



Science and Technology Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Rt Hon Greg Clark MP

Sir Patrick Vallance
Chief Government Scientific Adviser
By email

22 May 2020

Dear Sir Patrick,

Transparency of scientific evidence: social distancing

My Committee is grateful for your efforts to increase the transparency around scientific advice to Government during this pandemic, including publishing the participants in SAGE and agreeing to publish regularly and promptly the scientific papers on which SAGE draws—though we note that there remains information that has still not been published, as referenced in our recent letter to the Prime Minister.

One of the matters on which we believe transparency is of particular importance is on the evidence underpinning the Government's guidance on 'working safely during COVID-19', which was one of the subjects on which my Committee took evidence today. This guidance recommends that people maintain a 2 metre distance from others wherever possible.

This recommended distance is greater than the distances recommended by many other countries such as France, the Netherlands, Germany, Singapore and Hong Kong,¹ as well as the World Health Organization and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.² The significance of the exact distance recommended is the impact it has on workplaces that are trying to re-open, where social distancing of 1m or 1.5m rather than 2m may make a decisive difference to the feasibility of returning to work.

The evidence that my Committee took today indicated that the question of what is the appropriate distance is nuanced—and influenced by such questions as the length of exposure and whether encounters are in the open air or not. We also discussed whether there was any reason for UK advice to differ significantly from those of other countries on this matter given that both scientific underpinnings and the behaviour of the virus itself are clearly not country-specific.

I would therefore be grateful if you could give particular urgency to publishing the scientific evidence underpinning the guidance on social distancing and in particular the decision to advise a 2m separation, and specifically all consideration that SAGE and its working groups have given to the approach being followed in other countries around the world.

¹ '[Comment vous protéger et protéger votre entourage ?](#)' Santé publique France; '[Avoid busy places and stay 1.5 metres away from others](#)', Government of the Netherlands, accessed 22 May 2020; '[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Daily Situation Report](#)' Robert Koch Institute, 21 May 2020; '[FAQs on the COVID-19 Situation](#)', Singapore, accessed 22 May 2020; '[Tips for you and me to prevent COVID-19](#)', Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection
² '[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) advice for the public](#)', World Health Organization, accessed 22 May 2020; '[Q & A on COVID-19](#)', European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, accessed 22 May 2020

The urgency is that this matter will be an important determinant of how workplaces are configured, which settings can open, and how the public can use them—all questions which are very much live at the moment.

I would be grateful if you could publish this as soon as possible, and by the end of next week at the latest. I will be publishing this letter on the Committee's website in due course.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Chair