

# Welsh Government: COVID-19 Technical Advisory Group

## Terms of Reference (ToR) v2.0 – 12 March 2021

### 1 Purpose

The purpose of the Welsh Government Technical Advisory Group is to ensure that scientific and technical information and advice, including advice arising from the UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)<sup>1-3</sup> for COVID-19, is developed and interpreted in order to:

- Ensure Welsh Government and the Welsh public sector have timely access to the most up-to-date scientific and technical information related to the outbreak.
- Commission and interpret data models, research outputs and measurements that are specific to Wales to help understand the nature, scope and spread of COVID-19 in Wales.
- As members of SAGE, contribute to and interpret relevant scientific papers, advice or data and consider the implications for the Welsh context.
- Support a collegiate approach to science and technology advice and research in all areas of COVID-19 across the four nations. Provide advice and data to inform Welsh Government, NHS, Social Care and wider public sector policy and planning.
- Relay relevant information and questions from Welsh Government to SAGE.
- Communicate and share understanding of the virus with the public sector and the public in an open and transparent way.

#### Excluded functions:

- TAG does not replace the extant functions of Strategic Coordination groups (SCG) or local Scientific Technical Advisory Cells (STACs).
- TAG does not replace statutory functions of Public Health Wales.
- Although it can provide advice to decision makers and policy makers, TAG does not develop Welsh Government policy or comment on the decisions of Welsh Ministers.

The Technical Advisory Group is part of the Welsh Government's emergency response to COVID-19.

### The priorities of TAG

- The overarching priority of TAG is to provide the best possible scientific and technical advice to support the response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Wales until there is an exit from the state of emergency and the group is stood down by the First Minister. Further priorities develop from this and are subject to change, but currently include:
  - To better understand and interpret the epidemiology of the virus in Wales, the UK and in a global context, including risk factors around demographics, geographies and vulnerable groups (e.g. age).
  - To provide modelling such as estimates and forecast scenarios to assist with planning and decision making in all parts of the Welsh public sector in response to Covid-19.
  - To advise on the most appropriate ways to detect and monitor the spread of Covid-19 in Wales as effectively as possible.
  - To advise on appropriate interventions to protect the well-being of the Welsh population from Covid-19, to highlight the indirect harms that could be caused as a result of proposed interventions and to support policy makers in identifying appropriate mitigations.
  - To provide insights around behavioural science and risk communication to inform policy makers and communication with the public.
  - To consider emerging therapeutic, diagnostic and other opportunities to treat, detect or monitor SARS-CoV2
  - To consider the genomics of the virus, and emerging variants, and advise on potential implications for current and planned interventions.
  - To work in collaboration with the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre and consider the wider research and evidence landscape.
  - To support the transition from pandemic to endemic and consider the longer term scientific and technical requirements for future re-emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and other future pandemics.
  - To support the development and understanding of the impact of COVID-19 recovery strategies.

This list of priorities is not exclusive, and should be periodically reviewed and updated by the Co-Chairs, with input from TAG.

## **2 TAG and TAC**

TAG is the Technical Advisory Group, the group of scientific and technical experts who provide advice and guidance to the Welsh Government in response to COVID-19.

TAC is the Technical Advisory Cell, the core team of Welsh Government civil servants which chairs and provides a secretariat function for TAG and its associated subgroups.

### **3 Reporting and Commissioning**

TAG provides independent scientific and technical advice across Welsh Government on COVID-19. The responsibility and accountability for its outputs sit with the Co-Chairs who are overseen by the Director General for Health & Social Services, the Director General Covid Crisis Coordination and the Chief Medical Officer.

[INTERNAL ONLY - The commissioning process is available at Annex A. A diagram of how TAG and its subgroups feed into Welsh Government and the Welsh public sector is available at Annex B]

A weekly TAG subgroup Chairs meeting agrees commissions and emerging areas of concern that require further discussion at TAG. The TAG Co-Chairs also attend a weekly UK Science Coordination Group, to ensure coordination with upcoming SAGE activity, and a bi-weekly 4 Nations Scientific Coordination Group, to consider more strategic scientific matters.

