

Witness Name: Professor Peter  
Halligan

Statement No. M2B: 1

Exhibits: 14

Dated: 01/11/2023

## **UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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### **WITNESS STATEMENT OF Professor Peter Halligan, M2B/CSAW/01**

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I, Professor Peter Halligan, will say as follows: -

#### **Introduction**

1. I have prepared this statement in response to a request dated 15 May 2023 (the request) which seeks to understand the role that I played as Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales (CSAW) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. I previously provided a detailed statement (First Statement) to the Inquiry for Module 1, in response to an earlier request made to me on 10 February 2023, where I was asked to provide an explanation of my role and responsibilities as Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales (CSAW), a position I held from March 2018 – February 2022.
3. I was born in Dublin, Ireland and gained qualifications in psychology, philosophy and education at University College Dublin. My current qualifications and honours are CBE DSc PhD FBPS FMedSci FLSW CPsychol. In 1985, I moved from Ireland to work at Rivermead, a specialist NHS neuro-rehabilitation Centre in Oxford as a research psychologist while also undertaking a PhD in neuropsychology. In 1987, I joined the Neuropsychology Unit at the Department of Clinical Neurology in Oxford University and in 1997, following a MRC Senior Research Fellowship award, I joined the Department of Experimental Psychology in Oxford. In 2000, I moved to the Cardiff School of Psychology as a Distinguished Research Professor. In 2003, I became the

founding Director of the Cardiff University's Brain Research Imaging Centre (CUBRIC) and later in 2006 Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies at Cardiff University. In 2012, I joined Universities Wales as Head of Strategic Futures as part of a 2-year secondment before joining the Learned Society of Wales in 2015 as Chief Executive.

4. Whilst at Cardiff University, I played a central role in establishing Cardiff University's Brain Research Imaging Centre (CUBRIC), Wales Research and Diagnostic Positron Emission Tomography Imaging Centre (PETIC), Wales Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience (WICN), the UnumProvident Centre for Psychosocial and Disability Research, the Cardiff Cognitive Neuroscience Seminar Series, School of Psychology MindArt project, the Haydn Ellis Distinguished Lecture Series and Cardiff's University Research Institutes.
5. From 2010-2014, I was Chair and Academic lead of the Welsh Crucible, the all-Wales staff leadership programme for early career researchers. This flagship researcher development programme, showcased at the European Commission in Brussels, won the Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Contribution to Leadership Development in 2013.
6. I acted as CSAW from March 2018 to February 2022. The role involved championing science across Government, managing the large Welsh Government funded Ser Cymru Programme, (this multi-million programme was established in 2012 by the first Chief Scientific Adviser and designed to bring scientific talent into research posts in Wales) and providing scientific advice to the First Minister and wider Welsh Government.

#### **The Role, Function & Responsibilities of Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales**

7. The role of the CSAW was established by the First Minister in May 2010 to provide scientific advice to the First Minister, the Cabinet, and the wider Welsh Government. It is a cross cutting role but is not a specialist or lead science adviser involving policy areas; with existing science advisers in Welsh Government covering human and animal health, such as the Chief Medical Officer (Wales) (CMO(W)), Chief Scientific Adviser for Health (CSAH) and Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO). The roles of CMO and CSAH are both long established posts (1969 and 1988 respectively) that retained responsibility for providing medical and public health policy advice to the Health and Social Care Minister.

8. As a relatively recent addition to the range of existing evidence advisors, covering Welsh Government policy responsibilities, there are no formal reporting lines between the Chief Scientific Advisor for Health and Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales. The relationship therefore is informal with no joint government governance structures and separate line management.
9. The responsibilities and focus of the Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales role involved:
  - a. Promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects.
  - b. Championing science across Government and relevant stakeholders.
  - c. Reviewing scientific advice provided to the Welsh Government, save for those policy areas with pre-existing Chief Science Advisers (e.g., Human and Animal Health).
  - d. Engaging with the wider scientific community.
  - e. Managing the large Welsh Government funded Ser Cymru Programme.
  - f. Working with the UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA) and departmental Chief Scientific Advisers on topics of mutual interest to respective Governments.
  - g. Acting as Head of Profession for science and technology staff in Wales and particularly in the Welsh Government.
  - h. Promoting Wales's intellectual, innovative, and cultural achievements nationally and internationally for economic and social well-being.
  - i. Encouraging greater diversity in STEM and helping to build a strong and dynamic science base in support of Wales's economy and national development.
  - j. Representing the Welsh Government internationally on science and technology issues, the translation of research to economic benefit and STEM Education.
10. The principle focuses of the CSAW role, since established in 2010, lay in supporting the growth of the Welsh economy, growing research capacity, delivering more and better skilled jobs, and presenting Wales as a place where science research and innovation can flourish, creating an environment to help young people to take up

opportunities. This includes consideration of Wales's future skills needs, taking a proactive approach to encouraging and increasing the interest in STEM.

