

Next steps for work on COVID-19 disparities announced

News story

Following the release of the Public Health England review into disparities in the risks and outcomes of COVID-19, the Government's Equality Hub is today (4th June 2020) setting out how this work will be taken forward.



The work will be led by the Equalities Minister, Kemi Badenoch, and supported by other government departments and agencies.

Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, said:

“This government is rightly taking seriously the initial findings from the PHE report published earlier this week. However, it is also clear that much more needs to be done to understand the key drivers of the disparities identified and the relationships between the different risk factors.

“That is why I am now taking this work forward, which will enable us to make a real difference to people’s lives and protect our communities from the impact of the coronavirus.”

The full terms of reference for this work will be as follows:

- Review the effectiveness and impact of current actions being undertaken by relevant government departments and their agencies to directly lessen disparities in infection and death rates of COVID-19. Factors to be considered – but aren’t limited to – should include age and sex, occupation, obesity, comorbidities, geography, and ethnicity;
- Modifications to existing, or development of new policy, should be considered and discussed with the relevant Ministers responsible. This ongoing work will include looking at the extensive guidance that is already currently available;
- Commission further data, research and analytical work by the Equality Hub to clarify the scale, and drivers, of the gaps in evidence highlighted by the Report;

- Consider where and how the collection and quality of data into the disparities highlighted can be improved on, and take action to do so, working with the Equality Hub, government departments and their agencies;
- Lead engagement on the disparities highlighted with Departmental Ministers;
- Build on and expand the stakeholder engagement undertaken by PHE, to consolidate and develop the qualitative insights gained and how they may support further actions that should be taken to address the disparities highlighted;
- Strengthen and improve public health communications to ensure they can reach all communities across the country;
- Provide quarterly updates to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on progress being made to address health inequalities by departments and their agencies.

Earlier today, the Minister for Equalities answered an Urgent Question in the House of Commons before answering detailed questions from members on a range of issues related to the PHE review.

Further Information:

- To support the Minister for Equalities in fulfilling these Terms of Reference, the Race Disparity Unit in the Equalities Hub (Cabinet Office) will work with MfE directly. They will be supported by officials in PHE and other departments or agencies as relevant to take this forward.
- The Equality Hub sits in the Cabinet Office and is made up of officials working for the Government Equalities Office, Race Disparity Unit and Disability Unit
- The full PHE review can be found here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-review-of-disparities-in-risks-and-outcomes>

Published 4 June 2020

Parliamentary elections in Tajikistan: UK statement

We thank the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Assessment Mission for their comprehensive report on the 2020 parliamentary elections in Tajikistan.

We note the report's observations, assessment and full set of recommendations. In particular we note with concern the assessment that the

“elections in Tajikistan took place in a tightly controlled environment” and that “systemic infringements on fundamental political rights and freedoms have left no space for a pluralistic political debate, and genuine opposition has been removed from the political landscape”.

This followed the Needs Assessment Mission report of December 2019, which stated that “the level of respect of fundamental freedoms has further deteriorated since the last elections and the choice between political alternatives is limited in the absence of independent media and a functioning opposition”.

The ODIHR Final Report stated that despite legal changes enacted in 2017, 2018 and 2019 in Tajikistan, the recommendations made by the 2015 ODIHR Election Observation Mission have not been taken forward. As the 2020 Final Report notes, “all these shortcomings and infringements challenging the integrity and credibility of elections remained unaddressed, having a detrimental effect on the 2020 electoral process”.

We support the Election Assessment Mission’s report’s seven priority recommendations that would enable Tajikistan to enhance its election process and bring it in line with OSCE commitments, as well as international obligations and standards.

We draw special attention to the importance of an open and inclusive review of the electoral legal framework, an independent Central Commission for Elections and Referenda (CCER) and the critical importance of freedom of the media and journalists at all times, especially when covering political issues. A free, independent and diverse media, online and offline, is crucial to the functioning of inclusive, peaceful and democratic societies.

We also fully support the report’s practical recommendations aimed at improving accurate elector registration, independent election observation, strengthening procedures for counting and tabulating results and the timely publication of all election results disaggregated by polling station.

We encourage Tajikistan to consider these, along with the report’s other 16 recommendations, and to further promote gender equality to enhance the representation of women in elected positions and political life generally. Finally, we strongly encourage the government of Tajikistan to take up ODIHR’s offer of assistance to further improve the electoral process and address these, and previous, recommendations from election-related activities. In support of this, we encourage an open, ongoing dialogue between the OSCE institutions, including ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the government of Tajikistan.

As a valued partner, we stand ready to support Tajikistan and the OSCE in following-up on ODIHR’s recommendations.

