

The Budget: first reactions

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I am writing this, minutes after hearing the Budget, having read little of the reaction of others to it, and having just come out of a BBC Radio 2 studio where I offered my comments.

My immediate reaction is (and there will be more later on when I have read some more of the documentation) that this was a Budget in need of an election to give it any meaning.

There were no big ideas.

There were no big announcements not already trailed.

The claim that the 2p cut in national insurance is part of some bigger plan is, very politely, absurd when not long ago the Tories pushed it much higher. It is just a pre-election bung.

So, too, were the giveaways on capital gains tax on property sales and the grant of yet another tax subsidised ISA savings scheme for the wealthy (because they alone can use them to their limits).

The reform on child benefits was wrong. What was needed was the removal of the two child cap, not the lifting of the number who can claim the income at higher levels of income.

And as for the public sector productivity reforms: as I said on air, this means that 10 minute GP appointments will now last 7 minutes and school classes that lasted 40 minutes will now be 33 minutes long.

The claims for public sector investment were crass. Not only did they disguise the failure to provide any new real money for these essential services, but to suggest that a drone might be the first responder at a crime has to be one of the most stupid ideas I have ever heard. You can really see that working.

As for growth, in reality there was nothing to make it happen and all the claims for

higher than expected growth simply reflect the inevitable statistical reaction to returning to anaemic levels of actual growth after we unexpectedly (as far as the government was concerned) slipped into recession.

And throughout all this the delivery was lacklustre, and the jokes unusually bad. Hunt seemed like a Chancellor who knew his time was up. No wonder he had invited his eldest daughter to come to the Commons to watch. This will be the last chance she ever has to see him do something like this. That was the only small mercy I could find in all this, even when he cancelled the non-dom rule. Given that I know all the rules to do this were discussed in the Treasury in 2011, the only thing that can be said about that now is that it was tawdry electioneering by a Party that knows its time is up.

It really is time for them to go, and everything about this Budget suggests that a May election is very likely.