



Government
Office for Science

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Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation
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By email only

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Dear Ed,

Transparency of data and information related to COVID-19

Thank you for your letter dated 5 November 2020. I agree that timely publication of data and supporting documentation is of great importance, and undoubtedly helps citizens understand the decisions Ministers have made.

As you acknowledge in your letter, openness and transparency of advice are principles to which I attach great importance, which is why SAGE, on my direction, publishes its minutes and supporting documents every week. To date we have published over 400 items on the government's website regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, including the names of those contributing to discussions that develop that advice. You can find all of this information here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/scientific-advisory-group-for-emergencies>. We are however, bound to work within existing legislation on data ownership and approval, and as the Government Office for Science does not own the data this can sometimes cause delays which we endeavour to minimise.

Our publication record is a significant and public demonstration of our commitment to openness, and has allowed the public easy access to the science advice we have given since January in support of the government's response to the COVID-19 epidemic. All of this advice and the underlying papers are available for public scrutiny and scientific challenge and has been used by groups across the world. SAGE advice is of course just one input into the decision-making process, and Ministers will rightly draw on other sources of evidence and information when making decisions.

Openness is one of the guiding principles of science and we plan to continue being an exemplary branch of government in this respect, publishing our work on the epidemic with the same regularity going forward as we have to date. I will continue to make every effort to ensure that our work is understandable and presented as clearly and simply as we can.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Vallance