Summary of Discussion: First JBC Data Science Advisory Board Meeting,

30 October 2020, 14.00 – 14.50

[held virtually]

Key Challenges facing the JBC and the Role of the Data Science Advisory Board (DSAB)

The Board discussed the challenges facing the Joint Biosecurity Centre in the data science space. The challenge was to ensure that the JBC was able to rapidly harness new research developments with the potential to improve the UK's response to the Covid-19, without the need for the JBC to maintain on ongoing view of the UK's entire data science ecosystem. It was a necessary and positive feature of scientific research that different teams focus on similar or overlapping questions. Maintaining visibility of this landscape was likely to be a significant challenge for the JBC, but an area where DSAB was likely to add significant value

Three key issues were identified:

1. The complexities involved in working with data from multiple sources. The openSAFELY programme might offer some useful guidance on how to approach this issue;
2. Ensuring the JBC was able to recruit the right talent from across the UK's data science community to support its capabilities; and
3. The importance of the JBC adhering to the highest standards of transparency and openness in its work.

DSAB Ways of Working

The Board agreed that its core purposes were knowledge exchange and technical advice to the JBC. The intention was to consider one or two issues in detail each month, with space to consider emerging issues too. Openess was an important principle, including to new and different thinking. There were a number of specialisms that had the potential to add particular value to discussions, including active clinical expertise, a view from the NHS Test and Trace Frontline, a Director of Public Health, experience with high consequence and rapid data analysis, and as well ethics and governance.

Attendance:

Ewan Birney (European Biomatics Institute),

Zeynip Engin (UCL),

Ben Goldacre (University of Oxford),

James Hetherington (JBC and the Alan Turing Institute),

Johanna Hutchinson (JBC),

Rupert Lewis (Royal Society),

Graham Medley (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine),

Andrew Morris (University of Edinburgh),

Mark Parsons (EPSRC),

Simon Vosper (Met Office)

Observers/Secretariat: Five members of JBC staff.