11. Given this economic/promotional science purview, the office of the Chief Scientific Adviser was located within the Economy and Transport Ministerial portfolio, when I first joined Welsh Government in March 2018. In December 2018, the office was moved to the Minister for Education and finally in May 2021, reverted to the Economy Minister portfolio, where it currently remains.
12. Holding a cross-cutting role (but not being a policy lead or budget holder), I set out plans (agreed by Cabinet in Sept 2018) six months after I came into post to restructure and refocus the Chief Scientific Advisor division covering 5 broad areas:
  - a. Science Advice for Government Policy
  - b. Science Promotion & Communications
  - c. Management of Ser Cymru Research Programmes
  - d. Growing Science Capability & Skills Evidence Synthesis & Analytics
  - e. Developing Future Research opportunities
13. I also changed the existing Science Advisory Council for Wales into a smaller, high profile independent Wales Science and Innovation Advisory Council (WSIAC) comprising distinguished members of the UK Science, Business and Innovation community. Although the council has no statutory or financial responsibilities, WSIAS provided me as CSAW with independent advice on science, business, and innovation developments.

#### **The Role, Function & Responsibilities of Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales (CSAW) in a health emergency**

14. I will set out the distinction between my role as CSAW and the roles and responsibilities of Chief Scientific Advisor for Health in Wales (CSAH).
15. As a devolved area of responsibility for Welsh Government, all policy decisions relating to health in Wales including medical emergencies, such as the pandemic are made by Welsh Ministers advised by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO(W)) and Chief Scientific Advisor for Health (CSAH), together with the Chief Executive Officer of NHS Wales. This is similar to the case of animal health emergencies, where the Chief Veterinary

Officer is the responsible lead official for advising and managing the containment of infectious disease relating to animal and livestock.

16. Consequently, during my tenure as CSAW, the systems, processes, and structures associated with public health, public health-related science and social care sat outside my primary responsibilities as CSAW.
17. The CSAW role did not involve or require explicit involvement in the planning or preparation for pandemic preparedness or participation in the Wales Resilience Forum (WRF) and Civil Contingencies Group (CCG). As CSAW (2018-21), I had no formal governance or leadership role with respect to the policy preparation for pandemic readiness or the management of epidemic outbreaks.

### **The Role of the CSAW within the Technical Advisory Group (TAG)**

18. Throughout the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, the CMO and the Welsh Government benefited from health and science research experts convened by the Technical Advisory Group, established and co-chaired by the CSAH and the Deputy Director for Technology and Digital. TAG provided the independent scientific and technical advice from across Welsh Government on Covid-19 to Ministers.
19. Since devolution in 1998, Health has been a devolved responsibility of the Welsh Government which means that Welsh Ministers have accountability for medical emergencies, including pandemics. The role of the CSAH, established in 1988, leads on all health-related issues, including research and development, and is the principal source of science advice to the Health and Social Services Group, CMO(W) and Minister for Health. Science advice on all matters relating to health care have always been deferred to the CSAH and CMO(W). Consequently, during the public health/medical crisis, Wales's CSAH and CMO(W), were the lead members that fed into relevant cross-UK groups, assessed the latest international scientific evidence, and provided daily updates to Welsh Ministers including any advice from SAGE.
20. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Ministers and Cabinet were advised by the CMO(W), the CSAH and the Chief Executive Officer of NHS Wales. I had no formal role in the provision of this advice.

