks of the year you've got capacity coming out of your ears that you don't need. And some bright spark in Amazon in Seattle says, well, why don't we kind of rent out some of this processing power, rent out some of this massive storage space we've got and see if we can make a business out of it. And Amazon was great for letting people just experiment and try stuff. You know, if you experimented and it didn't work out you never got criticised for that. Well, suddenly there was this massive demand, it took them by surprise. It ended up, people were paying for it with their credit cards, there wasn't a billing system or anything, and it suddenly took off. And they basically invented the whole cloud computing services industry.

Yeah. So you didn't, I mean a lot of people get stuck with companies like Amazon because of the golden handcuffs of their share options and so on, but you didn't stay, you left in 2011, I think?

Yes. I mean if you look at my career, apart from IBM where I spent ten years, you know, I've spent three, four, five years. And I think I either, I come in and help fix

something that's broken, or I kind of take a fledgling and get it ready to get to the next place. Amazon was slightly different. When I joined Amazon I was the oldest executive in the company, and I felt it, it was a real young tigerish team.

You were fifty-two or something, were you, or...

Yeah, when I joined, it was two thousand and... yeah, so I was fifty.

Fifty.

And, you know, and actually, because of the kind of the older, greyer person, I got a little bit of deference, even from Jeff, you know, I'd get more of a hearing than some other people did. But I thought when I joined there it would be a three- or four-year thing. It turned out to be six. And actually, one of the reasons I left, I developed prostate cancer, I was very fortunate I got it diagnosed early, and any men listening to this, you know, check your, get your PSA checked, because there is no downside in getting it checked. I didn't know there was anything wrong with me, I had no symptoms, but the PSA test, you know, pointed to an abnormality. So, long story short, prostate cancer moves very slowly, so I had plenty of time to plan my exit. It was diagnosed during 2010 and we agreed I would step aside at the end of 2010, January 2011, and I was going to get my surgery in February. And it was very simple, it was very successful, not too intrusive. But it's the sort of thing that I knew I wasn't going to come back, so Amazon was very good at keeping me on till we were sure that I was fine. I already had my successor, I had two successors on the horizon, on my bench, I'd hired them in for that purpose. Because I think that's one of the, one of the roles of a great leader is to make sure that they leave a good bench behind them, you know. It's not a great leader that leaves them, then the ceiling falls in and the company goes to...

No.

... goes to rack and ruin. So I had two great people and one of them got the job and I left Amazon in the autumn of 2011.

[00:35:00]

So- and had you done that in your previous roles as well, actually, made sure there was a leader who could take...

Yes, yes. I mean I think it's, it's just it's what expected of you, I think it's called, you know, level five leadership. I think it's incumbent on any- and it doesn't matter how big or how small a company is, you've got to have that scenario that says, if I get hit by a bus or if I want to just go in a year's time, who's going to take over. And that is the current leader's problem, it's not the future company's problem. You've got to sort that before you go.

Yeah, yeah. Okay, so then after that you joined ASOS. Chairman of ASOS?

Yes. I mean I knew I was going to take on a portfolio career, I wasn't going to do another... So Amazon was a great point at which to get out, you know, at the top, from fulltime executive life. It would have been hard to do that same job for someone else, it just wouldn't have... you'd be comparing it all the time. So I decided then to have a plural career. I joined the board of Computacenter, and then ASOS, who I'd known when I was at Amazon, tried to buy them actually at one point, met them, they were looking for a new chair, and I joined them twelve months after leaving Amazon, which was when my covenants expired. And I think, you know, at that point I started, you know, I was clearly painted as a tech person at this stage and so any company going public would come to me. So I was on the board of a company called SThree, which was a staffing business. I was then starting to talk to people like John Roberts at AO. So any tech business that was going to do anything would probably approach me and say, do you want to join the board. I was very fortunate to be spoiled for choice.

And you enjoyed, so that portfolio role you obviously carried on doing for several years?

