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The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

The Independent SAGE Report 19

**A blueprint to achieve an
excellent Find, Test, Trace, Isolate
and Support system**

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Submitted to The UK Government and the People of Great Britain
& Northern Ireland by Sir David King, former Chief Scientific Adviser,
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A blueprint to achieve an excellent Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support system

Executive Summary

The Treasury reports that £10 billion has been budgeted for the existing track and trace system to date. We are concerned that much of this budget is not being used effectively. With this budget, the government could have provided £1 million to every UK general practice and £10 million to every top tier-local health authority.

Covid-19 is a public health problem so the response must be fully integrated within our national health service and public health system. The key element to the response must be at the local level. The virus relies on families, groups and communities within which to spread and the answer to the virus is to be found by working for its control and eventual elimination in and with those communities locally.

National and regional lockdowns and other large scale restrictions are blunt tools; testing and tracing should be a targeted, precise system. Done well, it allows us to identify sources of outbreaks and isolate individuals and those they have been in contact close contact with, rather than entire populations. Without an effective find, test, trace, isolate, and support (FTTIS) system, the government has little choice but to rely on imprecise and damaging local and national lockdowns to prevent surges in infection. These shutter businesses and restrict people – ill or not – from going about their daily lives. In turn, they cause severe economic disruptions. The urgent reform of FTTIS is the most important economic and health priority for the government and the country right now.

This pandemic will never be brought under control in the UK without every community having access to a Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support system that actually works. This paper mostly addresses the problem in England. Scotland, Wales and N Ireland have different approaches and challenges. Some issues, such as testing capacity, are however of common importance and are addressed in the UK wide context.

Summary of blueprint

- ◆ Independent SAGE calls for the replacement of the failed, falsely named and private sector run 'NHS' Test and Trace with a system for England which is rooted in the regions of England and in local areas. It must be integrated throughout with the National Health Service and provide for the needs of people and the communities in which they live.
- ◆ NHS England should be the lead national organisation and provide the infrastructure and logistics for the organisation and functioning of the FTTIS system.
- ◆ In each top-tier local authority the local Director of Public Health should have the leadership role and convene the necessary management structure in conjunction with the local NHS and local authority.
- ◆ Laboratory capacity, in particular, is crucial to our ability to control the virus throughout the UK. Independent SAGE calls for the establishment of a national COVID testing consortium , including all current providers, under the auspices, oversight and management of NHS.
- ◆ Isolation will not work unless people are supported to enable them to isolate. Self-isolation should be replaced by 'supported isolation' with assistance, if needed, with accommodation, domestic assistance and financial support up to £800.