

UK-wide considerations in the C-19 policy and delivery response

1. The Government response to Covid-19 must deliver for all our citizens in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The devolution settlements mean co-ordination between governments adds complexity and there can be divergence in policy and implementation. This is being overseen by the MIGs where it is an issue, and we are keeping track of divergence centrally.

Overview of current UK wide delivery and key risks

2. There are good examples of UK-wide join up with the Devolved Administrations across priority work streams, and areas where pace and complexity makes this an ongoing effort:
 - a. **Health:** data flows have improved but there are gaps in our understanding of demand for ventilators and PPE. DHSC led procurement is intended to be UK-wide, with DHSC using its buying power to meet demand and distributing according to requirements. The DAs, though committed to mutual aid, wish to retain some procurement autonomy, and have continued in some instances to press posts overseas on separate contracts. **DHSC, supported by Cabinet Office, should conclude its work to clarify the model, gain its endorsement by all governments, and ensure a single instruction to DIT/FCO.**
 - b. In our wider **public sector response** ongoing co-ordination is required between reserved and devolved policy areas on key workstreams, for example support for the vulnerable. We are missing some opportunities to offer a UK-wide approach by not approaching the DAs earlier, e.g. the Welsh Government interest in our volunteering scheme. **While in some of these areas the DAs might wish to introduce different policies, early engagement from UKG departments is likely to mean greater alignment, and additional opportunities for a UK-wide response.**
 - c. **Businesses** have asked for more consistency in administrations' guidance and have reported confusion on areas such as whether businesses should close; which of their workers can continue to send children to school and the package of support they can access. Recent business guidance was issued on a nation by nation basis. **Ideally, future iterations of guidance would be issued on a UK-wide basis, even if consistency is not achievable and part of its function is to communicate differences clearly, or make links to other products.**

Data collection

2. Led by CCS, there has been recent progress in collecting and reporting UK-wide data on the dashboard. When new measures are added, there is a lag in DA data coming on stream as we sort through collection and definitional issues (for example care homes, just added). It is important that all papers going to Ministerial Implementation Groups (MIGs) and all data presented publicly at the daily press conferences consistently has UK-wide data (and if data is England only that this is explicit). The Cabinet Secretary has written to all workstream SROs to emphasise the importance of UK-wide data and analysis.

Communications

3. Where possible communications should be clear on the territorial extent of announcements and should have a narrative on the four nations elements of the response. This will need to be a responsibility of departments in the first instance.
4. There is a premium put by the public, key workforces and business on joined-up communications. There have been examples of this not working, of DAs getting out ahead of UKG comms; and of UKG making announcements for England without equivalents being ready for S, W, NI. There isn't a failsafe mechanism on the former, but we recommend Ministers chairing MIGs with the DAs ask DA Ministers about any planned comms and agree any comms coming directly out of the meeting. On the latter, departments, working with comms teams, should take a conscious decision about territorial extent and how that will be managed in comms messaging. This would mean two broad routes: a) working with the TOs to develop specific messages for S, W, NI as part of a UKG announcement, or b) sharing content for announcements in England with DAs early, to comment, tailor, translate and potentially align. **Do Ministers agree?**
5. We need to maintain best practice in communicating Government announcements in the nations. The COVID-19 communications hub is strengthening links with policy, No.10 and TOs and working with DAs to have as joined up approach as possible.

Social distancing review point

6. The review of social distancing measures is critical in maintaining an appropriately aligned response across the UK. Any divergence, which isn't clearly communicated and based on scientific advice, could lead to confusion among citizens and reduce public confidence in the UK response. Careful management of the position on the island of Ireland will also be essential for the Northern Ireland Executive.
7. The DAs attended COBR on 9 April where Governments agreed that there would be no relaxation of the current social distancing measures next week and they would work together on clear messages to the public to that effect. As the data becomes available next week we recommend engagement with the Devolved Administrations to maintain a joined up approach to the social distancing review. In advance of any COBR, this would mean **official-level engagement with the DAs including CMO and CSA with their DA equivalents. We recommend the papers that go to COBR have also been worked on in advance by DA officials in the preparation phase.**
8. Ministers will also want to respond to the recent letter from the three devolved governments about social distancing to set out the process and emphasise the importance of a joined up approach on communicating to the public.