

Witness Name: Des Clifford

Statement No: 1

Exhibits: 19

Dated: 16 October 2023

**UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY  
WITNESS STATEMENT OF DES CLIFFORD**

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 14 February 2023 and referenced M2/WG/IRTD/01.

I, Des Clifford, will say as follows: -

**Preface**

1. I extend my deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and those who have suffered during the pandemic and because of the pandemic.

**Introduction**

2. I have worked in the Welsh Government since 1999. My professional background is as a civil servant with particular expertise in First Minister's private office and EU Affairs. During the period in question, I was Director General for the Office of the First Minister. My primary focus in normal circumstances was managing the implications for the Welsh Government of Brexit; like many colleagues my attention and energy was diverted towards assisting with Covid-19 work.
3. I understand that the period of particular importance is that between 21 January 2020, which is the date on which the WHO published its "Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Situation Report – 1", and 30 May 2022 which is when the remaining Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in Wales.
4. In preparing this statement I have relied on advice and information from Andrew Gwatkin and from Paula Walsh, whose job titles and roles are set out below. They have collectively assisted me in the preparation of all parts of this statement.

### **The Welsh Government – International Relations and Trade Ministers**

5. Eluned Morgan was the Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language from 13 December 2018 until being appointed Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing in October 2020. The portfolio was split with the First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, assuming responsibility for the International Relations portfolio in October 2020, and Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, taking over responsibility for exports and inward investment. International Trade Policy became the responsibility of Jeremy Miles MS, Counsel General and Minister for European Transition, and Jane Hutt MS, the current Minister for Social Justice, assumed responsibility for Wales and Africa in her position as Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.
6. Vaughan Gething MS was appointed as Minister for the Economy following the Senedd election in May 2021, and assumed portfolio responsibility for international trade policy, exports and inward investment. Jane Hutt MS retained responsibility for Wales and Africa following her appointment as Minister for Social Justice in May 2021.
7. Details of the organisational structure of the Welsh Government including Ministerial portfolios and senior official responsibilities, between 2019 and 2022, are set out in organograms which were exhibited in Andrew Goodall's statement in respect of M2B-WG01. These describe at all material points between 2019 and 2022, the portfolio responsibilities of the First Minister, the Welsh Ministers, and Deputy Welsh Ministers.

### **The Welsh Government - senior officials involved in IR&T**

8. The Welsh Government's responsibilities in relation to IR&T are led by the Director for International Relations and Trade, Andrew Gwatkin. The directorate covers the following areas:
  - a. International Relations, including the Wales and Africa programme,
  - b. Trade Policy,
  - c. Exports,
  - d. Inward Investment.
9. Andrew undertook an interim role, prior to the appointment of Lisa Wise, to provide information to the First Minister about PPE stocks in Wales. Andrew's role had two main functions. Firstly, he was responsible for providing weekly reports to the First Minister on PPE levels and, secondly, he was the link between the Critical Equipment

Requirement Engineering Team (CERET) group (led by James Davies, Industry Wales, and Dickie Davis, a Deputy Director in the Business and Regions Directorate) and the First Minister, conveying information from CERET via the weekly reports. I understand that the CERET group will be described in more detail in the statement to be submitted in response to M2B-BRD-01, and as Andrew's role in CERET was not related to his duties as the Director of IR&T, I do not describe CERET here. I also understand that several of the weekly PPE reports to the First Minister have been exhibited to Andrew Slade's statement in response to M2B-CPD-01.

10. Once Lisa Wise was appointed, Andrew stepped back into his substantive role within International Relations and Trade.

11. I have set out below a non-exhaustive list of senior officials who had particular involvement in the IR&T response to Covid-19.

- e. Andrew Gwatkin was and remains the Director of International Relations and Trade. Andrew was responsible for leading the overall IR&T response to Covid-19. Andrew was also involved in the PPE identification and procurement work undertaken by Health, and, for clarity, this role is not included in this statement. Due to the work being undertaken on PPE, Andrew delegated much of the day-to-day work in IR&T to Paula Walsh, Iain Quick, Ifona Deeley, Jon Townley and Louise McShane, maintaining an overview of the work being done by the team through regular verbal updates.
- f. NR was Head of International Relations for the Welsh Government throughout the specified period. NR led Wales-based IR&T engagement with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ("FCDO"). Ifona attended the Four Nations meetings, advising and briefing the Minister for International Relations ahead of the meetings, and taking forward any actions arising from the meetings.
- g. NR was Head of Overseas Performance and Delivery throughout the specified period. Iain led the overseas IR&T engagement with the FCDO undertaken by the overseas network. NR collated the information gathered by the overseas network in relation to Covid-19 prevention measures being undertaken by other governments and international partners. NR collated the information received from across the network into a single report and submitted it to the Minister for International Relations.
- h. Paula Walsh was Deputy Director International Relations throughout the specified period. She joined Welsh Government in June 2020 and took over

