

# Defence scientists ramp up their support to the Covid-19 pandemic

Press release

Scientists from Dstl have been working tirelessly since the start of the pandemic to support a whole host of government agencies and civilian authorities.



British Army Royal Engineers deliver Covid-19 tests to European lorry drivers on the M20 in Kent, to enable the drivers to make the border crossing back into mainland Europe.

Recently, Dstl experts were called on by the MOD's Standing Joint Command (SJC) to provide short notice analytical support to the Dover crisis between Christmas and New Year, by helping the military and the police clear the backlog of heavy goods vehicles and their drivers. Dstl – the science inside UK defence and security – provided information to aid effective queuing and Covid-19 testing strategies which enabled a rapid return to normality.

As the current vaccine is rolled out, a number of scientists and technicians have been building data science and computing models for the NHS England IT system to tackle a range of vaccine related challenges, from vaccine population estimation to vaccine phasing and regional planning tools.

Dstl's Dr Kit Waterman, said:

It has been a privilege to contribute to one of the nation's largest logistical feats at this critical time. Modelling the phasing and delivery of the vaccine has proved an intellectually challenging and rewarding experience, and the opportunity to work with colleagues from across Dstl has really brought home the versatility and quality of skills developed through the delivery of science and technology support to UK defence.

Dstl's work has been crucial in both the response and building up of national and international scientific understanding of Covid-19. 180 defence scientists are currently working on multiple assignments, with more than 300 scientists in total who have worked on hundreds of Covid support areas. These include supporting the safety guidance for military personnel, ensuring supply chains for military equipment can operate, through to providing scientific support to a number of agencies, including the NHS, Public Health England, the Department for Health and Social Care, as well as the Government Office for Science (GO-Science) and the Joint Biosecurity Centre.

Dstl's Chief Executive Gary Aitkenhead said:

Our people are carrying out some outstanding work, including helping to make sure that defence maintains its operational output during the pandemic. Dstl has helped to widen the Government's scientific understanding on the spread of the pandemic, we've supported the national health response and are helping to increase the understanding of the virus. It is a truly national and global effort and Dstl is a critical part of that.

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## [Education Secretary launches review of children's social care](#)

A wholesale independent review of children's social care will set out to radically reform the system, improving the lives of England's most vulnerable children so they experience the benefits of a stable, loving home.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson will today (Friday 15 January) launch the review which aims to raise the bar for vulnerable children across the country, delivering on a 2019 manifesto commitment that pledged to look at the care system to make sure children and young adults get the support they need.

In a speech to children's charities and sector organisations, the Education Secretary will also announce that he has appointed Josh MacAlister to lead the review.

A former teacher, Mr MacAlister founded the social work charity Frontline in 2013. He will step down from his role as Chief Executive to lead the review.

The review will reshape how children interact with the care system, looking at the process from referral through to becoming looked after. It will

address major challenges such as the increase in numbers of looked after children, the inconsistencies in children's social care practice, outcomes across the country, and the failure of the system to provide enough stable homes for children.

Running throughout the review will be the voices and experiences of children, young people or adults who have been looked-after, or who have received help or support from a social worker. Their experiences will be considered and reflected sensitively and appropriately, with their views included in full in the work.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson will say:

We have known for some time that despite the best efforts of hardworking and dedicated social workers, the children's social care system is not delivering a better quality of life and improved outcomes for those it is designed to help.

This review will be bold, wide-ranging and will not shy away from exposing problems where they exist. Under Josh MacAlister's leadership, it will benefit from his understanding of the challenges facing the system and his experience of improving outcomes for children and young people.

It is part of the golden thread that runs through everything we are doing to level up society, especially for those who are too often forgotten or marginalised. It is going to help us raise the bar for these vulnerable children, it's going to help us improve their life prospects and most importantly, it's going to help give them the chance to achieve their potential and not be held back from the futures they deserve.

During the virtual launch event today (Friday), Josh MacAlister will launch a 'Call for Advice' to help shape the early work of the review and invite applications for an 'Experts by Experience' group to advise him on how to include the voices of people with a 'lived experience' of the children's social care system. The review will consult widely and bring in a broad range of expertise.

Chair of the Review Josh MacAlister will say:

If 2020 showed us the grit, commitment and creativity of social workers, teachers and other professionals, then 2021 is our chance to think afresh about how we support children without the safety, stability and love that many of us take for granted.

This review will listen deeply and think boldly. That is why I am recruiting for an 'Experts by Experience' Group that will direct an ambitious effort to hear the diverse experiences of children and families who have had social workers. I also need advice and

challenge as we start this review, which is why I'm launching a Call for Advice.

