

<b>Briefing Note for Meeting</b>	17:15 – 18:00	<b>On:</b>	14/04/2021
<b><i>CDL meeting with Devolved Administration First Ministers</i></b>			
<b>Agenda</b>			
1. Covid status certification and opportunities for UK wide alignment 2. NPIs, insights and topical issues 3. AOB			
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**We recommend you note the point to make and the significant Union risks from certification discussed below.**

**1. Vaccine/testing certification** (Oliver Munn, Director of Vaccine certification within the Cabinet Office, will be in attendance))

Point to make

- **We need a common system for the whole of the UK. It would be highly disadvantageous to have four separate systems, with persons living on one side of a border and working on the other, requiring separate certificates.**

On 5 April, the UK Government announced it had begun work on developing a policy on vaccine certification, for both domestic use and international travel. The FMs of Scotland and Wales, at CDL's last Covid meeting, complained that there had been a lack of engagement on all four of the Covid reviews now in progress, including on certification. Subsequently CDL has had advice that that the DAs should be brought earlier into the policy development process at official and ministerial level, and DA Ministers should be invited to relevant Covid-O meetings, particularly where international travel is under discussion.

A series of policy discussion with the DA officials has now started and yesterday clinical standards for vaccine certification. This involves such matters as whether or not certification should be dependent upon having had one or both doses of vaccine, what sort of test should be allowed to indicate negative Covid status, and the admissibility of naturally acquired immunity.

At today's meeting CDL is expected to seek agreement to the following principles:

- Covid-status certification should be **accessible** and widely available to minimise inequalities;
- Standards should be **clinically robust** and based on our latest understanding of transmission and risks;
- Covid-status certification should be **flexible** and **proportionate**, in line with the UK's evolving epidemiological status
- There should be a **single set of standards** for domestic certification to provide simplicity and consistency across settings

## Union risks from certification work

It appears that policy development on vaccine certification within all of the DAs is less mature than within the UK Government. SG officials understand that certification for international travel will be necessary and argue that any UK Government scheme must follow WHO standards. However they say that the FM, at today's meeting, is likely to argue that the UK Government must define the purpose of a domestic certification scheme, and only, when that is done, can the human rights and ethical considerations be examined. At the same time Ms Freeman is reported to have said at the last meeting of the UK Health Ministers that she believes there should be a common UK framework for certification. The SG may therefore be said to be keeping its options open on certification, but from a position of scepticism about domestic certification. Proper decisions may not be made until after 6 May elections.

To date work by UK Government officials assumes that the same IT app will be used both for international travel and for domestic certification. The UK Government's roadmap envisages that international travel will restart no earlier than 17 May, and this therefore provides a deadline for the launch of the app. NHS X (a joint DHSC – NHS England unit responsible for digital solutions in NHS England) officials started work on the development of an app (distinct from the test and trace app) for NHS England registered patients. There have been subsequent discussions with DA officials about interoperability with devolved NHS IT systems but these discussions have been late and slow. There is therefore a risk that an IT solution will be ready for 17 May that will not work for people registered with the NHS in Scotland, Wales and NI. It is of course possible that one or more of the DAs may decline to participate in the IT solution being developed by NHS X, but it is essential that that is an autonomous DA decision, and not provoked by a UK Government failure to consider the whole of the UK. **We must avoid a position where it can be alleged that the UK Government failed to involve the DAs sufficiently early in the technical solutions, and therefore has excluded the people of Scotland, Wales and NI from international travel and access to facilities dependent upon certification in England.**

We have endeavoured to make these points at official level but officials are focused on operational delivery to timetable and may not appreciate fully the UK wide dimensions. **A worst case scenario might be that an app will be ready for 17 May but only for residents in England.** In that scenario UK Ministers will have a choice between meeting the timetable in the English roadmap, or alternatively delaying until the app can be made to work for the whole of the UK.

If one or more of the DAs were to decide of their own volition to implement a separate app it will nevertheless be essential for FCDO and Border Force to ensure that the DA app is accepted by foreign governments as evidence of vaccination on a par with the UK Government app.

**We therefore recommend that, in the light of today's meeting, you write to CDL to emphasise the Union risks in the way that work on certification and international travel is being taken forward.** We will provide advice and, if necessary, a draft letter, after this evening's meeting.

## **2. NPIs, insights and topical issues**

### Roadmap - Scotland

On 13 April, the FM announced that the lifting of NPIs scheduled for 26 April would indeed proceed. This includes the reopening of retail and hospitality. As of 16 April, restrictions on travelling around Scotland are to be lifted, but not between Scotland and the other rest of the UK. People are also to be allowed to meet up in larger groups outdoors.

### Vaccines – phase 2 advice

Yesterday the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published its final advice for phase 2 of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. In line with its interim advice, the JCVI has recommended a continued age-based approach. A joint statement by the four UK Health Ministers was published endorsing the JCVI advice and stating that the UK is on course to have offered a vaccine to all adults, aged 18 years old and over, by the end of July.

## **3. AOB**

### International travel

Scottish Government Ministers and officials continue to argue that quarantining in hotels should be a requirement for all travellers from outside the CTA, and it is likely that at least one DA Minister may raise at this meeting the issue of whether or not European countries will be added to the UK Government's red list of countries. The question is under discussion among UK Ministers. At present, there are no plans for a DA attended Covid-O meeting to discuss possible additions to the red list, though such a meeting would be very helpful in trying to secure a cross UK consensus.

On 9 April the Republic of Ireland's extended its list of category 2 (equivalent of red list) countries to include France, Belgium, and Italy.