the lead for all IR&T work that was being undertaken by [NR] and [NR] [NR] prior to this date. Paula led on all engagement with the FCDO (UK and overseas), ministerial meetings and information gathering. [NR] and [NR] continued to support Paula.

- i. [NR] (now Vaughan) was in the role of Head of the Rest of the World. [NR] supported [NR] and Paula Walsh.
- j. [NR] was and remains the Wales and Africa lead. In that role he leads IR&T's Wales and Africa programme. During the pandemic, [NR] led on the work to provide grant support for partners working in sub-Saharan countries, repurposing the WaA Small Grants Scheme to provide focused support for Covid-19. Jon also supported the Health and Social Services Group on its donation of PPE to Namibia by liaising with the Namibian government and grantees.
- k. [NR] was and remains Head of Strategy and Government Business. [NR] led on the consular support and repatriation work undertaken by IR&T, providing information to the FCDO about enquiries for support received by the Welsh Government. [NR] also led on the dissemination of data received by the FCDO to TAG/TAC. Led government business and correspondence on international enquiries.
- l. [NR] was and remains International Relations Government Business lead and provided support to [NR]

12. I exhibit at [DCM2BIRTD01/00-INQ000271865] an organisational chart identifying the senior positions within the Group.

### **Functions of the Welsh Government**

13. I understand that the nature of devolved functions and the Senedd's legislative competence is dealt with in detail in other statements in this Module. In particular I understand that it is dealt with by the statement of Helen Lentle in the corporate statement for M2B/WG/01.

14. Significantly, the reservations contained within Schedule 7A to the Government of Wales Act 2006 ("GoWA") include:

International relations, regulation of international trade, and international development assistance and co-operation are reserved matters.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1) "international relations" includes—

- (a)relations with territories outside the United Kingdom;
- (b)relations with the EU and its institutions;
- (c)relations with other international organisations.

15. The key power in respect of the IR&T is that by section 60 of GoWA the Welsh Ministers may do anything which they consider appropriate to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic or social well-being of Wales.

16. That power may be exercised in relation to or for the benefit of the whole or any part of Wales, or all or any persons resident or present in Wales. That power extends to a power to do anything in relation to or for the benefit of any area outside Wales, or all or any persons resident or present anywhere outside Wales, if the Welsh Ministers consider that it is likely to promote the objectives identified above.

17. GoWA expressly states that the above includes the power to:

- a. to enter into arrangements or agreements with any person,
- b. to co-operate with, or facilitate or co-ordinate the activities of, any person,
- c. to exercise on behalf of any person any functions of that person, and
- d. to provide staff, goods, services or accommodation to any person.

18. Section 61 of GoWA provides that the Welsh Ministers may do anything which they consider appropriate to support:

- cultural activities and projects relating to Wales,
- sport and recreational activities relating to Wales, and
- the Welsh language.

19. Section 62 Of GoWA provides that “The Welsh Ministers, the First Minister and the Counsel General may make appropriate representations about any matter affecting Wales.”

## **Overview of IR&T**

20. Prior to March 2020, IR&T had around 100 staff based in Wales, London and across the overseas network working across four workstreams:

- a. International Relations (including Wales and Africa)
- b. Trade & Invest
- c. Trade Policy
- d. Strategy and Government Business

21. Our overseas offices are based in the major economies of the world and mainly co-located with the UK Government's overseas network in British Embassies and High Commissions. The remit of all our overseas offices is to deliver the ambitions of the Welsh Government's International Strategy. The strategy sets out the vision for the next five years and its ambitions are:

- Raise Wales' profile internationally,
- Grow our economy by helping businesses in Wales increase exports and by attracting high quality inward investment,
- Establish Wales as a globally responsible nation.

