

**Summary of Discussion: UKHSA Data Science Advisory Board Meeting 26th November 2021 –
14:30-15:20 [held virtually]**

Chair: Wendy Hall

1. Previous minutes were signed off and agreed

- Apologies were noted from: Ewan Birney, Simon Vosper and Alison Heppenstall.
- Previous minutes (29.10.21) signed off.

2. UKHSA update

- Promotion of Women in Data Week.
- Highlight work completed and ongoing work needed for B.1.1.529 (Omicron).
- Discussion of UKHSA's long term strategy and the capabilities required to deliver against this.

3. Presentation from Global Analysis and Assessment Unit - Work illustrating possible reasons for the recent deterioration in the epidemiological situation in Europe prior to the emergence of Omicron

- Driver of the analysis was recent worsening COVID-19 situation observed in Europe.
- The analysis sought to compare which countries had increasing case and death rates and investigate possible reasons behind the observed trends.
- Analysis investigated geographical, non-pharmaceutical interventions, vaccination coverage and variant prevalence as possible explanations.
- Negative correlation between vaccination coverage and death rate – outliers could be flagged to illustrate something different happening in country.
- Exploratory investigation could be used more widely.
- Could implicate risk for UK going forwards.

4. Discussion

- A constructive discussion about the presentation mentioned these key points:
 - Key for understanding COVID-19 spread is susceptibility because doses vs cases does not tell the whole story due to natural immunity. There is also a need to consider local age and geographical differences of other countries as there will be gaps in susceptibility.
 - Rate of change metrics could be used to better compare countries.
 - Potential to apply this analysis findings to South Africa B.1.1529 situation and draw lessons from Beta previously.
 - Discussion about international data sources and intelligence available.
- Further discussion about B.1.1.529 (Omicron):
 - Board members were glad about the quick response by the UKHSA to inform ministers and recognised the complexity of comparing countries and thanked

the team for their efforts – commented that this is an opportunity to slow the spread while we are learning more about the variants characteristics.

- Discussion of importance of maintaining confidence from public.
- Emphasised that this is an opportunity for UKHSA to demonstrate its world class capabilities and expertise – gathering data and advising, and that this will be critical in coming weeks.

5. Any Other Business

- Secretariat advised that the scheduled meeting for December, which falls on New Year’s Eve, is to be cancelled so the next DSAB meeting will be on Friday 28th January.

6. Meeting outcomes

- Update note requested at beginning of January prompting again collaboration between groups.
- MQS to intervene on high waiting times in enclosed corridors in airports.

Attendance:

Attendee	Role
Professor Dame Wendy Hall	Professor, Associate Vice President (International Engagement) and Executive Director (Web Science Institute), University of Southampton
Professor Daniela De Angelis	Professor of Statistical Science for Health, University of Cambridge, Deputy Director and Programme Leader at the MRC-BS
Dr Zeynep Engin	Urban Dynamics Laboratory, UCL
Dr Johanna Hutchinson	Director of Analysis and Data Science, UK Health Security Agency
Dr Ben Goldacre	Director DataLab, University of Oxford
Professor Graham Medley	Professor of Infectious Disease Modelling, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Professor Andrew Morris	Director, Health Data Research UK
Professor Mark Parsons	EPCC Executive Director and Associate Dean for e-Research at Edinburgh
Dr Sylvia Richardson	Chair of Biostatistics, Director of MRC-BSU, University of Cambridge
Dr Chris Savoury	UK Health Security Agency (Presenting)
Emma Collins	UK Health Security Agency (Presenting/Secretariat)
Dr Amy Thomas	UK Health Security Agency (Observing)
Dr Nick Watkins	UK Health Security Agency (Observing)
Charlie Dunstan-Rice	UK Health Security Agency (Secretariat)