Yeah. And again, you know, some of the things I did, I mean being on the board of the BBC wasn't a particularly tech role, but you know, broadcasting and BBC is quite

a tech-enabled business and at that time, you know, with its own website the internet was very important. So I was able to bring from my Amazon experience an understanding of digital customers and how to retain customers, how to acquire them. I spent three years on the advisory board of Huawei, so again, Huawei is one of the great global tech companies, clearly got a few challenges with the whole China and Western relationships today. But when I was there, from about '12 to '15, they were a great company, highly respected in the UK, brought a lot of jobs here. And again, because I'd been at T-Mobile I'd an understanding of that industry that they were in, so tech in its broadest sense is where I have enjoyed applying myself in the plural life.

But you've also moved much more now into the world of finance and private equity and that's been sort of, was that somewhere, a direction that seemed natural to you to...

Well yeah, I mean private equity, I joined Scottish Equity Partners as an adviser about ten or twelve years ago, and again, a lot of the investments they were making were – they used to be in oil and things like that, but then they moved into tech and into software and so, again, I had a very good view of that industry and where some of those companies could go, so I think I brought something to their party. Private equity, similarly again, through Bridgepoint I got involved in Wiggle, the online cycling business, and I chaired that. So tech is a very broad platform and I managed to understand it from the customer end all the way through to the, you know, the server and cloud and back office end.

Yeah. So, but the world of private equity, venture funding, angel investors, small tech companies getting off the ground, I mean that's obviously very different from working for IBM or Xerox or Amazon or ASOS. I mean you're really much... at this early stage where companies can, you know, win or lose and make...

Yes.

Is that something that you're particularly interested in?

Well, I mean I think it's great when you've been working for big global giants to get to something smaller where you, you know, it reminds me of my time in Crosfield. Crosfield wasn't a necessarily small company, but it was much smaller than IBM, and getting into a business where you can know everyone and know how it works, you know, from top to bottom, is quite interesting. I mean start-ups and early-stage companies are very different, they need funding and so that's part of your role is, are these worthy of funding. I mean you don't want to pour money into something that's going to go bust. So picking winners is part of it, and then when you've picked those winners and you've bet on them by funding them, it's about how you support them as well, because, you know, Jeff Bezos and Michael Dell were all, you know, employee number one at one stage, you know, they were young tech entrepreneurs and they need advice and they need guidance and they need help, and sometimes they don't know what they don't know. So a lot of what you do is almost kind of mentoring and it's not about telling them how to make their product better, it's helping them think about leadership teams and succession and marketing and global and things like that.

[00:40:22]

Yeah. So all these experiences have presumably created an ideal background for you to become president of the CBI. I mean is that, does that seem like a natural role for you to fill?

Yeah, I think when they first approached me it didn't feel particularly natural to me. I mean I'd been involved as a member of the CBI when I was at T-Mobile, but I hadn't had any real association with them for about ten years. And I got approached in November '21. And at first I thought this isn't really me, you know, I'm not really mainstream British industry, I'm more of a disrupter than anything else. But then they kind of told me that look, we do need a very different type of person now, we need somebody that understands digital, somebody that could help convene the digital community for us, somebody that understands global business but also start-ups, somebody who understands business outside London. So I think there was a number of attributes and characteristics that made me quite a different person for them. And I think just the ordinary grounded working class person from Glasgow also quite appealed as well. So I then thought about it and I met Tony Danker, who's the DG,

who was just a breath of fresh air, and I did feel that there is an agenda here. Business is a very important part of what goes in any society. Whether we like it or not, if businesses don't succeed and if they don't make profits, then they don't pay taxes. And if they don't pay taxes we can't build schools and hospitals and provide public services. So there's a whole, there's a whole virtuous cycle here and it really starts with a successful business. And that's partly what my role is today, it's talking to the government about what business needs in terms of, not so much direct support, but more the fiscal policies, the monetary policies, the migration policies. It's what are the conditions- I believe that it's the government's job to kind of roll the pitch to make the playing field level, and then to get out of the way and let business get on with it.

And how successful have you been in your discussions with government, how has it gone?