22. I exhibit at **DCM2BIRTD01/02-INQ000271751** and **DCM2BIRTD01/03-INQ000271866** a copy of the International Strategy, and a document setting out the locations and remit of our international offices.

23. As noted above, in January 2020 the Welsh Government published its first International Strategy, which set out the three key ambitions to bring together its international work, to be led by IR&T, working alongside other Welsh Government departments and external partners. Work to develop action plans to support the delivery of the International Strategy had just started as the first lockdown was put in place, and the development of these plans was paused as a result.

24. IR&T's international work is undertaken independently of the UK Government, but it does receive support from the FCDO and the Department for Business and Trade especially in markets where the Welsh Government does not have an overseas office. Foreign policy is not devolved, therefore if the Welsh Government receive requests for matters that are outside of devolved competence, these enquiries will be forwarded to the FCDO's Devolution Unit.

## Covid-19

25. In March 2020, IR&T's core functions, in relation to delivering the Welsh Government's International Strategy, were paused as they were deemed by the Minister for International Relations to be non-essential to the Covid-19 response, as they did not directly support the key functions of health, economic response or education. In addition, much of the international work was no longer possible to deliver due to the withdrawal of international travel and lockdowns in Wales, the UK and overseas.
26. The majority of the Wales-based IR&T team was seconded to other parts of the Welsh Government to work on the economic and health responses to the pandemic and returned from these seconded roles on a phased basis between summer 2020 and Spring 2021, as the need for additional resource in these areas of work receded. A small core team was left in Wales to manage day-to-day enquiries and corporate functions in IR&T. The London team was seconded into Health and the overseas network supported the UK Government's crisis response team, working on the UK response to repatriation and consular support in their respective host markets.
27. For clarity, this statement does not cover the work undertaken by the Trade & Invest branch, as the team was seconded to support the delivery of the economic response. Nor does it cover the Trade Policy branch: they are the principal Welsh Government experts on trade policy issues, who represent the views of the Welsh Government and Welsh stakeholders to influence and implement future UK Government and Welsh Government trade policy; their work continued as normal due to the then upcoming deadline for the UK's exit from the European Union.
28. Foreign policy is non-devolved; therefore, the Welsh Government does not have any powers to undertake consular support for Welsh citizens and must direct any enquiries for support on these matters to the UK Government.
29. This also means that the Welsh Government does not have the powers to liaise with international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (ECDC). Engagement with these organisations must be undertaken by the nation state (i.e. the UK Government); therefore, IR&T did not have any discussions with international organisations about the pandemic.

## IR&T's role, function and responsibilities

30. IR&T's usual roles and responsibilities include:

- a. Promoting Wales as a destination for overseas investors – developing propositions that set out Wales's economic strengths and working with potential investors to attract investment from overseas.
- b. Providing advice and financial support to Welsh companies to export - including overseas events and trade missions.
- c. Hosting diplomatic visits from ambassadors - including working with embassies to develop a programme which highlights areas of interest such as the economy, education and culture and meeting with Ministers.
- d. Working with other countries to promote Wales and develop international partnerships.
- e. Working with partners to develop community projects in sub-Saharan Africa that support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
- f. Working with the UK Government to ensure Wales's interests are represented in new free trade agreements.

31. Between March 2020 and December 2021, the Wales-based IR&T team's Covid-19 role within the Welsh Government was to collate information provided by the UK Government, and our international partners, and disseminate this to the Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Cell (TAC). Information took three main forms:

- a. Four Nations meetings on consular support (Ministerial),
- b. Data sharing,
- c. WG Overseas Network intelligence gathering from other government partners.

32. IR&T supported the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO) consular services both in the UK and overseas and worked with the FCDO, and the other devolved governments, to adopt a four-nation approach to information sharing. Initially, the UK Government provided information on the number of British Nationals requesting consular support, then the numbers who had been returned to the UK. This info was provided at the Four Nation meetings. The UK Government then moved on to providing data on a variety of topics as set out in the Annex.



