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To:

**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**

From:

**Joint Biosecurity Centre,
Policy and Legislation Team,
PMO
Date: 30 November 2020**

JBC-DA AGENCY AGREEMENT: UPDATE ON PROGRESS, IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND NEXT STEPS

Issue

To outline the joint JBC-DA approach and initial plans following the completion of the JBC Agency Agreement with the Devolved Administrations.

Recommendation

That you:

- **Note** the progress towards achieving a Four Nation JBC to date;
- **Note and agree** the approach that is being taken to implementing the Agency Agreement; and
- **Note** the next steps to progress delivery.

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Background

1. On 10 August 2020, an agreement on the 'Participation of the Devolved Administrations in the Joint Biosecurity Centre' (hereafter referred to as the Political Agreement) was agreed between the Secretary of State and respective Health Ministers in the Devolved Administrations.
2. Following the completion of the Political Agreement, an Agency Agreement – underpinning the political commitment and providing the legal basis for JBC's operation on a UK-wide basis – has been finalised at official-level and has been approved by Ministers.
3. The JBC and DAs are now focussing on the implementation of the Agency Agreement and the commitments contained within it. This implementation will build on the good progress we have already made, and the productive engagement and collaboration that is already underway between the JBC and the Devolved Administrations. Key progress includes:
 - a. **JBC Governance and Strategic Alignment** – the JBC Technical Board, comprising of CMOs and relevant officials from all four nations, has met three times, with two of these instances being extraordinary meetings. The Technical Board is responsible for agreeing the methodology that underpins the Covid-19 Alert Level and has made important adjustments to international methodology and thresholds. The first meeting of the JBC Ministerial Board will take place Monday 30 November, with the JBC Steering Board meeting for the first time soon after (the composition of which is to be agreed by the Ministerial Board).
 - b. **Policy Engagement and Implementation** – JBC Policy Advisors meet with DA counterparts on a weekly basis to discuss governance, live issues, and Agency Agreement implementation. This regular meeting has evolved into The Implementation Group for the Agency Agreement (TIGAA) which will oversee Agreement implementation.
 - c. **Analytical Collaboration** – Analyst and data science communities across the four nations meet regularly in both the Four Nations Analytical Working Group and Four Nations Modelling Group, which focus on sharing best practice, insights, and current and future analytical and modelling projects.

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- d. **Operational Alignment** – Complementing the 0800 JSAT meetings, a Four Nations SitRep has been established by Test & Trace, where Response colleagues meet thrice weekly to discuss current national situations, cross-border issues, and lessons learned from incident response.
4. Our approach to Agency Agreement implementation builds on this progress and the constructive spaces for collaboration that have already been established.

Implementation Workstreams

5. To implement the commitments of the Agency Agreement and ensure we build a UK-wide JBC, officials from each administration have discussed and agreed in principle that implementation activity is divided into four broad workstreams:
 - a. **Workstream 1 - Ways of Working** which will establish agreed ways of working that facilitate efficient collaboration and provide detail to Agency Agreement commitments
 - b. **Workstream 2 – Procedural and Technical Controls for Data** which will establish the requisite technical and procedural controls for the use of DA data by the JBC, fulfilling the terms of the Agency Agreement
 - c. **Workstream 3 – Data Sharing** which will establish and utilise data sharing processes to achieve the JBC's objectives on a UK-wide basis, prioritising those areas analysts deem to be of greatest value
 - d. **Workstream 4 – Analytical Products** which will establish and embed clear processes for the commissioning, collaborative production, and use of JBC products

Implementation Principles

6. In carrying forward these workstreams, we are conscious of making the most of the finite resource that exists within both JBC and the Devolved Administrations and have therefore devised a set of implementation principles that seek to make the best use of this limited resource through a progressive approach.
7. These principles will be reviewed regularly, and are:
 - a. To progress implementation in a logical, sequential and agreed order following assessment of activities to determine benefit as well as impact on resource and time

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- b. To build on pre-existing JBC-DA collaboration and engagement channels, enhancing and complementing the good work that is already ongoing
- c. To avoid undue strain on analyst and data science communities
- d. To build flexibility into our approach, ensuring that we can adjust our priorities to reflect our changing context

Priority Projects

- 8. We believe that the best way of capturing these principles in practice is through a small number of Priority Projects. The initial projects will focus on developing a joint analytical pipeline (deepening our analytical partnership) and embedding DA staff within the JBC.
- 9. The Priority Projects will be “pathfinders” which pave the way for future implementation work. We believe that the lessons learned from taking forward these projects will be invaluable to future delivery, and therefore the journey will be just as important as the destination. The Priority Projects are also intended to overlay the Workstreams outlined above. Rather than being separate from the activities agreed under each Workstream, the Priority Projects will advance each workstream, progressing the work in a logical, prioritised way.
- 10. We hope that the Priority Projects will continue to build on the significant progress we have already made, by reaching key milestones by Christmas. The specific success criteria for each project is not for this paper to determine, but for The Implementation Group of the Agency Agreement (TIGAA) and TIGAA Teams to establish (discussed under Implementation Governance, below).

Implementation Governance

- 11. In line with the principles outlined above, we propose that the governance mechanisms for overseeing implementation build on what already exists. These proposed structures are as follows:
 - a. **JBC Steering Board** – The Steering Board will be ultimately accountable for Agency Agreement implementation. It will receive quarterly reports on implementation progress from working-level bodies and officials (principally TIGAA) and in turn give steers on the direction of implementation. In the

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unlikely event that issues cannot be resolved at a working level, they will be escalated to the Steering Board for resolution.

- b. **The Implementation Group for the Agency Agreement (TIGAA)** – This group is an evolution from the weekly JBC-DA SitRep meetings that have been taking place since September. This group is comprised of policy representatives from JBC and the DAs, and its role will be to have practical oversight of Agency Agreement implementation. It will take decisions on the prioritisation of work, unblock delivery issues, and commission TIGAA Teams.
- c. **TIGAA Teams** – These teams would be responsible for overseeing discrete areas of implementation work, with their objective, scope, and membership commissioned by TIGAA. They would be comprised of a sub-set of TIGAA itself, who would bring in relevant expertise from across the JBC and DAs as necessary. In the first instance, we propose that the TIGAA Teams would each oversee a Priority Project.

12. Senior officials from across the UK met on 19 November and were content with the proposed implementation governance and approach.

Next Steps

13. TIGAA will continue to meet weekly and, subject to discussions, commission the first TIGAA Teams and oversee progress on the Priority Projects. TIGAA will report on implementation progress to the first meeting of the JBC Steering Board, expected to take place in early December.