### **4 Information Access and Sharing**

Information arising from TAG is official-sensitive and should not be shared outside of these structures without the approval of the TAG Co-Chairs or TAG subgroup Chairs prior to publication. Discussions during meetings of TAG and TAG subgroups are considered official-sensitive and should not be quoted or referenced without relevant clearance.

Information arising from SAGE and its subgroups is official sensitive and should not be shared beyond the needs of the devolved administration without the approval of the SAGE secretariat.

All members of TAG and TAG subgroups are required to sign a Declaration of Interest.

### **5 Papers and publications**

In principle, TAG is committed to sharing information and findings with the public wherever possible in line with the original commission. TAG will make every effort to publish technical outputs as promptly as possible. Contributions and contributors to TAG are encouraged to publish their findings in relevant peer reviewed journals. Some papers may be dependent on the publication of other papers such as those developed by SAGE, and in other cases it may be felt that there is a significant risk of misrepresentation or misunderstanding if published and as a result these papers may be kept official-sensitive.

### **6 Remuneration**

No member of TAG or its subgroups shall be paid to be a member. The TAG Co-Chairs acknowledge and are grateful for the vast contributions of time, effort and expertise that have been volunteered to meet the needs of this emergency in Wales. They will endeavour to provide letters of reference to Vice-Chancellors highlighting material contribution made by members and will

facilitate recognition through the Research Excellence Framework where relevant.

### **7.1 Venue**

Remote-access where possible.

### **7.2 Frequency of Meetings**

Tuesday and Friday mornings, working in tandem with SAGE Meetings (currently Thursdays) and other subgroups.

### **7.3 Agenda Items**

The TAG Co-Chairs will agree the final agenda for each meeting of the TAG. Any attendee may ask for an item or paper to be included on the agenda.

### **7.4 Circulation of Papers**

Agendas, supporting papers and minutes of the previous meeting will be circulated to attendees as soon as is practicably possible.

Minutes and actions of the most recent meeting will also be circulated as soon as is practicably possible after the meeting.

### **7.5 Membership**

In order to preserve the independence and balance of expertise needed to provide scientific and technical advice to Welsh Government the majority of members of TAG and its subgroups should be drawn from academia and appropriate public sector bodies.

Membership of TAG is by invitation of the TAG Co-Chairs. TAG subgroup Chairs will be standing attendees. TAG subgroup attendees shall be by invitation of the subgroup TAG Chairs in agreement with TAG Co-Chairs. Membership will be supplemented by subject specific experts in line with agenda items or areas of discussion.

### **7.6 Observers**

Individuals may be invited to observe where relevant, at the discretion of the TAG Co-Chairs. Observers should not take part in discussions unless called upon by the TAG Co-Chairs.

### **7.7 Attendance**

Other than in exceptional circumstances, all members of TAG should endeavour to attend all meetings.

### **7.8 Withdrawal of individuals in attendance**

At the discretion of the TAG Co-Chairs, any or all individuals in attendance at a meeting of the TAG (i.e. non-attendees) may be asked to withdraw from parts of the meeting in order to facilitate full and frank discussion.

## 7.9 Conduct of urgent business

Where urgent business is required to be conducted between meetings, the TAG Co-Chairs will arrange for attendees views to be sought by email and the outcome will be reported to the next meeting of the TAG.

## 7.10 Decision making and escalation

TAG will seek to reach decisions by consensus. Where consensus is not reached, this will be highlighted in the relevant report or statement.

## 7.11 Declarations of Interest

Attendees of TAG will need to declare interests and a register of interests will be held by the secretariat and updated periodically.

## 7.12 NOLAN Principles

Attendees must subscribe to and uphold the seven (Nolan) [principles of public life](#).