Well, I mean I've only been in the role for five minutes, it feels like. I joined just over six months ago. And since then, nobody told me before I joined that I'd be on my third Prime Minister in four months and my, you know, third Chancellor. And you have to, part of your role is, you know, making relationships with the PM, the Chancellor and the Business Secretary and the opposition. So, I've had a pretty full on four or five months. I mean I've been to the Labour Party Conference, we've hosted our own conference where we had the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. I've had a number of dinners and events, you know, where I've been speaking about the business agenda. So it's been a very difficult time. I think very few people could look back over the past six months and write their own report card and say they've done a good job, but I think what we have done is we've certainly made business in general and CBI centre ground in terms of the solution to the problems that Britain's got today. I think the Treasury, the government, the opposition do see us a key convening power to let them know what is going on on the ground. I mean the CBI, during Covid, when business had just about grinded to a halt, nobody knew what sort of support was going to be needed to keep business going. The Treasury said, look, you know, we don't talk to businesses every day. And the CBI was able to get some working groups together to help craft with the Treasury, you know, the bounce-back loans, the furlough schemes, all of the tools that

got us through Covid. So that's the sort of role that we have, and so again, it's the same today. Britain is in a, you know, an economic storm at the moment. The whole world is, but we seem to be getting some of these winds more severely coming at us. And so the next twelve months needs some, you know, some steady hands, some good counselling, some good relationships with both government and opposition, and that's part of my role.

[00:44:32]

Are you optimistic? What's your gut feel about it now?

I'm an eternal optimist, I always have been. I do believe that, I mean things won't get better of themselves, but I do think that things will get better. Even in the short term, you can see inflation will have peaked by now, things will start to get better on that front and therefore people will feel a little bit better. The energy crisis is far from solved, but it is starting to ameliorate, we are no longer dependent on Russian oil and, you know, the problem is that renewables aren't coming along fast enough to replace what we've lost in terms of carbon-based fuel. But that will get to the right place at the right time. I think business will get through this, and again, the whole, the post-Covid supply chain mess that's really affected the automotive industry and many other industries, these are all starting to get slowly better. But I think there is no doubt about it, I wouldn't sugar coat the pill, we are in for a tough twelve or fifteen months here in Britain. We are starting out on a recession here. And by the second half of the year it will feel hopefully that we're starting to come out of it, but it will be a slow exit from this, it won't be a big sharp V-turn here. And so I think people are becoming conditioned and are starting to prepare for that. The other problem we've got in business today is that, you know, we're effectively at full employment in the UK, you know, those who want a job have got a job, and yet we've got 1.2 million unfilled jobs, many of which are tech-related jobs, so we just cannot get the skills we need in this country because we haven't either trained enough of the right skills for people or we've turned off the migration taps, which is an understandable consequence of Brexit.

Yeah. So you see that, I know you've spoken about the problem of not having enough human resources and post-Brexit and so on, so do you think we've set in train the mechanisms we need to address that or to recover from the aftermath of Brexit, or is there still a lot to do?

No, I think there's still a lot to do. And I think, whether we like it or not, one of the short-term solutions to this is more migration. And it's not just data scientists and programmers, I mean there's a whole bunch of jobs which have got some tech element. You know, the manufacture and assembly of an electronic vehicle is a very tech-related role now. But even beyond tech, you know, just from, you know, healthcare to hospitality, you know, from plumbers to butchers, we just don't have enough people to do key jobs. And this is what, part of what's holding Britain back. You can't have productivity, you can't have productivity increasing if you've got a whole bunch of unfilled jobs in your company. So what we're lobbying the government about is, look, you know, we don't want the tides to come in, you know, but we do believe that controlled economic migration is one of the solutions to the problem we've got over the next two or three years. Industry, universities, government are working on the reskilling agenda, and there are initiatives happening, they're not happening quickly enough, but we're doing the right things. But that will take three or four years for it to really work its way through into today's skill base, so in the interim we do need more migration. And that's become a very thorny political issue, so this is where politics meets business.

And on the tax issue, I mean that's, I suppose, quite a sort of short-term thing, but do you think we should have higher taxes for business and higher tax bands for people, for high earners?