21. The Technical Advisory Cell (TAC) was formed when it was established at the beginning of the pandemic that Wales did not have a suitable, independent SAGE like committee. It became clear that a STAC (Science and Technical Advisory Cell), designed to provide advice to category one responders in an isolated emergency (such as an industrial incident such as a flood, or fire) would not be suitable for a pandemic of this size and nature and as such a separate advisory body was required. TAC was therefore established to collate, create and mobilise knowledge related to the pandemic, including Welsh specific information, to support decision making within the Welsh Government by Welsh Ministers. TAC provided the coordination for the wider Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and its associated advisory subgroups.
22. The management and accountability for TAG sat with the Co-Chairs who represented the Welsh Government at SAGE and attended the weekly UK Science Coordination Group, to ensure coordination with upcoming SAGE activity, and the bi-weekly 4 Nations Scientific Co-ordination Group, to consider more strategic scientific matters.
23. As CSAW, I supported the CSAH and CMO(W) during Covid by providing nearly 30% of my non-programme Welsh Government Office for Science staff to support of the CSAH's Technical Advisory Group (TAG). I also attended the Covid-19 Technical Advisory Group.
24. Delegating the key advisory responsibilities relating to medical and public health policy to the CMO(W) and CSAH, was designed to provide leadership transparency, avoid duplication, and ensure the effective stewardship of relevant resources from those already serving within the Welsh Government's health care organisation.
25. Both the CMO and the Welsh Government were advised by the health and science research experts, who were brought together by the CSAH under the Technical Advisory Group. This group of experts was recognised within the Emergency Planning and Civil Contingency operating function within Welsh Government as providing the key medical/ health advice/ guidance for policy makers and Ministers.
26. TAG was established and co-chaired from the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic by the CSAH and was later joined by the Deputy Director for Technology and Digital as Co-Chair. I became a member of TAG in April 2020 and while I attended most of the TAG meetings, I did not play a part in the decision to establish TAG or its day-to-day governance or management. Like other members of TAG, I received weekly agendas

and minutes of the weekly meetings. The first record of me attending the regular TAG meetings was on 11 May 2020, exhibited at **M2B/CSAW/01/01-INQ000349426**.

27. I held no leadership involvement or responsibility for running TAG and attended the meetings to learn about scientific updates, consider implications for the wider science and research agenda in Wales (University research and the Ser Cymru programmes) and suggest names of potentially relevant science colleagues from different disciplines covering public health, health protection, medicine, epidemiology and modelling who might be able to assist TAG.

### **The Role of the CSAW with SAGE and the Joint Biosecurity Centre**

28. The Co-Chairs of TAG represented the Welsh Government at SAGE meetings and later when, established, the weekly UK Science Coordination Group meetings. I did not attend SAGE meetings and was not involved with the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC).

### **Other CSAs**

29. The UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA) provides scientific advice to the Prime Minister and members of cabinet and advises the UK government on all aspects of policy on science and technology. Most UK government departments, however, employ their own policy relevant CSA and the GCSA works informally with these department CSAs on cross-cutting issues. Departmental CSAs are recruited based on their skills and credibility in their field.
30. The GCSA has no formal management responsibility for departmental or Devolved Government CSAs but is free to provide advice to all departments. Departmental CSAs are the main contact point between the suppliers of science advice, either external, mandated, or internal structures, and policy makers. Their remit can include, as in the case of Health or Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), taking a key lead role in public health or animal health emergencies.

31. Since 2017, and before I became CSAW, the GCSA chaired weekly Chief Scientific Advisers Network meetings (lasting approximately 30-45min), involving UK departmental CSAs, together with CSAs from the Devolved Governments, to discuss key UK-wide science and research issues, share updates and support the GCSA. The GCSA has no formal relationship with the Devolved Governments, but can advise, where appropriate, on reserved matters.
32. The purpose of the updates was to discuss UK science and innovation-wide issues, facilitate communication on high-profile STEM-related issues, share updates on research funding, identify and share good practice and provide support and co-ordination across the wider UK CSA community.
33. The arrangements for the meetings, including membership were all established before Covid and were managed by the UK Government Office for Science. None of the CSAs for Health from Scotland, Wales or NI were members. The weekly meetings from Spring 2020 sometimes contained brief updates on Covid 19 by GCSA, but the main focus was on UK science and innovation-wide issues. This included Technology and Science Insights Function (1/9/21), Coastal Health Report (8/9/21), Royal Society Health and Climate Mitigation (15/9/21), UK in a Changing Europe (22/9/21), Innovate UK (29/9/21), Science Capability Review (6/10/21) and Quantum computing applications for Government 20/10/21). The CSA Meeting on 27 October 2021 for example focused on identifying opportunities for strengthening engagement between Departmental CSAs and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the opportunity to increase the appointment of CSAs to UKRI Councils.
34. In keeping with their pre-Covid format, much of the agenda for these meetings focused on wider UK and departmental CSA issues, leaving the health leads and SAGE to bring together the devolved administrations and other relevant departments health CSAs. I updated CSAH from time to time on any relevant information from such meetings. These updates were carried out using Microsoft Teams.

