ALARM – Written evidence (RSK0079)

1. What are the most significant extreme risks that the UK faces? Are these kinds of risks discrete, linked or systemic? What do you understand the term 'extreme risk' to mean?

The most significant extreme risks that the UK faces include:
- Failure to mitigate against climate change - systemic
- Failure to adapt the built environment to increased incidence of extreme weather - systemic
- Cyber attacks - systemic
- Widening inequality in economic, health, digital and workforce outcomes – systemic
- Future pandemics - systemic
- Security threats - systemic.

Extreme risk is a risk that has the highest level of impact should it manifest (also termed as catastrophic risk) and one that would have significant impact on the way we operate and function, nationally, regionally and organisationally.

2. Are there types of risks to which the UK is particularly vulnerable or for which it is poorly prepared? What are the reasons for this?

The UK is particularly vulnerable to:
- Transmissible diseases – London in particular is a world hub for international travel.
- Financial risks – in view of world liquidity provided to global markets by UK financial institutions.
- Supply chain shocks due to global nature of our supply chain – poor procurement and contract management practices and lack of UK-based back up infrastructure.
- Coastal erosion due to scenarios not being discussed with or by the affected parts of the country so no solutioning is taking place.
- Flooding due to density of developments, the increasing nature of future flood events and the increase in risk of surface flooding which is hard to predict and model.
- The risks set out in response to question one due to the systemic underfunding and lack of support for public services.

3. How could the Government's approach to risk assessment be strengthened to ensure that it is rigorous, wide-ranging and consistent? Your answer could refer to any aspect of the risk assessment process including, for example, its governance, the evidence base, or the degree to which it is open to scrutiny and the input of experts.

The Government's approach to risk assessment could be strengthened by:
- Conducting regular external reviews of risks on the national risk register. This could be conducted by NAO.
- Engage with local resilience forums across the country to maintain strong overview of regional issues.

- Having clear accountability for mitigating the risks identified.
- Increasing input of experts across the widest possible areas of risk with credence given to that input.
- Facilitating open publication and discussion of the National Risk Register with very close working with local areas to implement mitigation plans, including much more communication with the public on what those risks are and how they may be affected.
- Working closely with local government bodies and organisations.
- Risk assessment is only one element of the process. It is no good understanding what the risks are unless there is commitment and funding to put appropriate mitigation measures in place. The Government's response to COVID-19 is a brilliant example of what happens when the risks are assessed and agreed as significant, but completely ignored by the Government until they materialise.

4. Given the range of possible national risks, and the need to achieve a balance between efficiency and resilience, what level of assurance should the Government be seeking on the UK's resilience to hazards? What would effective national risk management achieve, and how could its success be measured?

- There needs to be clear delineation of the country's appetite to accept risk which should be shared with citizens.
- Truly balance efficiency and resilience – if a risk is identified as extreme, resources must be directed towards mitigating it until it comes within tolerance. Not doing this because of a perceived need for efficiency will result in short-term cost saving at the expense of considerable incurred costs when the risk manifests – as evidence by the current crisis.
- The Government should have an assurance map for each of its risks, identifying the key control measures in place and identifying when they start failing to mitigate the risk as effectively as they should to identify risk hot spots for action.
- Effective national risk management would mean that either identified risks don't manifest or are judged to have moved below accepted tolerance levels or that if risks do manifest they do not have the worst expected impact due to successful response plans being activated.
- The National Risk Register is monitored and input is included from local resilience forums. This enables local response arrangements to be put in place but can feed into more national approaches.
- Effective national risk management should help the country prepare for the next pandemic or extreme weather event by ensuring that every aspect of Government policy and activity considers and plans for these types of risks.

5. How can the Government ensure that it identifies and considers as wide a range of risks as possible? What risks does the inclusion criteria for the National Security Risk Assessment exclude and what effect does this have on long-term resilience?

- Better engagement with resilience forums across the country.
- Ensure that a wide range of experts and stakeholders input into the assessment, through research papers and participation in the risk process.

- Societal risks do not consider the root causes sufficiently meaning we are neglecting the systemic impact of inequality on society and on our ability to respond effectively to other risks.
- Risk assessments should be led by knowledgeable people not politicians.

6. How effectively do current ways of characterising risks (for example, the use of a five-point scoring system of a 'reasonable worst case scenario') support evidence-based policy decisions? What other information would be useful?

- The use of a of a 5x5 risk matrix is a good start however this should be supplemented by a risk velocity assessment - the time is takes for the effects of a risk, if it occurs, to be to be realised. This may then change the respective priorities of risks within the National Risk Register.
- The scoring mechanism is standard risk management practice. This mechanism is only there to prioritise the risks and identify those most in need of further mitigation. This is beneficial if you have a tolerance level or risk appetite overlaid so you can look at what mitigation is needed to bring out of tolerance risk into tolerance. This will enable efficient resource allocation.

7. How effectively do Departments mitigate risks? Does the Risk Assessment process and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat adequately support Government departments to address risks within their remits? Is further oversight or accountability required, and if so, what form should that take?