Well, I'd separate, I mean I think personal tax is something that we tend not to have a view on in the CBI because it's more, you know, it's for the, it's for society to determine how much its higher earners should pay. I think that we all would believe that higher earners should pay more than lower earners and some would argue that a flat rate of tax means that they will do because they're earning more anyway. So I wouldn't get into personal taxation. It will be what it will be, regardless of what government we have. In terms of business tax, I think it's quite an important issue.

And, you know, whether corporation tax is at 22% or 27%, it's not that material. The issue is there have to be incentives for business to invest, they have to be able to offset the cost of their investments against some of the business tax that they will pay. If you are a boiler making company, somebody like Vaillant in the UK, who's trying to move to the manufacture of heat pumps, to retool your factory and put in the right technology and the right skills, it will take you four or five years to get the return on that investment, and that's why there has to be some offset of investment against corporation tax. The government had a super deduction which is about to disappear in April. There are some incentives today but in our field they're not enough. So we think business tax, have high business taxes, but for those companies prepared to invest in the future, allow them to offset it. If you're not investing and you're just raking in big profits, absolutely you should be paying higher taxes. But if you're investing in jobs and in the future of this country, you should have an offset.

[00:49:50]

And what about supporting mothers, new mothers who want to go back to work? Is that important?

Well, I think, look, I'm a father of two daughters, you know, both of them are mothers. One's a lawyer, one's a teacher, you know, and I've seen them- and actually they have been well supported in their journeys back to work. I think we have to, because I think it achieves a number of things. First of all, the senior levels of management in our industry today is still not diverse enough. We have now got a much better balance at the boardroom level with females and males and with other ethnic diversities, but you go lower down the food chain and we start to lose females from the higher echelons of management, so we have to be doing everything we can to encourage that. It also addresses the issue I've just spoken about, which is there is a big chronic job shortage in the UK and we have got qualified people who would like to get back to work. So let's find the right incentives, the right support to allow them to get back to work to help, you know, Britain's job shortage and to give them, you know, some form of income and earnings as well.

So, looking at the younger generation now, what would your advice to them be in terms of maybe going into tech, looking over your own experiences and your career? I mean I guess, you know, you had the foresight or good fortune or whatever to get into the tech sector and to seize those opportunities early on, are you encouraging your young people who approach you to go into the tech sector particularly?

Well, I think what I would say is, it's different today because when I was younger tech was a very clearly defined type of company, type of industry. Today tech is everywhere, it's what we all do. I mean from the age of seven, eight, ten you've got a mobile phone and you're understanding tech, you understand apps, you've got people doing coding at a very early age, you know. So what I would say to people is, you know, first of all, you've got to find something that you want to do. Somebody once said, you know, the key to a happy life is to find something you like doing and get paid for it, and I think that's very true and that's what's always happened with me. And I say to people there is no wrong door into a company. Get into a company at any level, you know, if you have to, help out with, you know, processing payroll or invoices, it doesn't matter, because smart, bright people get noticed. Cream always rises to the top quite quickly. So get into a company, don't get too hung up on the title or what it is, just get in there and start, you know, contributing. Thirdly, if you really have got an interest and a curiosity about tech and you'd like to go a bit further, you'd like to get into either coding or becoming, you know, a data scientist or into analytics, you know, because this is where, the tech that we've got today allows us to use great technologies like AI machine learning to solve difficult business problems. And so I think the great jobs going forward are those who have got a business experience, a business mind and know how to apply tech to those problems. So make sure that you're learning, you're keeping up with where Artificial Intelligence, machine learning is going, and if you want to be in that space there's going to be lots of opportunities for modern apprenticeships, you know, for- you don't have to be a graduate to get into tech. And look at some of the- you're going to find GCHQ, the government, Ministry of Defence, lot of big organisations are going to be starting to ingest lots of tech, you know, apprentices and graduates and take one of those jobs, get a bit of training with them, get some on-the-job training, you don't have to stay there forever. Do it for three, four, five years, then you can go off and become a great data scientist in investment banking or something else. So I just think technology's

going to be part of our lives going forward, working and personal life, so you can't avoid it. And if you can't avoid it, start to get comfortable with it, embrace it and enjoy it.