33. IR&T did not have any contact with Welsh local authorities on Covid-19 -related matters during this period, as this was not part of its remit either before or during the pandemic.
34. No work was undertaken by IR&T prior to the first national lockdown in March 2020 to track the risks posed by the international spread of the Covid-19 virus as this was not within our remit or core functions. IR&T did not perform such a role and did not have the expertise to do so. IR&T's role was never intended to track international risks, as such no information was provided about the emergence of the Covid-19 virus by IR&T to the First Minister, Cabinet or Cabinet Committees.
35. IR&T did not provide advice, nor make any decisions, relating to the Welsh Government's initial strategies on community testing, surveillance, the movement from 'contain' to 'delay' and guidance and advice to health and social care providers. IR&T did not provide advice or make any decisions relating to the imposition of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) in Wales. IR&T was not involved in the provision of advice and briefings on public health and coronavirus legislation, the use of behavioural management, public communications, or the maintenance of public confidence.
36. The overseas teams, once they had completed their consular work with UKG, used open-source material within overseas markets to develop reports on their respective country's approaches to lockdown, vaccine deployment, social distancing etc. There was no single prescriptive element set by the Welsh Government as responses would depend on information available in-market.

## **Key Functions during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### Four Nations Meetings

37. Following the announcement of the national lockdown, and the recall of British Nationals (BNs) who were overseas, the Welsh Government and other devolved governments were contacted by British Nationals seeking assistance to return to the UK. Due to foreign policy being a reserved matter, and the crisis response being undertaken at a UK-level, the Scottish Minister for Constitution, Europe, and External Affairs wrote to the Foreign Secretary to request guidance on the UK's strategy for

consular support during Covid-19 in relation to support from the devolved governments. As a result of this letter, the Minister for International Relations, Eluned Morgan MS was contacted by the Minister of State for Consular Matters, Nigel Adams MP, to take part in four nations calls on consular services and repatriation. That invitation is exhibited at **DCM2BIRTD01/04-INQ000271467**.

38. The first meeting took place on 31 March 2020 and covered repatriation, the FCDO response and financial support for British Nationals overseas. Notes from that meeting are exhibited at **DCM2BIRTD01/05-INQ000271470**.

39. It was agreed that four nations meetings should be held weekly to provide the devolved governments with an opportunity to raise specific concerns and receive information directly from the FCDO. It was also agreed that the devolved governments would receive daily written updates from the FCDO on repatriation numbers. Following a slight delay, the first written daily update was received by IR&T officials on 10 April 2020. This information, and subsequent daily updates, were sent by IR&T officials to the Minister for International Relations. These documents were for information only and were not used by IR&T or any other teams in the Welsh Government to inform any decisions. I exhibit the ministerial briefings for the four nations meetings at **DCM2BIRTD01/06-INQ000271813**, **DCM2BIRTD01/07-INQ000271806**, **DCM2BIRTD01/08-INQ000271792**, **DCM2BIRTD01/09-INQ000271780**, and **DCM2BIRTD01/10-INQ000271812**.

40. Regular weekly meetings took place at a ministerial level until the end of May 2020 with later meetings covering topics such as sharing international intelligence and vaccines, as well as repatriation. I exhibit notes of the meetings at **DCM2BIRTD01/11-INQ000271485**, **DCM2BIRTD01/12-INQ000271867**, **DCM2BIRTD01/13-INQ000271868**, **DCM2BIRTD01/14-INQ000271783**, and **DCM2BIRTD01/15-INQ000271539**.

41. IR&T did not make any decisions during these ministerial calls as this was an opportunity for the FCDO to brief devolved governments on the UK Government response, and for Welsh Ministers to raise queries. They were not decision-making forums.

#### Consular Support and Repatriation

42. The Wales-based team managed enquiries received by Welsh Ministers, Members of the Senedd and Welsh Government officials from Welsh citizens who were overseas following the closure of the UK border and the subsequent withdrawal of international flights. Correspondence received from a Ministerial private office was processed and responded to using normal government business procedures, including standard correspondence deadlines.
43. IR&T officials prioritised requests for assistance and aimed to process within 10 working days. IR&T would pass details of the correspondent to the FCDO through its Devolution Unit who, in turn, would acknowledge receipt and inform the FCDO's crisis response team. Where appropriate, IR&T would follow up with the correspondent outlining the advice received from the FCDO on return options from the relevant country.
44. IR&T sought advice from the FCDO, using the published travel advice on the FCDO website or advice received directly from the Devolution Unit, to respond to all enquiries of which there were around 20 individual cases covering multiple people.
45. IR&T followed FCDO advice at all times, did not diverge from the approach being taken by the FCDO, and was not responsible for any decisions regarding the repatriation of British Nationals.
46. IR&T's overseas network supported the FCDO crisis response team within the local embassy/consulate/high commission. The crisis response varied depending on local conditions with IR&T officials following the lead set by the Ambassador/Consul General/High Commissioner in their market and working according to the timetable set by the FCDO on activities delegated by the UK Government. IR&T's overseas teams followed FCDO advice at all times and were not responsible for any decisions regarding the repatriation of British Nationals or the UK's crisis response in their local market.

