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BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear Katharine,

### **National Security Risk Assessment 2019**

Ahead of publication of the 2019 NSRA, the community of Chief Science Advisers (CSAs) across Government reflected on the methodology and areas that should be improved in the next iteration. Please pass on my thanks to the Cabinet Office National Risks team who supported the discussion.

During the meeting, CSAs agreed that the rationale for combining malicious and non-malicious risks into a single risk assessment framework is valid and that the use of a probability-based approach in making the comparison between these risks is right. However, some methodological anomalies have arisen, due in part to combining the previous NSRA and NRA, that should be reviewed and addressed. CSAs identified two areas where further thought is necessary.

**1) Defining Reasonable Worst-Case Scenarios (RWCS) and their effect on likelihood and impact ratings:** It is evident that there are many inconsistencies in how RWCS are defined by departments, in particular for chronic risks. For example, in the case of flooding, it is possible to define a RWCS, but this is more difficult for serious and organised crime or anti-microbial resistance. In practice, the lack of clarity on what constitutes a reasonable worst-case assessment and how this can be applied to chronic events has led to departmental inconsistencies in defining risks, which can then affect the impact and likelihood rating of each risk. It would be useful to further research how to define a RWCS for chronic risks.

Departments would also value greater support in scenario development. At the outset of the NSRA process, it may be useful to run scenario development workshops, so that Departments have a common understanding of what is expected of them, what constitutes a reasonable worst-case assessment, including the data that underpins this assessment, and how this will be used within the NSRA methodology.

**2) Interdependent risks:** Another area to review is how interdependencies within risks are captured. Many risks are interconnected and can act as contributors or enablers of other risks. This in turn can amplify certain risks. This issue is not currently captured sufficiently well in the NSRA methodology.

A peer review of the full document by a group of independent specialists, who are sufficiently aware of the risks and can sense check the document from an early stage would be beneficial. This is currently done on a risk by risk basis and a review of all the risks in a holistic manner from the outset, and at set intervals thereafter, will be an opportunity to spot methodological anomalies and act as a feedback mechanism for Departments to review the underlying data within their scenarios. GO Science and the network of CSAs will be able to support such a review.

Finally, it is crucial that we continue to emphasise the purpose and value of this document, especially the importance of the planning assumptions rather than specific risk ratings. To that end, previous GCSAs have presented on the NSRA to Cabinet and other senior decision-makers, alongside the Minister for the Cabinet Office, to ensure that Secretaries of State are aware of the risks they are accountable for and the scientific evidence that underpins it. Prior awareness and understanding of risks, likely trajectories and consequences can be critical during an emergency and I would be happy to discuss this document with Ministers in a similar format, if that would be useful.

Yours sincerely,

**Personal Data**

**Sir Patrick Vallance**