[00:54:04]

Indeed. Yes, so what are your thoughts about the UK generally in the tech sector, thinking about how we've come up with some of the, you know, most innovative early ideas. I mean, I'm old enough, like you, to remember, for example, the BBC Micro computer and, you know, times when people thought that companies up in Cambridge might become global players, and of course we don't even have ARM any longer in UK ownership. Is there, how do you feel about the prospects of creating an Amazon or a Google or a Microsoft in the UK and have we really, have we done enough, are we not doing enough to nurture our tech sector?

Well, I think there's no company apart from America's created an Amazon, a Google and a Microsoft, that's what Silicon Valley is all about and it's just an incredible confluence of funding and skill and encouragement and also an ability to be prepared to fail. So I wouldn't beat ourselves up because we haven't done that. And we had, you mentioned ARM. There's lots of great companies that the UK has created. I think Britain is still a great place for tech to thrive. You'll find that it's still a great global centre. People like working here, you know, Americans, Europeans, Scandinavians, you know, Russians, Ukrainians. Britain was always a tech Mecca for entrepreneurs, for start-ups and people to come. And we've also now got this great representation of the big companies you talked about, you know, Facebook and Google and Amazon and Microsoft, they've got massive capability in the UK, so that helps create, you know, that pull of tech knowledge. So I think we're still a great place to be, you know, and I look back, you know, some of the online retail, you know, ASOS and Boohoo and AO, I mean look, everyone's had a tough time over the past couple of years, but these were and are great companies and they're still around today. And I think we have managed to transfer the tech into, you know, so tech and retail is not just about Amazon. Or if you look at what Currys are doing and what Next is doing and what John Lewis is doing, you know, they're all very tech-enabled businesses, so I actually think we've got a good skill base of tech in the UK and I

think we're still, we've got a great, you know, we still invest in terms of venture capital and private equity more in the UK than in any other country in Europe. So we're still very much a place that encourages and enables investment. I see from my time at, my work at Scottish Equity Partners, there's still a lot of demand out there for funding, still a lot of great ideas. So look, let's not beat ourselves up because we haven't created an Amazon or a Microsoft, are we the place that is nurturing, creating, expanding tech skills and making sure that our companies are tech-enabled, because we have to get much more digitalised. You know, there are still companies around the world and in the UK that have got pretty manual or old-fashioned back offices, and these are parts of the reasons why productivity isn't where it needs to be. So, I think we're doing a pretty good job. We could do better, but we're doing better than most.

Oh, that's very reassuring to know. So looking back over your professional career then, are there any things that you would do differently if you had your time again?

I don't think, I mean I think it's worked out pretty well for me and I really couldn't... I wouldn't change a thing. And I mentioned earlier, when I worked at Crosfield, you know, it was two and a half years of the most difficult work I've ever done and, you know, when you're working for ASOS or Amazon or Trainline and your business is growing 40% a year, that's a lovely place to be and it's slightly easier. When you're cutting back and having to close things down and letting people go, it's a horrible place to be, it's not a pleasant experience, and so that was the least enjoyable time of my working life, but you have to experience that to enjoy the upsides. You know, it's about hills and valleys. So I'm glad I did it, I'm glad I didn't do it for too long, and I don't think I'd change a single thing.

And, obviously you haven't been driven by getting rich, that wasn't sort of your main goal in life. I mean, do you think that, you know, that works? Do you think people who might think, oh, I'll have a career in tech because, you know, that's the way to, you know, to get rich quickly, is that sort of relevant or would that not really be successful, do you think?