Deep down I think many of those working in the children's social care system and certainly many of those who have experience of it, know that radical change is needed. My commitment is that this review will deliver a wide-ranging plan to extend the joy, growth and safety of childhood and the esteem, love and security of family life to all children.

The Review will address the clear need for change that supports children to achieve their potential. Children who have been in care comprise 25% of the homeless and 24% of the prison population. Over a third of care leavers (39%) are not in education, employment or training, compared to 13% of all 19-21-year-olds and just 13% progressed to Higher Education by age 19 compared to 43% of all other pupils.

In addition, statistics published today revealed the number of serious incident notifications between April and September 2020. Every death or harm of a child is tragic and we are working to understand the impact of COVID on the nature of serious incidents. This data will provide important information to the care review to help address major challenges.

The Department for Education will publish terms of reference for the review, setting out the themes and questions that will be addressed and how it will respond to the changing needs of children in care or at risk of going into care, especially given the impact of the pandemic.

These will include how to improve accountability for those responsible for children's outcomes, how to ensure children have a positive experience of care, and how to support and strengthen families – helping children stay safely with their families where possible.

The Education Secretary will also announce today that the Adoption Support Fund will continue beyond March 2021, helping new adoptive and special guardianship families overcome challenges through therapies like family support sessions, or music and play activities. Nearly 64,000 families have benefitted from the fund since it was launched in 2015.

It builds on the government's commitment to levelling up across the country, starting with children and families – particularly the most vulnerable – to reduce the impacts and costs to both the children themselves and society.

The review of children's social care builds on recent work from the Department of Education to support the most vulnerable children in society, including an investment of almost £4.4 million to extend Covid-19 response programmes run by major children's charities aimed at reaching 'hidden' children, as well as setting out plans to create a National Centre for Family Hubs that will improve families' access to vital services across the country.

There was also confirmation in November's Spending Review of an additional £24 million investment in 2021-22 to expand capacity within secure children's

homes, as well as £165 million funding for the Government's Troubled Families programme.

The Government will also respond to the consultation on unregulated provision, where the views of the sector and care-experienced young people were sought on banning the placement of children under the age of 16 in this provision and introducing national standards for provision for 16 and 17-year-olds.

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## **Citizen Space Survey – National Strategy for Disabled People**

The Disability Unit in the Cabinet Office is working with government colleagues, disabled people, disabled people's organisations, charities and businesses to develop and deliver a National Strategy for Disabled People. We intend to publish the Strategy in spring 2021.

Despite the unprecedented challenge we face as a nation, this government is committed to delivering an ambitious National Strategy for Disabled People with expert advice and the lived experience of disabled people at its heart.

The Strategy will make practical changes to policies which strengthen disabled people's ability to participate fully in society and will place fairness at the heart of government work on disability, to level up opportunity so everyone can reach their potential and participate in life in this country.

We want to place the lived experiences of disabled people at the centre of our approach, as well as views from people across the country including those caring for and related to disabled people, as well as the general public.

Today, we are launching a public survey to gather views. This survey continues the engagement that was carried out across government throughout 2020, and continues to be this year. It includes engagement nationally and across the regions with a diverse network of stakeholders, including leading charities, disabled people's organisations and individuals from all parts of society that are affected by disability.

The survey is hosted on Citizen Space. If you share your views by 13th February, your views will inform the development of the National Strategy for Disabled People, but thereafter we will continue to listen. The survey will remain open until 23rd April, and your views will be used to inform the delivery of the plans we set out.

The survey, hosted on Citizen Space, is fully accessible to ensure as many

people as possible have their voices heard. It is available in Easy Read, BSL and written responses can be sent to: [DUCitizenspace@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:DUCitizenspace@cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

Read our [privacy notice](#).

If you would like to know more about the National Strategy for Disabled People, follow the [Disability Unit](#) on Twitter and sign up to the [mailing list](#).

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## Aruba, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, Chile, Qatar, Madeira and the Azores removed from travel corridor list

- Aruba, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, and Qatar have been removed from list of travel corridors for England from 4am on 16 January 2021, following data showing a significant increase in confirmed cases
- we will also be removing Chile, Madeira and the Azores from the travel corridor list for the UK from 4am on 15 January 2021, due to their strong travel links with Brazil
- there will be no additions to the list of travel corridors
- travellers are urged to check the latest advice from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) before travelling and will be required to fill in a [passenger locator form](#) before returning home

Aruba, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, and Qatar have been removed from England's [list of travel corridors](#), following a significant increase in confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases in these countries.

Chile, Madeira and the Azores will also be removed from the travel corridors list as part of the government's response to the Brazilian strain of the virus. This comes alongside the [urgent decision to ban travel to the UK from several South American destinations, Portugal, Panama and Cape Verde](#) in order to prevent the spread of the new strain into the UK.