#### Information Gathering and Dissemination

47. The Four Nations ministerial meetings resulted in information that had previously been restricted to the UK Government also being sent to the devolved governments at the same time as it was issued across the FCDO network. Initially, the information focused

on repatriation (numbers repatriated and from which countries), but it was eventually expanded to a Global Daily Dashboard which covered topics including international health comparators, global infection levels, vaccine take-up, the economy and Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs). Due to the wider scope of the Global Dashboard, IR&T sought permission from the FCDO to share this information with named external individuals who were working in the Welsh Government's Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Permission was granted by FCDO to share all International Comparators Joint Unit (ICJU) information with external named contacts, specifically for the purpose of formulating the Wales response to Covid-19.

48. Dashboards were produced by the ICJU between August 2020 and April 2022 on a variety of topics (listed at Annex A) which were all disseminated to TAG by IR&T. I exhibit an example of the Global Daily Dashboard at **DCM2BIRTD01/16-INQ000271571**.

49. IR&T did not make any decisions with regards to how this information was used. Its role was to act as the single point of contact between FCDO and TAG.

50. IR&T's overseas teams also gathered information from international partners in their host market as well as neighbouring countries. They provided information on government interventions, for example, lockdown easement techniques, NPIs, education, travel restrictions and contact tracing, using information available in the public domain. These reports were compiled by IR&T between May 2020 to August 2020 and issued to the Minister for International Relations.

51. IR&T did not make any decisions with regards to how this information was used in relation to the overall Covid response.

#### PPE – identification of sources of face masks

52. In April 2020, the IR&T team in China was able to identify companies from existing contacts who could potentially provide face masks to Wales. Following initial due diligence in respect of those companies, undertaken together with the British Embassy, details were provided to the Life Sciences Hub (LSH), which was managing the flow of information about potential sources of PPE, with further decisions made by the NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP). The NWSSP is the operational name for the Shared Services Committee of Velindre NHS Trust, which is responsible for shared NHS services such as procurement. I understand that the role of NWSSP is

outlined in more detail in Andrew Goodall's statement in response to M2B-NHSW-01. Further, I understand that the role of the Life Sciences Hub (LSH) is described in Andrew Slade's statement in response to M2B-CPD-01.

53. Neither the China team, nor the Wales-based IR&T team, made any decisions about whether to utilise these companies. The decision on whether to procure the items of PPE identified by our China team lay with the NWSSP, and neither I nor the IR&T team can confirm whether any PPE was procured as a result of these contacts. I understand that the Rule 9 request issued under reference M3/WGO/01 includes several questions in relation to PPE, and given the IRTD made no decisions on PPE, I have not covered this matter any further in this statement.

#### Wales and Africa

54. The vision of the Welsh Government's Wales and Africa (WaA) programme is to support Wales to be a globally responsible nation through building and growing sustainable partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa that support the delivery of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Whilst the responsibility for international development within the United Kingdom lies with the UK Government there is a demand within Wales for an identifiably Welsh response to contributing to international development.

#### *Covid-19 Grants*

55. The WaA programme supports dozens of small civil society groups who work with African partners on education, climate change initiatives, livelihoods, health and sport and culture projects promoting well-being both in Wales and in African communities.
56. At the beginning of the specified period, the Welsh Government had in place a well-established Wales and Africa Small Grants Scheme, which was administered by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA). At the point at which the first lockdown was introduced in March 2020, a grants round (where organisations could submit bids for funding) had just closed, and officials had been preparing to assess the applications. However, because of the introduction of the lockdown it was immediately clear that none of the groups who had applied would be able to deliver their proposed projects. The Welsh Government therefore advised these groups to resubmit bids purely for Covid-19 related projects.