Well, look, I've done pretty well, I certainly can't complain, and I've got a very good lifestyle. I mean I don't have any private jets or polo ponies or need lots of the accoutrements of that. I do think you do have to make a decision at a certain point in your life. If you're going to be, you know, a teacher or a doctor or a public servant or a civil servant, you will know that your earnings have got a limitation, and it's still a pretty good place to be, at the top of these professions, but when you go into business, especially entrepreneurial businesses, you know that there is a chance of making money, but there's also a chance of not making it and you could spend three, four, five years and the company goes bust. So there's more risk and with that risk comes reward. I think that's the way it should be. You know, you can't have heaven without hell, and so you do have to have the chance that it all goes pear-shaped. And I'd say to people, you know, if you're doing it only for the money, it's probably not the right motivation, but if you know that you, if you put your life and soul into it and if it's really successful, there is a bit of upside, that's quite a nice place to be.

[00:59:47]

Yeah. So would you, looking at the way the social change and the changes to society that there've been because of the tech sector that you've been working in over your professional life, what would you say the greatest changes of society are?

Well, I think nobody would have envisioned twenty years ago how we would live our lives through the mobile phone. And that's, you know, that's, my ninety-four-year-old father-in-law uses a mobile phone. Thankfully, none of my grandkids do, but you see, you know, ten-year-olds and people like that. So it transcends all age groups. And it's not just a kind of social media chitchat... when you look at what the mobile is doing in terms of security, in terms of health, in terms of telemedicine. So I think the whole tech, AI- the ability of AI, you know, when you think about looking at brain scans, you know, and the amount of time it takes to manually look at brain scans and then you look at the success rate of the machine. So if you can actually process really important life or death things like that more quickly, if you can be more accurate, and the machine's not going to decide, let's go and operate on patient A, B or C, but the machine will quickly serve up to the specialist or the consultant, you need to look at these more closely. And I think the whole use of tech in medicine has prolonged, has

extended lives, has helped with what's going on in, you know, cancer research. So I think the impact of tech on lifestyle, on health, on wellbeing, has been the most remarkable and useful thing that we've achieved.

And what do you see as the main challenges, looking sort of in your crystal ball, in the next maybe five, ten-year timeframe?

Yeah well, one thing is, I mean I've looked through Moore's Law, and Moore's Law's kind of running out of steam, you know, you can't make a chip any smaller than it is today, really. You can't make the mobile phone any smaller because, you know, our eyesight isn't going to get any better and our fingers aren't going to get any smaller. So we're reaching the physical limits of some of the things that we can do. And so we're not going to get the big lifts. I mean Moore's Law, computerisation, especially that mainframe we talked about earlier, that's what gave industry a massive productivity lift in the eighties and nineties. We have none of these easy wins coming along from fast or better, cheaper technology. We will through, again, through analytics, through AI, through data science, we'll still be able to do things a bit faster, but I think that the next improvement in productivity is going to have to be grinded out by us doing things a bit differently, a bit better, a bit faster, but there's no light switch change moments, I don't think.

No. And is this, does the CBI take much review on all the employment problems that there are in the public sector at the moment and with so many strikes and so on, is that something you have a view on?

Well, we don't, I mean we don't represent public sector, obviously, and we don't represent every organisation and every, we don't represent employees at all. So we look at it from the point as it impacts things. If I look at train strikes, it stops people getting to work and it stops the hospitality industry in big cities from performing as it should do and there's nobody to buy the product. So, we look at it, but again, we also have to make people understand that in the private sector nobody's giving a twelve or a 17% pay increase, you just can't do that, and at an inflationary time, all you do is you keep feeding inflation. So I think we're always sympathetic, I mean as I say, I'm a product of a public sector family; my dad was a teacher, my mum was a nurse, so I

know what it's like. But the reality is, you can't fix an inflation problem by chasing after it, throwing money at it. And so I think we all, whether it be in the public sector or the private sector, despite the fact that there's a cost of living crisis, we have to show restraint at the moment.

[01:03:58]

Yeah. Okay, thank you very much. There was one, I just wanted to go back to you on one point. I think you talked about the growth in turnover – was it at T-Mobile – you were talking about going from one and a half...

I think at Amazon I said it was probably just over a billion when I joined and it was about five billion when I left, yeah.

