

**Joint Biosecurity Centre Ministerial Board - Minutes**  
**6.15 – 7.15pm**  
**Monday 19 July 2021**

**Introductions – Humza Yousaf, MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport)**

Humza Yousaf, The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport for Scotland, welcomed attendees to the JBC Ministerial Board. Apologies were noted from Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (SoS). Board members wished the SoS well.

**Context and updates on national issues/situations – All Ministers**

It was noted that cases in Scotland are on a downward trajectory; after experiencing a recent peak of 4000 cases per day they are now down to around 1400. Hospital admissions remain high but are showing signs of stabilising. Restrictions are now at level zero and limits remain in place. Face coverings remain mandatory and social distancing is still in place.

NI stated that the rise in the Delta variant has led to an increase in case rates - 1700 cases today, over 100,000 hospitalisations but relatively low ICU cases. NI stated they will continue to observe UKG & SG case numbers to identify any trends or patterns ahead and have started winter planning early to consider potential challenges.

WG are gradually removing restrictions and there are no longer any limits on outdoor gatherings. Full tier zero is expected next month at which point approximately 85% of their population will be double-vaccinated. WG highlighted that they have reluctantly agreed to follow the UK government guidance to allow fully vaccinated travellers to arrive from amber-listed countries. WG continues to advise against non-essential international travel.

UKG stated that although UK restrictions are lifting, isolation rates remain high – approximately 140,000 isolations in the past week. Vaccination programme still appears to be working well. Recent announcements include mandatory vaccinations for care home staff in England and Covid vaccine certificates to be compulsory for nightclubs and pubs to help tackle vaccine hesitancy among young people.

**JBC as a four nations entity and review of the agency agreement – Interim Director General, JBC**

Interim DG, JBC provided an overview on the progress to date towards implementing a four-nations JBC. He highlighted that positive, collaborative work is continuing in key areas:

- DA Senior Liaison Officers – SG and WG embeds who joined the JBC in May 2021
- DA involvement in JBC internal governance structures through attendance at the Joint Policy Forum and Senior Stakeholder Prioritisation Panel

- Support provided by The Implementation Group for the Agency Agreement: Work on pathfinder projects e.g. international borders assessment, Variant of Concerns (VOC) dashboard and school holidays as a Non-Pharmaceutical Intervention
- Logistical support provided to DA analysts on DHSC laptops for joint working on analytical platforms
- Communication - Delivering awareness raising comms around the notion of 'DAs by default' across JBC e.g. Show and Tell sessions and the planned delivery of devolution training
- Work on the details surrounding Data Sharing arrangements – this will underpin our ability to build four-nations product e.g. VOC dashboard. Important to ensure that data ethics and privacy are incorporated.

At the recent Steering Board, it was noted that a high-level plan will be designed for public engagement ahead of sensitive data being used as the JBC transitions into the UKHSA structure and into a non-emergency state.

The Board thanked the Interim DG for his leadership and felt that overall, good progress had been made and continuing the 'four - nations by default' approach works in all nations' interests. The shift from consulting to genuine opportunities for collaboration was welcomed, and the importance of identifying shared priorities was stressed.

It was highlighted that there are constraints placed on the Agency Agreement review due to lack of certainty regarding the proposed purpose and structure of the UKHSA. The Health Ministers endorsed the view that clarity on the future structure of the UKHSA would be helpful.

### **Update on the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and DA engagement – Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive, UKHSA**

Dr Jenny Harries (Chief Executive, UKHSA) explained that the UKHSA was formally established on 1 April 2021 and will be operational from October 2021. Staff consultations are in progress and the transition of staff and functions will happen over the next few months. Dr Harries is keen to work through the existing arrangements of Test & Trace/JBC and DAs, and also the 'professional' side of how public health services and functions are delivered by the four nations. A holistic approach will be taken to maintain the collaborative relationship between the JBC and DAs. It is considered vital to preserve the four-nations approach during the transition to the UKHSA and work on establishing a more coherent way of doing things in the future. The Board highlighted the good working relationship between JBC/DAs and would like the engagement to continue.

The Board agreed that clarity is important ahead of the next Ministerial Board in November and it would be useful to get a timeline of when key decisions will be made. WG Minister requested that a set of milestones for engagement with DAs prior to November be agreed to ensure we get this right. Dr Harries agreed

November would be an excellent time to come back on the Agency Agreement setting out how we can jointly work together.

It was highlighted that some design workshops with DAs (proposed science draft strategy) have already taken place. In the meantime, Dr Harries expressed she is happy to be contacted directly to answer any queries.

### **VOC dashboard update engagement – Variants Assessment Team, JBC**

The Variants Assessment Team, JBC presented an overview of the VOC dashboard. It was highlighted that presently the dashboard includes data for England only, but there is a pathfinder project exploring opportunities to incorporate data from all four nations.

The Board agreed that this is an impressive concept; building a UK-wide dashboard and making it a four-nation product could add value. NI stated that they supported the production of the dashboard and wanted to see it pursued swiftly; Scotland agreed, but were concerned to ensure that both the legal arrangements for the sharing of data were in place and appropriate procedures for considering ethics and other matters of importance to the Scottish Government. WG signalled support in principle as it is very much in our interests to work together, but highlighted the need to work through the details of the project and in particular in relation to data sharing.

JBC explained that they currently have procedures in place for ensuring that ethical considerations are taken into account and it could take some time to change these (as changes would need to be coordinated with the rest of UKHSA and DHSC). The Board endorsed the importance of having both the legal arrangements for the data and ethical arrangements in place, though this should be completed as quickly as possible. JBC asked for clarity on the additional Scottish requirements and Scotland agreed to provide these as soon as possible.

**Action: HY requested SG Officials to confirm list of requirements to progress data sharing arrangements.**

### **AOB**

There were no items of additional business raised.

The Chair thanked all attendees and stated that the next Ministerial Board is scheduled for November 2021, with WG chairing.

### **Attendees:**

Humza Yousaf MSP – Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport

Robin Swann MLA – Minister of Health

Eluned Morgan MS – Minister for Health and Social Services  
Lord Bethell – Minister for Innovation with oversight of UKHSA  
Dr Jenny Harries (Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency, UKHSA)  
Professor Sir Michael McBride (Chief Medical Officer, NI)  
Nicola Steedman (Deputy Chief Medical Officer, SG)  
Richard Pengelly (Permanent Secretary, DofH NI)  
Caroline Lamb (DG, Health and Social Care, SG)  
Reg Kilpatrick (DG, Covid Crisis Coordination, WG)  
Interim Director General, JBC  
Tina Clapham (DD Legal, Policy and Compliance, JBC)  
17 government officials and observers from the JBC and Devolved Administrations