David Wood introduces the Government Geography Profession

Two and a half years ago a group of committed and passionate geographers – the Central Government Geographers Group chaired by Jon Pickstone – worked with the Cabinet Office and the Government Science and Engineering profession (GSE) to establish geography as a new sub-profession within GSE.

I was appointed in 2018 as the first head of the geography profession to establish and grow the profession within GSE with a vision for a high profile, proud and effective profession that attracts fresh talent and has a secure place at the heart of government decision making.

It's been a busy couple of years, during which time we've grown from a standing start to over 1,200 members across the public sector and put in place a number of initiatives to support our members, celebrated and promoted the importance of geography in the public sector and undertaken outreach activities to inspire the next generation of geographers – find out more at our new [website](#).

Today, Sir Ian Diamond, Head of the Analysis Function in Government (and UK's National Statistician) and Sir Patrick Vallance, Government Head of the Science and Engineering Profession (and Government's Chief Scientific Advisor) made an announcement on the future of the Analysis Function in Government, GSE and the [geography profession](#). Geography is a crucial part of the multi-disciplinary approach we will need to take within the Analysis Function to tackle the big issues faced by society. To support this, I'm very pleased to say that the Government Geography Profession will become a standalone profession within the Analysis Function and based at Cabinet Office with the [Geospatial Commission](#).

You can find out more about the [Analysis Function](#) and its vision to integrate analysis into decision making and delivery to help improve outcomes and the Geospatial Commission and its strategic goal to drive a demonstrable shift in the UK's geospatial capability through improved skills, resources, and better awareness, [understanding of the geospatial sector and its value](#).

Of course, we will continue to be an inclusive and welcoming profession and will continue to support all those in the public sector who consider themselves geographers, recognising that whilst a lot of us clearly align to the [Analysis Function](#), some of us are in wider roles across the public sector.

But this is just the start, there's a lot more that we want to do as a profession to support our members, set standards and work with other professions to embed geography at the heart of government decision making.

I would like to thank all those who have joined the profession and worked with us to help us realise our vision, including all those in GSE who we will continue to work with, and I look forward with the rest of the [geography](#)

[leadership team](#) to leading us into the next stage of our journey.

If you are a civil, crown or public servant, and a geographer find out more about our [benefits](#) and how to [join us](#) (answer 'Geography' to question 11).

If you're not a civil, crown or public servant, but would be interested in a role within one of our organisations and becoming part of the Government Geography Profession, please see our [jobs in government](#) page for more information.

[Geography in Government Awards 2018](#)

Advancing Geospatial Data Science

[WINNER] [OVERALL WINNER] Geography Spatial Analysts Team at the Office for National Statistics for work undertaken for the United Nations World Data Forum on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to provide a global metric for indicator 9.1.1, which measures the proportion of the rural population living within 2km of an all-season road (an important measure of connectivity and accessibility).

Michael Hodge at the ONS Data Science Campus working with the Welsh Government to develop a tool to estimate travel times, based on private and public transport, to effectively appraise public service accessibility which is critical to formulating and targeting policy and for delivering public services.

Mobileye Project Team at the Ordnance Survey for investigating whether data streams from an in-vehicle Advanced Driver Assistance Scheme could be re-used to reliably and repeatedly survey roadside features in near real-time without the need for any human intervention or processing.

Operational Delivery

[WINNER] Ben Payne at Natural England for a new evidence-based approach to conservation and licensing for the great crested newt that combines geospatial analysis with ecological knowledge. By reducing the need for survey, trapping and translocation of this protected species it cuts out costs, delays and developer/investor uncertainty in the planning process, and maximises the proportion of investment secured by licencing which is invested in habitat.

The Boundary Review Team at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council for supporting an electoral review by building on a statistical forecast of the 2023 electorate. The team developed a tool which used Ordnance Survey maps

and address data melded with electorate forecasts at property-level. The user is able to merge, edit and rename boundaries and get a real-time view of the impact upon the future voting population.

Sarah Taylor and Michael Knight at Natural England for developing the National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability Model and a range of spatial data products associated with it to provide maps of the areas where species and habitats are most likely to be vulnerable to climate change to support delivery of the Nature Recovery Network.

Excellence in Geo-Visualisation and Cartography

[WINNER] Charley Glynn, Tim Martin, Oliver Snowden and Andrew Radburn at the Ordnance Survey for developing OS Open Zoomstack, the latest addition to the OS OpenData portfolio. It makes OS open data more accessible, customisable and easier to use by providing a single, customisable map of Great Britain to be used from national to local levels.

