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Baroness Dido Harding of Winscombe
Interim Executive Chair
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By Email.

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I am writing this letter in response to the oral evidence you provided in the Select Committee on Science and Technology Oral evidence: UK science, research and technology capability and influence in global disease outbreaks, HC 136 on Wednesday 3 February 2021.

Part of the evidence provided relates to the Scottish Contact Tracing System, Test and Protect. Your statement did not accurately reflect the position in Scotland. I include a written excerpt of the relevant section below:

*"For example, in digital self-serve, which accounts for about a third of our **positive index cases**, people are sent an email, or a text message may provide contacts digitally, and those contacts themselves can confirm that they have received a message digitally. We count a successful digital contact only when the contact has confirmed receipt of the message. That is the English approach, **whereas my understanding of the Scottish system is that once they have sent an SMS message they count that as a successful contact**. As with all statistics, the devil is in the detail. We are looking to improve them continually, but the fundamental change you have seen is in the actual public health contact tracing policy."*

This is an inaccurate representation of Test and Protect. We do not consider a positive index case contacted until they have been spoken to by a contact tracer over the phone. All contact tracing interviews of people who test positive are carried out by phone and last around an hour. Index cases are attempted reached by phone three times in 24 hours. If they are not reached, a message is sent with instructions to isolate and to call the contact tracing service back, and the case is marked as 'failed'. For higher risk cases, contact tracers will continue to try and speak to a positive case beyond 24 hours. Since the start of reporting, Test and Protect has only failed to contact 8,049 positive cases out of a total of 171,255 cases - 4.7% of the total index cases reported. Test and Protect also only failed to

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contact 13,636 close contacts out of a total of 592,870 contacts – 2.3% of the total close contacts reported.

We also telephone close contacts of people who have tested positive. We constantly monitor our system's capacity and turn to automated SMS messaging of close contacts only when case numbers are high, to ensure high quality calls can continue be prioritised for index cases. Even when SMS is defaulted to in these scenarios, we still call a number of close contacts, particularly if they are linked to complex cases. When we do contact some close contacts of index cases via SMS text message, we use the GOV.UK Notify Service which means we know the SMS has been received by the mobile phone, not just that it has been sent. Where the SMS is not received, a contact tracer will attempt to contact the individual through other means. The case will not be marked as complete unless someone has spoken to them. Contact tracers are on hand to speak to anyone who has received a text message and has questions or concerns to discuss. Since 02 February it has been the default in Scotland that all close contacts, as well as index cases, are phoned and spoken to by a trained contact tracer.

I trust this has been helpful in clarifying the position in Scotland. I would be grateful if you could confirm by reply your plans to write to Select Committee on Science and Technology to correct the official record.

Regards

JEANE FREEMAN