# 8 TAG and TAG subgroup Chairs

Name	Title / Organisation
Fliss Bennée	Co-chair TAG, Welsh Government
Dr Rob Orford	Co-chair TAG, Chief Scientific Advisor for Health, Welsh Government
Dr Brendan Collins	Co-Chair Modelling and Socioeconomic subgroups, Welsh Government
Craigier Solomons	Co-Chair Policy Modelling Group and All Wales Modelling Forum. Welsh Government
Dr Robin Howe	Chair Testing Technical Advisory Group, Consultant Microbiologist, Public Health Wales
Prof Ann John	Chair Risk Communication and Behaviours Group, Professor in Public Health and Psychiatry, Swansea University
Dr Robert Hoyle	Chair International Intelligence Group, Welsh Government
Prof Davey Jones	Chair Environmental Science Group Professor of Soil & Environmental Science, Bangor University
Dr Heather Payne	Chair Children & Education Group. Child Health Senior Medical Officer, Welsh Government
Prof Kieran Walshe	Chair Research and Development Group Director of Health and Care Research Wales
Jonathan Price	Co-Chair Socio-Economic Harms Subgroup, Chief Economist, Welsh Government

## 9 Subgroups, Fora and terms of reference

Subgroups will be created when there is a need to consider a particular area in greater detail. Each subgroup provides advice with regards to their individual areas and there is an expectation that subgroups will proactively draw on the expertise available within TAG and TAC in doing so. All subgroups will operate within a scope set out in a Terms of Reference document. Current sub groups are:

Subgroup	Purpose
All Wales National Modelling Forum	The purpose of this forum is to agree consistent and coherent methods and messages around COVID-19 models for use in Wales by the Welsh health services.
Policy Modelling	The Policy Modelling subgroup coordinates modelling to support Welsh Government policy and decision making and intelligence, such as Reasonable Worst Case modelling scenarios and other data driven surveillance activities. The Chairs and some members are contributing members of SPI-M
Research	<p>The Research subgroup coordinates the Welsh Government approach to COVID-19 health and care research strategy and planning. Their core functions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to coordinate research efforts around COVID-19 across Welsh Government and health and care services in Wales, and provide effective connections into UK level strategy and process;</li><li>• to share intelligence on emerging research developments across Welsh organisations and awareness of UK/international developments;</li><li>• to work in collaboration with the Wales Covid-19 Evidence Centre and join-up the work underway for evidence synthesis and knowledge mobilisation around COVID-19.</li></ul>
Socioeconomic Harms	The Socio-Economic Harms subgroup oversees projects that aim to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on already disadvantaged sectors and groups in Wales. The subgroup uses evidence synthesis to identify potential policy options that may mitigate these social, economic and equity harms from COVID-19. The subgroup also oversees the evaluation of emerging national and international research and evidence on COVID-

	19 in the context of the economy and the potential harm that may be caused to specific sectors and groups in Wales.
International Intelligence	The International Intelligence subgroup evaluates emerging national and international research and evidence on COVID-19 in the context of: infection rates, death rates, testing, track and trace methods, imposition and easing of control measures, use and success of vaccines, travel restrictions into and out of countries, quarantine measures and other factors from which lessons may be learned that are applicable to Wales.
Vaccination & Testing	The Virology and Testing sub-group provides detailed and strategic consideration to the scientific and technical evidence on COVID-19 as it relates directly to virology and testing.
Children & Schools	The Children & Schools subgroup provides detailed and strategic consideration to the scientific and technical evidence on COVID-19 as it relates to children and schools settings. The Chair attends the SAGE group SPI-Kids
Risk Communication & Behavioural Insights	<p>The Risk Communication and Behavioural Insights subgroup provides behavioural and risk communication insights to inform the work of TAG and the interpretation, implementation and impact of the ongoing response to tackling Coronavirus. The subgroup assesses the existing and potential risks, impacts and harms associated with the behaviours of people across Wales in relation to COVID-19 which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• informing people and understanding behaviours;</li> <li>• supporting decision making of stakeholders and policy makers; and,</li> <li>• engaging wider society.</li> </ul> <p>The Chair and some members are contributing members of SPI-B.</p>

Environmental Science	The Environmental Science subgroup discusses and researches all environmental studies and science in relation to COVID-19. The chair is a member of the SAGE group EMG.
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For further information contact: [HSSG.TAC@gov.wales](mailto:HSSG.TAC@gov.wales)

## References

1. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/80087/sage-guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80087/sage-guidance.pdf)
  2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies-sage>
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/61252/the2009influenzapandemic-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61252/the2009influenzapandemic-review.pdf)