

Ethnicity Subgroup: Covid-19

Terms of Reference

1. The Ethnicity subgroup was convened in response to the novel coronavirus first reported in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019.
2. The Ethnicity subgroup is a subgroup of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) during the Covid-19 response only. SAGE is chaired by the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA). The Ethnicity subgroup reports directly to SAGE. SAGE is responsible for ensuring that timely and coordinated scientific advice is made available to decision makers to support UK cross-government decisions, including for Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) and C19 strategy meetings.
3. The Ethnicity subgroup Secretariat is held by the Government Office for Science (GO-S).

Scope

4. The Ethnicity subgroup provides independent academic and expert advice to assist policy decisions relating to the Covid-19 epidemic. The Ethnicity subgroup advises, in the broadest sense, on the risks to and impacts from Covid-19 upon minority ethnic groups.
5. The Ethnicity subgroup will focus on questions that are complex and/or involve issues beyond the capability of individual departments to answer. The existence of the Ethnicity subgroup should not preclude departments commissioning their own science advice on risks and impacts from Covid-19 on minority ethnic groups.
6. The subgroup is a science advisory group only. Questions concerning the proportionality and value for money of policy options are outside of the group's remit.

Timing and Duration

7. Ethnicity subgroup meetings will be held as often as required to support government decisions for the duration of the Covid-19 response, to coordinate ongoing work and meetings of any related subgroups or working groups. The Ethnicity subgroup may also be required to meet on an *ad hoc* basis and at short notice.

Working groups and subgroups

8. The core of the Ethnicity subgroup will be made up of regular participants (as decided by the co-chairs and Secretariat), with individual officials or subject matter experts being invited depending on the issues being discussed at specific meetings. This core group of participants will also consider requests for work from GCSA, SAGE and other policy teams across government and then provide coordination and sign-off for work done by temporary working groups.
9. Temporary working groups may be set up to assist the subgroup in considering questions on a particular theme. Outputs will be endorsed by the core group of participants and temporary working groups stood down once the original questions and any immediate follow-up have been answered.
10. Additional SAGE subgroups may also be stood up during the response to tackle specific issues from a science angle, and some of these will require expertise around minority ethnic groups. Ethnicity subgroup participants may be invited to participate in these groups also and will observe the terms of reference of these groups in addition to the Ethnicity subgroup terms of reference (this document).

Governance

11. The Ethnicity subgroup operates under the SAGE advice structure alongside other government expert groups. Science advice to Government is coordinated and prioritised by SAGE and the Science Coordination Group in the Government Office for Science (GO-S).
12. The Ethnicity subgroup will provide advice to SAGE, in the form of papers on specific issues, as and when requested by SAGE or the GCSA. The Ethnicity subgroup will also provide advice direct to other parts of government where advice needs are additional to that provided by existing departmental advice mechanisms, and where this is agreed by the Subgroup Secretariat and GCSA.
13. Questions may be posed to the group by SAGE, Cabinet Office or by policy teams across government.
14. Questions for consideration by SAGE will be prioritised by the GO-S Science Coordination Group. Questions posed by departments directly to the Ethnicity subgroups will be prioritised according to capacity.
15. Participants of the Ethnicity Subgroup or working groups should consult the chairs and Secretariat to suggest any additional issues or questions to be discussed, which can be prioritised accordingly.
16. The group's meetings are not officially minuted. However, the Secretariat may draft a high-level summary, including actions, from meetings. Formal outputs from the group are Ethnicity subgroup papers and the views recorded in the minutes of SAGE.
17. GO-S and lead departmental customers will be responsible for disseminating advice produced by the subgroup, which may include organising seminars and circulating papers. The Ethnicity subgroup Secretariat will act as a conduit for all requests should the Ethnicity subgroup require additional information or data from other advisory groups or government departments.
18. The Ethnicity subgroup chairs are responsible for:
 - liaising between the Ethnicity subgroup and SAGE, attending SAGE to represent the views and advice of the Group, and providing written and/or verbal updates as and when required;
 - representing the Ethnicity subgroup at the GO-S Science Coordination Group;
 - chairing meetings and moderating offline discussion;
 - signing-off on all advice of the Ethnicity subgroupThe chairs can deputise to other participants of the Group to chair sessions and sign off on Ethnicity subgroup products as required.
19. Officials from each of the Devolved Administrations may attend Ethnicity subgroup meetings as observers. Attendance of other observers will be at the discretion of the Chair and Secretariat. Policy officials may attend Ethnicity Subgroup meetings where they have an interest in the advice and views of the group, or to provide further context for discussion on specific topics.

Expert participation

20. Participants are experts in a wide range of areas and provide key insight on issues affecting minority ethnic groups. They are drawn from industry, academia, third sector and public sectors. GO-S has a commitment to diversity and recognises the importance of participation from a representative range of sociodemographic groups
21. The Ethnicity subgroup is not a membership body; participants are called upon to advise according to their relevant expertise.

22. Science advice will be provided and coordinated by the Ethnicity subgroup, supported by specialist temporary working groups as necessary.
23. Experts will be invited to participate in meetings and working groups by the Ethnicity Subgroup Secretariat on behalf of the chairs. Participation is at the discretion of the chairs and participants will be invited to attend a given meeting if discussions are to be held on an area of their expertise.
24. When invited, participants will:
 - provide expert guidance in discussions relating to an issue, drawing upon their particular area of expertise;
 - directly contribute to the consensus view and decision-making processes of the group, providing high-quality and considered advice;
 - provide expert advice on relevant issues outside of group meetings
 - adhere to the Code of Practice for Science Advisory Committees.¹
25. SAGE and subgroup participants are not directly remunerated by GO-S but may claim reasonable personal expenses. Further assistance may be possible in discussion with the Secretariat, according to the individual commitment required.

Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

26. In line with GO-S and SAGE transparency policy, Ethnicity subgroup papers are publicly released after they have been delivered to SAGE, subject to the approval of the GCSA. Content from Ethnicity subgroup meetings and Ethnicity subgroup correspondence is confidential until release and must not be discussed outside of government. This includes the nature of participants' specific involvement and all discussions within meetings. Breaches of confidentiality will have a bearing on continued participation.
27. Participants are free to speak to the media as independent experts, but should not speak publicly on behalf of or as a representative of the Ethnicity subgroup unless requested by the chairs. Participants can disclose their involvement in SAGE and the Ethnicity subgroup.
28. The names and affiliations of everyone who participates in the group will be made public on the SAGE website. A request not to disclose participation will be considered in exceptional circumstances (e.g. on grounds of security) and must be approved by the Secretariat.
29. All participants must declare any potential conflicts of interest to the Secretariat upon acceptance of these terms. This could include, but is not limited to, professional, social, or financial associations, or activities that might, or could be perceived to, undermine the independence and effective operation or deliberations of the Ethnicity subgroup or SAGE in providing advice to the Covid-19 response.
30. Any changes in interests or memberships must be declared to the Secretariat and the Ethnicity subgroup chairs and may have a bearing on continued participation in the Ethnicity subgroup.

¹ Government Office for Science; Science Advisory Committees Code of Practice
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-committees-code-of-practice>