From 4am on Friday 15 January 2021, only British and Irish nationals, and third country nationals with residence rights traveling to the UK from Chile, Madeira and the Azores will be allowed entry. They will still need to [self-isolate for 10 days](#) along with their households.

From 4am on Saturday 16 January 2021, people returning to the UK from Aruba, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, and Qatar will also need to self-isolate for 10 days upon arrival.

People currently in Aruba, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, Chile, Qatar, Madeira and the Azores are encouraged to follow the local rules, return home

as normal and check [FCD0 travel advice](#) for further information.

At the same time, the FCD0 has updated its travel advice to advise against all but essential travel to Aruba, Bonaire, St Eustatius and Saba, Chile, Qatar, the Azores and Madeira.

The government has always said it will take decisive action, if necessary, to contain the virus, including if the public health risk of people returning from a particular country without self-isolating becomes too high.

[National restrictions for England](#) introduced on 6 January 2021 remain in place, meaning everyone must stay at home unless travelling for a very limited set of reasons, including for work. This means people can no longer travel to take holidays or travel internationally unless for work or other [legally permitted reasons](#). Those in breach of the rules face penalties starting at £200, rising to a maximum of £6,400.

From 4am on Monday 18 January 2021, [passengers from all destinations will also be required to present a negative COVID-19 test result before travelling to England](#) to help protect against new strains of coronavirus circulating internationally and to identify those that may currently be infectious.

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## [Taking swift action on the economy, humanitarian funding and humanitarian access in Yemen](#)

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to Special Envoy Griffiths, Mark Lowcock, and David Beasley for their compelling briefings.

I want to be clear that the United Kingdom strongly condemns the appalling attack in Aden on the 30th of December. The deaths and wounding of so many civilians and the targeting of the newly formed cabinet is unacceptable. Amongst the dead was a deputy minister, three members of the International Red Cross and a journalist who was there to document a positive moment. Our condolences to all of their families.

The UK assesses that it is highly likely that the Houthis were responsible for this cowardly and craven attack. Only they had the means, the motive, and the opportunity for this clear and deplorable attempt to destabilise the newly formed Yemeni government. We welcome the UN Panel of Experts' investigation into this incident, and we hope that the panel's results will be published swiftly.

The Houthi attack casts a dark shadow over a group who claims to be committed to pursuing peace in Yemen. The UK reiterates its firm support and its

gratitude for the efforts of Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and urges all parties to engage in the UN-led negotiations rather than resorting to violent methods.

As the Special Envoy said, this attack mars what is otherwise an extremely positive development: the formation of a new cabinet. It includes members from across the political spectrum under the auspices of the Saudi-mediated Riyadh agreement, although the lack of women is notable.

The UK wholeheartedly welcomes the cabinet's courageous return to Aden to restore services and supports the efforts of the Prime Minister to bring about the security, and the economic stability that the Yemenis need. We condemn, too, the ongoing Houthi cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia and share US concerns about the Houthi commitment to peace.

We've taken note of the US decision to designate the Houthis and welcome the US commitment to work with the UN, with NGOs, and donors on implementation. It will be critical, as we heard from Mark Lowcock, that there are exemptions immediately put in place to ensure humanitarian activity and commercial imports can continue unimpeded, and for the peace process to continue unhindered.

As Mark Lowcock said, we enter 2021 facing a humanitarian emergency with Yemen. And as we heard from David Beasley, Yemen is in imminent danger of the worst famine in decades. 16,500 Yemenis are already living in famine conditions, which is set to triple by June 2021 and with more numbers in the pipeline. Despite this, 2020 closed with a UN appeal that was only half funded – having a drastic impact, as we've heard, on the humanitarian response and its ability to save lives.

As we've heard, too, rapid economic decline is driving this crisis, compounded by severe humanitarian access constraints, particularly in the Houthi-controlled north. Aid and humanitarian workers must be able to reach those in need and do so safely.

Swift action is needed now – before it's too late – on the economy, humanitarian funding, and humanitarian access in order to avert catastrophe in 2021.

While the Yemeni Rial's value temporarily stabilised after the formation of the new government, it is now depreciating again. Food security is already getting worse in the absence of external financial assistance to the Central Bank of Yemen to support food importers.

The new government has the opportunity now to demonstrate the leadership required to stabilise the economy and seek financial assistance. We urge the new government and agencies to swiftly build relationships with the UN and the wider humanitarian community. We will call on the government to urgently set out plans for how it will pay salaries and support currency stability, working with key donors on setting out a financing plan for the Central Bank and for a package of reform measures.



Thank you, Mr President.