- Departments work in silos so while they may mitigate their own risks or own aspects of the risks, a joined-up approach would be more effective but is not currently evidenced.
- A better question is whether Departments adequately engage and utilise the expertise within the Risk Assessment and Civil Contingencies Secretariat through taking active ownership of the risks rather than waiting to be supported.

8. How well are national contingency plans communicated to and understood by those at a local level, including emergency responders? What could be changed to increase the capability of local responders to effectively plan for and respond to emergencies?

- Nationwide resilience structures and resources need to be reconsidered post-COVID-19.
- Local resilience forums analyse and discuss the national contingency plans but not consistently so the effectiveness of the forum will drive whether or not this is effective.
- Engaging with local resilience forums should be a priority piece of framework and having a much higher frequency of conversation between the centre and forums individually and collectively would improve planning and response.
- If local resilience forums are working effectively, local emergency responders will understand and can input in local intelligence to provide a measured and targeted response. Local authorities and local resilience forums are usually extremely experienced in responding and effective planning.
- Emergency responders need to be properly funded and resourced.

9. What is the role of the individual in relation to national crises? Are there potential benefits in increasing public involvement and transparency in emergency planning? What limitations are there to this? What lessons have been learnt or should have been learnt about the approach taken to risk assessment and risk planning in this country from the COVID-19 pandemic?

- The Government can build upon the public health campaigns it has run. It needs to be smarter on communication with BAME and hard to reach minorities.
- Local authorities should have their roles enhanced in this respect. Specific grants should be reintroduced/bolstered to improve local resilience. Local authorities and other public service organisations have played an instrumental and essential part in helping to manage the pandemic.
- Making the public aware of the risks potentially facing them will increase the engagement you get from those wanting to help shape and man the response and will also lead to potential community-based solutions to risks, for example, flood wardens in areas prone to flooding or community support networks set up to help those shielding.
- A public health approach is needed on every one of these extreme risks.
- It is more responsibility rather than role and individuals should support local and national responses in whatever way they can but coordinated through local authorities as the subject matter experts for their areas.
- In some areas there are already a lot of community groups working with local authorities to respond and plan for emergencies so there is a coordinated local approach and these relationships have been vital, hence why central Government should be enabling local authorities and other public service organisations to contribute.
- You need subject matter experts coordinating or leading on this or there is a risk that individuals will do their own thing and undo a lot of the planning which causes additional work.
- Lack of speed in taking really hard decisions. We are 12 months into the pandemic and only now is the Government putting in place measures in relation to access to the UK from other countries which should have happened months ago.

10. What challenges are there in developing resilience capability? Your answer could refer to critical infrastructure, but also to systems and networks beyond those elements. What is the role of exercising to test risk preparedness, and are these methods utilised effectively in risk assessment and risk planning in this country?

- Insufficient resourcing of resilience structures at present.
- Prioritising resilience capability in terms of money and other resources. Understanding that resilience always costs less than response is vital.
- Data sharing has been a challenge throughout the pandemic and is a systemic challenge across all risk areas.
- The number of organisations needed to effectively respond and getting them aligned is a challenge. Test exercises help with this point and data sharing as needs are identified and processes and plans set up prior to the real event.

- Planning and exercising taken part across multi-agency disciplines and action plans, and dynamic risk assessments take place as part of this. A way of feeding critical localised information into central Government is to enable a watching brief and enhance escalation as part of an infrastructure.
- Exercising and testing need to be much more commonplace and be acted upon.

11. What can be learnt from local or corporate risk management processes, or those of other countries? Are there any specific examples of practices, processes or considerations which could improve the UK's national risk resilience? How could businesses and civil society more effectively support national resilience preparation?

- Global response to COVID-19
- Institutional authority
- Risk financing
- Information collection and sharing
- Equipment and vaccines
- National response to COVID-19
- Government decision-making
- Public communication
- Health system capabilities
- Lockdown management
- Financial assistance to the vulnerable
- Lessons not just about how to better prepare for the next pandemic, but also an opportunity to enhance risk processes, capabilities and culture
- Formulate analytical frameworks that take a holistic and systems-based view of risk impacts
- Invest in high-profile risk champions to encourage national leadership and international cooperation
- Improve risk communications and combatting misinformation.
- Explore new forms of public-private partnership on risk preparedness
- There are a lot of business and community resilience practices in place on a local level that could inform future planning of the UK's national risk resiliency.

12. What individual or economic behaviours would strengthen national resilience against hazards, and what mechanisms are open to the Government or society to incentivise these behaviours? How should we prioritise any changes required in approach, process or policy needed to improve risk mitigation and strengthen the UK's resilience to extreme risks and emergencies?

- Prioritise a public health type campaign making the public aware of the key risks that could potentially hit them and asking them to engage and respond to them.
- Listen to risk experts and direct resources to those areas which are most likely to happen with the biggest impact.
- Looking at possible future threats and regular occurrences, putting long-term solutions in place to prevent these. We need to invest in these areas to prevent the welfare of our communities and business economy being compromised.

- Put power and resources into local services and structures that are best placed to respond to the needs of their local communities.

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