And was that dollars or pounds, that's what I wanted to ask you?

I think it, that was sterling, that was pounds. But, you know, the trajectory's the same, whether it's dollars or pounds.

Yeah, absolutely. That was at a time, obviously, as we said, that the company was going through enormous transition. So, I think I just wanted to ask you a bit more detail about what you were doing at Amazon at that time?

What I personally was doing?

Yeah.

Well, in all my time there I was chief exec of the UK, so from '06 to '11 I was running the UK business. And the reason it was growing at that rate was really two or three different factors. I mean factor one was the move to online shopping. A lot of people preferred to buy things online if they could, and of course online was better avail... you could show much more on a website than you can in a shop. So better range, better pricing, better availability, that was point number one. We were then also expanding into different categories, you know, when you go from being a

bookseller to an entertainment product seller, to selling electronics products and to selling, you know, clothing and selling jewellery, you're opening up new markets, new vistas every time. That's why we were able to keep going at those remarkable rates.

And do you think there's a case for breaking such businesses up because they're becoming too monopolistic?

I wouldn't, I don't think so. I think competition's a great factor and I think there's plenty of competition. And, you know, if you want to buy a TV or a washing machine, there's a lot of people beyond Amazon who'll offer you that. It's the same with probably books and certainly digital books that they've got a pretty good market share. But I don't think... and I think the businesses are different. The fact they've got a cloud business and the fact that they've got, you know, a Marketplace business, I mean in my time these weren't cross-subsidising each other, they have to stand on their own two feet. So I'm not sure what breaking them up would actually achieve. It wouldn't make it more competitive. I do believe that competition is the greatest force that you've got in business. And even on the Amazon Marketplace, you know, the number of different sellers who are offering you that mobile phone case, for instance, that's what keeps the price down.

Yeah.

And consumers want prices to stay down, I mean that's the whole point. These businesses have driven prices down, that's what the consumers want.

Yeah.

I never ever heard a customer in my time at Amazon say could you give us higher prices please.

No. So Brian, we've covered an enormous amount of ground. Is there anything we haven't discussed which you might like to highlight, bearing in mind we're creating a

sort of archive for people now and in the future who might want to look at this period and the growth of the tech sector and gain more insight?

Yeah, well, I think probably the only thing we didn't touch on is the Ministry of Defence stuff.

Yes, you're right.

It's a pretty important, it's the biggest government department, it's massive, you know. What it does is it's trying to plan projects for the next fifty years. If you're talking about the next generation of combat aircraft or the next generation of nuclear subs, these are challenges and problems that not even Amazon or IBM have to face up to, because big companies today might look at a four- or five-year horizon. The defence industry's looking at a thirty-year horizon. So it is a, it's a very different, very unique space. I think myself and my colleagues on the board, the non-execs, what we bring to the party is a knowledge of the outside world and how it works, a knowledge of big project management and really a challenge that they would not have got otherwise. And so a lot of defence is very much tech-based, tech-enabled, when you look at the whole defence thing and, you know, the ability to interconnect through data, you know, ships and aircraft and various other weaponry and you look at the amount of data that's flowing around to do that, when you look at the use of satellites, when you look at us going into space, it's a very complex tech-enabled space. And so yes, you've still got people in fatigues marching across Salisbury Plain, but a lot of the next war will be involved and enabled by great tech and so it's the defence piece as well, business and government, military all come together. So again, I find that a very fascinating space.

And that's where, I mean there is a lot of, the UK is a global leader in that, I would assume. Would you say we're...

Well, a lot of the capa... if you look at nuclear submarines, if you look at aircraft carriers, if you look at the ability to fight land-based wars, if you took those three as being three key components, there are only, you know, three or four countries in the world that have got that today and we're absolutely one of them and always have

been. So I think our brains, our capability, our knowledge, our intelligence is second to none.

Well, Brian, thank you very much, it's been fascinating talking to you. So I can, you know, only wish you onwards and upwards, but it's been a very, very informative...

Thank you. It's been a pleasure talking to you, Jane. Thank you.

[01:09:43 end of recording]