

JBC Ministerial Board – Minutes
30 November 2020
6.00 – 7.00pm

Introductions – The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State welcomed attendees to the inaugural meeting of the JBC Ministerial Board. He thanked everyone involved in establishing the Joint Biosecurity Centre (“JBC”) in an extremely short period of time. He noted that the JBC has been rigorous with its production of analysis which has served all four nations, providing valuable oversight of the pandemic.

The Health Ministers from each devolved nation endorsed this view.

Update on JBC and current priorities – Dr Clare Gardiner, JBC Director General

Clare Gardiner (DG, JBC) provided an overview of JBC progress, noting that we are now moving into the next phase of the pandemic. The vaccination programme and mass testing regimes will bring opportunities to pose deeper analytical questions for which we will want to draw on expertise and insight across all four nations.

Clare Gardiner stated that the Political Agreement and Agency Agreement were now in place, which represented a key milestone in the development of a UK-wide JBC, noting the value that the Technical Board is providing through the four UK Chief Medical Officers.

Clare Gardiner explained that JBC had developed close alignment with the Devolved Administrations and would seek to build on this analytical partnership over the coming months. Health Ministers endorsed this view.

Reflections on progress from Health Ministers

Jeanne Freeman MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport) highlighted that the Scottish Government had found thematic and bespoke products of particular value, alongside the collaboration at the Technical Board. She noted that further analysis conducted collectively across the four nations, such as the effects of inequalities on Covid-19 transmission, would be helpful.

Vaughan Gething MS (Minister for Health and Social Services) agreed that good progress had been made to date through the concerted effort of all parties and would like to see further analytical collaboration to strengthen the partnership with the JBC.

Robin Swann MLA (Minister of Health) stressed the importance of working together, as the virus knows no border, noting that we must seek to add value as participants. He added that we have made important progress through the Agency Agreement and now need to ensure that we are amplifying and enhancing our resources to our mutual benefit.

It was agreed that further consideration should be given to define additional work to be undertaken which would have a significant collective impact.

Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Board – Dr Clare Gardiner, JBC Director General

The Ministerial Board Terms of Reference were agreed by all Ministers.

Terms of Reference for the Steering Board – Dr Clare Gardiner, JBC Director General

The Terms of Reference for the Steering Board were agreed by all Ministers, subject to the inclusion of an additional point noting the Board would be consulted on the appointment of future JBC Directors General, to reflect the Political Agreement.

ACTION: JBC to amend the Steering Board minutes to reflect the changes

AOB

Secretary of State stated that the next Ministerial Board would take place in March, to allow the meeting to take place ahead of the pre-election period.

Secretary of State thanked Clare and the JBC team for their hard work and closed the meeting.

Attendees:

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP (Secretary of State for Health and Social Care)

Robin Swann MLA (Minister of Health)

Jeanne Freeman MSP (Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport)

Vaughan Gething MS (Minister for Health and Social Services)

Dr Michael McBride (Chief Medical Officer, NIE)

Richard Pengelly (Permanent Secretary, DoH NIE)

Reg Kilpatrick (DG, Covid Crisis Coordination, WG)

Clare Gardiner (DG, JBC)

Richard Foggo (Director, Covid Public Health, SG)

DD Legal, Policy and Compliance, JBC

7 government officials and observers from the JBC and Devolved Administrations