#### **Role, Function & Responsibilities of CSAW in response to Covid-19**

35. I did not engage with any other individuals or groups in response to COVID-19.
36. I provided no specific input into reviewing, analysing or disseminating scientific evidence into the advice for Welsh Ministers or Special Advisors. This work was



undertaken by TAG and TAC health experts under the collective leadership of the CSAH and Deputy Director for Technology and Digital.

37. As I retired in February 2022, I have played no part in the post action reviews that will have taken place within Welsh Government.

### **My Role during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

38. As the COVID-19 pandemic was a health emergency, it was agreed that the CSAH would lead the scientific advice provided to Ministers to assist them in making decisions on behalf of the Welsh Government. As there are no direct reporting lines between the CSAH and CSAW, and no governance structures in place between the two roles, I had no formal involvement in the operational planning or active advice issues of health, pandemics or on human or animal disease. Consequently, I had no oversight or responsibility for frontline response to the pandemic. I did not advise or brief Ministers or any other decision-makers or advisers within Welsh Government.
39. As CSAW the following were some areas that I and my team contributed during Covid 19:
- I provided several staff from the Welsh Government Office for Science (WGOS) to assist the CSAH and CMO with their evidence gathering. Following discussion with CSAH, I arranged staff support to the CSAH's Technical Advisory Group (TAG).
  - Working with the Ser Cymru team to evaluate, monitor and respond to universities given the significant impacts on Ser Cymru programmes when research activity had to be paused or significantly delayed. This involved helping to mitigate risks and maintain cash flows through to universities. Ultimately such loss of funding would be financially damaging to Welsh Universities, their partners (including overseas) and supply chains with longer term detrimental impact to local economies. Risk of not addressing would also severely compromise the future research capacity and capability in Wales and lose the benefits of the sustained investment built up over time and weaken Wales's chances of future inward investment. Exhibit **M2B/CSAW/01/02-INQ000349421** refers.
  - Liaising with Universities; taking account of issues surrounding future funding landscape because of EU transition remained a live on-going issue for Welsh Government and feeding into the ESNR Brexit Assurance Readiness Group.

- Working with stakeholders to assess impacts and alternate ways forward on the Trio Sci Cymru STEM enrichment engagement programme, which was severely restricted, given school closures.
- Nuclear: continuation of the existing projects on nuclear thermal hydraulics (NTHF with BEIS and UK Atomic Energy Authority) and medical radioisotopes and research reactor (MRRR with Rolls Royce). Working in close collaboration with colleagues in North Wales who were developing activities around the Trawsfynydd nuclear site.
- Led on the production of an internal Welsh Government Office for Science newsletter, to support the Director General and Directors of the Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group (ENSR) to better understand some of the key scientific developments of the COVID-19 pandemic. The newsletter was first circulated on 22 March 2020, exhibit **M2B/CSAW/01-03-INQ000350799** refers, and was only circulated to the Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group (ENSR) group of directors. This ran for eleven issues, and these are exhibited in the section titled 'WGOS COVID-19 Newsletter' on pages 11 and 12 of this statement.
- The focus of the issues was on translating the latest medical science findings from and related to the pandemic into digestible insights for senior WG senior servants working in the Economy, Skills and Natural Resources Group (ENSR).
- Securing additional bespoke funding to support action research relevant to the pandemic as part of an extension of the existing Ser Cymru science capacity programme.

### **Resources and TAG Membership**

40. The response to the pandemic was a cross organisation response. Reg Kilpatrick was appointed as the Director General to co-ordinate that response. TAG provided essential technical and scientific advice on the nature of the policy, epidemiology and transmission to inform the HSSG policy. I maintained a regular dialogue with the CSAH who was the Chair. Membership of the TAG kept me informed of the rapidly changing situation.
41. It was in my capacity as CSAW and through my membership of TAG that I was able to release resources from within WGOS with the right skills and expertise to support the CSAH through the various TAC sub-committees that were established in response to the pandemic. Dr Rob Hoyle, Head of Science, and Dr Simon Rolfe were two individuals from within WGOS who had such skills and volunteered to support TAC in response to the pandemic.