57. Due to the strong links already forged over the years, Welsh organisations were able to respond quickly to the pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa throughout 2020 and 2021, working with their African partners to identify where help was needed the most, and how to get that help to the right people swiftly. This support helped children get back to school; provided clean water and soap stations, and essential PPE. It raised awareness about Covid-19, dispelling misinformation and stressing the importance of receiving the vaccination. It helped people get digital access and assistance in areas that could not previously provide this.

58. On 15 February 2021, the Minister for Finance and Trefnydd, the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, and the First Minister were asked to agree via MA/RE/0625/21 to the allocation of £1m from the Covid-19 revenue reserve to support a Wales and Africa Covid-19 spending proposal which allowed for large grants to be made to Welsh organisations in support of Covid-19 recovery, Covid-19 prevention and vaccine preparedness in sub-Saharan Africa. I exhibit the MA at **DCM2BIRTD01/17-INQ000145485**.

59. Following approval of the MA, grant funding was allocated to these organisations, for the purposes set out:

- United Purpose was given £600,000 grant funding to provide a rapid emergency response to Covid-19 in Nigeria, The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea, reaching approximately 4.4 million people.
- Teams4U was provided with £125,000 grant funding for its project - Improving Sanitation & Menstrual Provision in Health Facilities and Schools in Uganda in response to Covid-19. Hot running water was plumbed directly into operating theatres and two 24/7 health centres which could see up to 300 patients daily.
- Phoenix Project / Cardiff University received a grant of £125,000 to roll out a vaccination programme in Namibia. Namibia had major Covid-19 vaccination resistance, especially amongst the vulnerable, remote, and disadvantaged communities.
- Disasters Emergency Committee Cymru received the remaining £100,000. Wales and Africa funds DEC Cymru £20,000 p.a. to employ an External Relations Manager for Wales. The DEC Coronavirus appeal raised £918,000 in Wales. IR&T extended the existing grant by £88,000 to both support the appeal and extend DEC's work with the Welsh public – especially in schools.

- The final £12,000 of the £1m funding was incorporated into the Wales and Africa small grants scheme to award for Covid related projects.

60. Due to the worsening Covid-19 situation in Wales's partner countries with their third wave of Covid-19, the Minister for Social Justice and the Minister for Finance and Local Government agreed on 6 July 2021 (via Ministerial Advice MA/JH/2281/21) to an emergency grant round of £1.5 million to support Namibia and Uganda in dealing with this situation. I exhibit the MA at **DCM2BIRTD01/18-INQ000103987**.

61. A grants panel was convened, including Welsh Government officials and external experts, to consider grant applications for Covid-19 related projects, and £770,000 was awarded in August 2021 to two projects, one each in Namibia and Uganda:

- £500,000 to the Phoenix Project, Cardiff University, for a project entitled OXYGEN Namibia, which aimed to provide oxygen for both immediate national Covid-19 lifesaving needs, and sustainable long-term use beyond the pandemic.
- £270,000 to Partnerships Overseas Networking Trust (PONT), for a project entitled Mbale Health System Strengthening: Equitable Access to Oxygen for All, which was to fill urgent and critical gaps in oxygen and PPE and to support sustainable infrastructure investment such as improving water supply to wards in the Mbale Regional Referral Hospital, which at that time served a population of 4.5m.

62. On 1 November 2021, the Minister for Social Justice agreed (via Ministerial Advice MA/JH/3600/21) that the remaining £730,000 could be used for Covid-19 emergency response funding for Welsh organisations who work across all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, not just Namibia and Uganda. The Minister also agreed that the grant scheme would be administered by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) through their existing contract with the Welsh Government, for a management cost of £21,919.50. I exhibit the MA at **DCM2BIRTD01/19-INQ000176891**

#### *PPE sent to Namibia*

63. During the pandemic, NHS Wales built up resilient supply chains and a robust PPE stockpile. Minimum order volumes meant that, in some cases, stocks were built up beyond what was eventually needed to protect Wales, providing an opportunity to

support our partner countries in Africa. The First Minister was approached by Professor Judith Hall to see if surplus PPE could be donated to partners in Namibia.