The DGC Task Team 8 at the Ministry of Defence for developing a country insight product, which is a country-wide situational awareness product providing foundation geospatial information about a range of key themes to provide context and understanding to Defence users. It consists of a geodatabase of fully attributed data which can be manipulated or incorporated with other datasets to support wider analysis and assessment activities.

The DGC and No 1 AIDU Air Teams at the Ministry of Defence for producing the first two Low Flying Charts to standardise the symbology across the 1:50,000, 1:250,000 and 1:500,000 scales to improve flight safety. Pilots and navigators now see standardised symbology across this range of air charts as they zoom in and out on their cockpit tablets, making the identification of obstructions and air space clearer.

Impact on Policy

[WINNER] Jamie O'Donnell at the Department for Transport for creating a key online interactive map of a proposed Major Road Network to feed into a government consultation which received over 1,000 web views in the first week alone. Jamie then developed an internal interactive mapping tool that a range of colleagues could use and access to support decision making and assess respondents' proposals on a segment by segment basis quickly and accurately.

Nick O'Rourke and ONS Geography Leadership team at the Office for National Statistics for developing the ONS Geospatial Hub for over 4,000 ONS members of staff. The Hub is improving the quality of ONS research and outputs through the greater insight gained from analysing the role of location in people's lives and environment and has brought producers and researchers together from across spectrum of social, health, economic and environmental statistics.

Mick Wyman at the Ministry of Defence for identifying the potential for a

bespoke very small-scale 3D perspective maps to provide MoD senior officers and Ministers with enhanced situational awareness for planning and policy purposes.

Contribution to the Profession

[WINNER] The DGC Learning and Development Team at the Ministry of Defence has been instrumental in formulating and redesigning the MoD Geospatial Analyst Function Competence Framework, rebranding and enhancing it to align with GSE Geography profession. The team also designed and ran the Geospatial Managers Development Programme, a tailored course, designed to support the growth of GSE Geography within MoD by delivering development and professionalisation interventions for staff across a range of grades.

Jack Whelan and Darren Scarlett at the Ministry of Defence for dedicating considerable personal time into teaching and inspiring the next generation of geographers at Comberton Village College through the ESRI Geo Mentoring Scheme.

Neil Peters at the Ministry of Defence for developing and sustaining an international network of experts engaged in spatial socio-cultural developments, promoting the contribution of the profession, geospatial information principles and analysis techniques in order to understand and respond to complex problems.

Joint statement on the presidential elections in Belarus

We, as friends of the Belarusian people and supporters of the sovereignty and independence of Belarus, welcome the progress achieved in our relations over the past few years. We have seen many positive developments between our countries and Belarus: the signing of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with the EU and the doubling of its financial support; the decision to resume relations with the United States at ambassadorial level, the visit of the Secretary of State to Minsk, and the first shipment of U.S. oil; the increasing political dialogue with the EU and with its Member States bilaterally (e.g. visits at Presidential or PM level to EU Member States) or in the framework of the Eastern Partnership; the Commercial Dialogue with the UK; and the opening up of EIB and EBRD for loans. We reaffirm our commitment to continue this positive engagement with Belarus on the basis of shared values.

As Belarus begins the process of selecting its president, we urge the Belarusian authorities to take the measures necessary to hold a safe,

peaceful, free and fair election and to ensure fundamental freedoms.

We expect Belarus to invite officially OSCE/ODIHR observers in due time and urge the Belarusian authorities to demonstrate in deeds its willingness to make progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the previous OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Reports.

Noting in particular that the process of registration of candidates should be fair and transparent, we emphasize that no politically motivated restrictive measures should prevent potential candidates fulfilling the registration procedure.

Given that the elections are taking place in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, we strongly recommend the Belarusian authorities adopt the World Health Organization's recommendations of physical distancing to minimize the COVID-19 threat in a way which allows all candidates an equal chance to campaign and inform voters about what they stand for.

We also recall that a genuinely pluralistic composition of election commissions is key to promoting confidence in the election administration.

Media freedom and the right of peaceful assembly are essential to legitimate elections. Journalists must be able to report freely and unhindered. Citizens must be allowed to peacefully express their opinions. This is why we are also concerned regarding the recent detentions of peaceful protesters and imprisonments of journalists.

We recall that tangible steps taken by Belarus to respect universal fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights will remain key for the shaping of our future policy towards Belarus. A safe, peaceful, free and fair election, untainted by malign external influence and respecting fundamental freedoms, will foster democratic development in Belarus, reinforce its sovereignty and independence, and pave the way for greater cooperation with our countries and economic prosperity for the Belarusian people.