42. There was no formal secondment arrangement as these individuals from WGOS still had responsibilities and work commitments that sat outside the response to the pandemic, yet when requested both volunteered.
43. The extent of the commitment from these individuals varied both between the individuals and over time, depending on the other demands on their time. I agreed to the release of individuals from WGOS to support TAC and that work was directed and overseen within TAC under the leadership of the CSAH. The direction provided by TAC was entirely separate and independent from my role and outside the structures that managed the other work of WGOS. As my staff were working in the service of TAG under the supervision of CSAH, I was not involved in the approval of any research and/or advice provided.
44. Dr Robert Hoyle, my Head of Science with WGOS, became a member of TAG in April 2020 and volunteered to establish the International Intelligence Sub-Group TAG (TAG11I) in September 2020. Dr Hoyle had begun work, informally, on gathering international intelligence on COVID-19 as early as April 2020 and the establishment of TAG11 was a normalisation of that early work. Dr Hoyle's work was carried out under the direction of the CSAH, and I had no oversight or input into the work he undertook.
45. Dr Simon Rolfe, a veterinary surgeon, with a doctorate in veterinary epidemiology, had direct experience of epidemic disease control in an animal health context and he provided considerable support to TAC. His most notable role was working in the Virology and Testing Advisory sub-group, where he worked with a variety of disciplines, including Public Health Wales, to generate evidence for advice and support to Welsh Government policy colleagues on virology and testing. All Dr Rolfe's work was carried out under the direction of the CSAH, and I had no oversight or input into the work he undertook.
46. As CSAW I also released two other individuals from WGOS, whose names I cannot recall, who were seconded to help the Emergency Control Centre for Wales. These staff were not under my leadership or management so there were no direct or indirect reporting lines from me to those two individuals during the period on their secondment.

#### **WGOS COVID-19 Newsletter**

48. It was clear that in the early days of the pandemic there was a lot of information and speculation about the COVID-19 disease and that internal colleagues within the

Economy Group of Welsh Government would benefit from some clarity about the science of the developing pandemic.

49. The internal Covid 19 newsletters provided colleagues within the Economy Group of Welsh Government with an easily digestible and factual information source that came from a reliable and reputable science base.
50. The newsletter focused on the nature of the COVID-19 disease. Its purpose was to raise awareness and inform and did not play any role in briefing or advising decision-makers within Welsh Government. They ran for eleven issues and are exhibited below.

<b>Date of Issue</b>	<b>Exhibit Number</b>
22/03/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/03-INQ000350799</b>
27/03/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/04-INQ000350811</b>
01/04/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/05-INQ000349234</b>
06/04/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/06-INQ000338709</b>
14/04/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/07-INQ000350800</b>
20/04/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/08-INQ000350801</b>
27/04/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/09-INQ000350802</b>
05/05/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/10-INQ000350806</b>
07/05/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/11-INQ000350803</b>
18/05/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/12-INQ000350804</b>
22/05/2020	<b>M2B/CSAW/01/13-INQ000350805</b>

51. The newsletter was collated from information gathered from existing contacts at Welsh universities. Available evidence and relevant information was included in each newsletter including some high-level take home messages based on the “intelligent reader” within Welsh Government. The intention was to draft easily understood and brief messages on the key issues.

#### **Grant Funding**

52. As Chief Scientific Advisor for Wales I instigated and oversaw the arrangements and management of submissions (bids) for short-term funding under the project name Ser Cymru Phase III Tackling COVID-19 Call for Proposals, exhibit **M2B/CSAW/01/14-INQ000350807** refers. The WGOS invited Welsh universities to submit bids for funding for novel research projects to advance research into the impact

of COVID-19. The publication of the grant funding required that applications should cover issues such as: virology, immunology, immunity, diagnostics, behaviour science, mental health consequences and environment issues.

53. The funding grants were evaluated by an independent scientific panel and decisions in terms of specific funding were approved by the education minister in May 2020. I did not directly participate in the reviewing or approval of bids.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that the 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.

Signed

Dated

**Personal Data**