64. Over £7m worth of masks, gowns and hand sanitiser was donated to Namibia in Autumn 2021. The equipment was donated through Cardiff University's Phoenix Project and followed a grant earlier that year of £125,000 given to promote awareness of the need for coronavirus vaccinations in Namibia. There was no cost to the Welsh Government for transporting the equipment – this was covered by Maersk who agreed with Prof. Judith Hall (Phoenix Project) that it would transport the PPE to Namibia at no cost. The decision to donate the PPE was taken by Health (HSSG Climate Change and Operation Supplies and the NWSSP), rather than IR&T. However, IR&T helped to facilitate the links between Health and the Phoenix Project to enable the donation to be made.

### **Reviewing IR&T's role during the Pandemic**

65. IR&T has not undertaken any lessons learned exercises or scenario planning following the pandemic. Officials from IR&T have not been required to provide oral or written evidence to the Senedd or UK scrutiny committees in relation to the pandemic.

### **What worked well**

#### Working with FCDO (Consular Support / Information Sharing)

66. Although the FCDO was slow to set up systems, once agreements were in place to share information, the FCDO sent through information daily and there were no issues with the supply of information. The FCDO was also accommodating by granting our request to share Official Sensitive information with named external partners.

67. The FCDO also responded reasonably quickly to requests for information and to enquiries about consular support and repatriation. The Devolution Unit acted as IR&T's main point of contact, and there were regular calls between IR&T and the Devolution team.

#### Wales and Africa



68. There was good partnership working for the PPE donation bringing together the Welsh Government, NHS Wales Shared Service Partnership (NWSSP), Cardiff University/Phoenix Project, University of Namibia, Ministry of Health Namibia and Maersk Shipping.

69. Activity progressed quickly once agreements were in place. As soon as MAs were agreed for PPE donations, and also the different grant funding, Health and Social Services Group officials acted to ensure the PPE, and the funding, were issued quickly.

## **Challenges**

### Working with FCDO (Consular Support / Information Sharing)

70. At the start of the pandemic, the FCDO was not very proactive in its approach and, generally, IR&T had to request information several times which led to delays in providing Ministers/TAG/TAC with information. However, once systems were in place these delays diminished and information flowed smoothly.

### Wales and Africa

71. The £1m was offered late in the financial year and presented a challenge in awarding this funding appropriately through a grant scheme. However, the Wales and Africa team managed to do this via the correct channels, receiving proposals from Welsh organisations and convening a grants panel to decide on grant awards. The funding was then issued in line with the end of year financial deadlines.

72. The decision to spend the £1.5m in July 2021 on a large grant scheme, delivered internally (rather than outsourcing), meant there was a meeting with a Welsh Government evidence panel, who considered the Wales and Africa proposal and held a question session with the team to determine if the funding would be processed and spent appropriately. Once the evidence panel decided the scheme could go ahead, the Wales and Africa team had to work very quickly to advertise the scheme, set up an expert grants panel, consider the project proposals and award the grants. Again, due to the increasing waves of Covid-19, time was of the essence. It took

approximately two months from being offered the funding, and getting the funding awarded and projects commencing.

### **Intergovernmental Relations**

73. As foreign policy is a reserved matter, IR&T followed the guidance issued by the FCDO and any decisions made by UK Government with regards to consular support and information dissemination. As set out in the WaA section above, international development is a reserved matter but all MAs relating to our work in this area identify the legal issues and relevant powers under which we discharge our international development activities.

### **Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

**Personal Data**

**Signed:**

**Dated:** 16 October 2023

## **Annex A – List of ICJU Dashboards**

The following are key materials that IR&T holds relating to the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The materials can be categorised as data/statistical dashboards with narrative and analysis provided by the FCDO's IJCU. Dashboards were issued between April 2020 to April 2022.

### Regular

- Repatriation Daily Dashboard
- Health and Economy Daily Dashboard
- Global Daily Dashboard
- ICJU Monthly Newsletters

### Ad-hoc (1 or 2 on each topic)

- Autumn NPI Strategies
- Behaviours and Attitudes
- Comparator Approaches to Covid-19 Certification
- Comparator Approaches to International Arrivals
- Comparator Approaches to Omicron
- East Asia Analysis
- Education Recovery
- Exit Strategies
- Global Cities
- International Strategies for Living with Covid in 2022
- International Travel
- International Trends
- Long Covid
- Mass Gatherings
- NPIs
- Self Isolation
- Social Distancing

- Supply Chains
- Testing
- USA Analysis
- Vaccines
- Ventilation
- Winter and Future Preparedness
- Working from Home