

## Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviour (SPI-B): Covid-19

### Terms of Reference

1. SPI-B was reconvened in response to the novel coronavirus first reported in the city of Wuhan, China in December 2019. The group continues to play a critical role in ensuring that HM Government is provided with the best possible behavioural science advice as it responds to the Covid-19 epidemic.
2. SPI-B is a subgroup of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), which is chaired by the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA). SPI-B reports directly to SAGE. SAGE is responsible for ensuring that timely and coordinated scientific advice is made available to decision makers to support UK cross-government decisions, including for Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR) and C19-Strategy meetings.
3. The SPI-B Secretariat is held by the Government Office for Science (GO-S).

### Scope

4. SPI-B provides independent, academic and expert advice to assist policy decisions relating to the Covid-19 epidemic. SPI-B advises on:
  - Behavioural and sociological drivers of the covid-19 epidemic, and how this impacts different sociodemographic groups;
  - Understanding of the range of public responses to the epidemic and associated government policy in this context;
  - Best practice in monitoring and evaluation of social and behavioural interventions in response to the Covid-19 epidemic;
  - Strategies for behaviour change, to support control of and recovery from the epidemic and associated government policy.
5. SPI-B will focus on questions that are complex and/or involve issues beyond the capability of individual departments to answer. The existence of SPI-B should not preclude departments commissioning their own behavioural science advice.
6. SPI-B is a science advisory group only. Questions of the proportionality and value for money of policy options are outside of the group's remit.

### Timing and Duration

7. SPI-B meetings will be held as often as required to support government decisions over the duration of the Covid-19 response, in order to coordinate ongoing work of SPI-B subgroups or working groups. SPI-B may also be required to meet on an *ad hoc* basis and at short notice.

### Working groups and subgroups

8. Temporary working groups may be set up to assist SPI-B in considering questions on a particular theme. Outputs will be endorsed by a SPI-B Co-ordination Group. Working groups will be reviewed and stood down once the original questions and any immediate follow-up have been answered.
9. Long-standing SPI-B subgroups may be set up for substantial, long-running themes of significant departmental interest. Each SPI-B subgroup will adhere to the subgroup's Terms of Reference – a model of which can be found in Annex A. Lead departments will provide the secretariat for SPI-B subgroups unless particular circumstances prevent it.

10. Additional SAGE subgroups may also be stood up during the response to tackle a specific issue from a science angle, and some of these will require behavioural expertise. SPI-B participants may be invited to participate in these groups also and will observe the term of reference of these groups in addition to the SPI-B terms of reference.

### **Governance**

11. SPI-B operates under the SAGE advice structure alongside other government expert groups. Science advice to Government is coordinated and prioritised by SAGE and the Science Co-ordination Group in GO-S.
12. SPI-B will provide advice to SAGE, in the form of a consensus view, as and when requested by SAGE or the GCSA. SPI-B will also provide advice direct to other parts of government where advice needs are additional to that provided by existing departmental advice mechanisms, and where this is agreed by the SPI-B Secretariat and GCSA.
13. Questions may be posed to the group by SAGE, Cabinet Office or by policy teams across government.
14. Questions for consideration by SAGE will be prioritised by the GO-S Science Co-ordination Group. Questions posed by departments directly to SPI-B subgroups will be prioritised according to subgroup capacity; the relevant subgroup will make the Science Coordination Group aware.
15. Participants of SPI-B or SPI-B subgroups should consult the SPI-B chair(s) and Secretariat to suggest any additional issues or questions to be discussed, which can be prioritised accordingly.
16. SPI-B meetings are not officially minuted. However, the Secretariat may draft a high-level summary, including actions, from SPI-B meetings. Formal outputs from the group are SPI-B papers and the views recorded in the minutes of SAGE.
17. GO-S and lead departmental customers will be responsible for disseminating advice produced by the subgroup, which may include organising seminars and circulating papers. SPI-B Secretariat will act as a conduit for all requests should SPI-B require additional information or data from other advisory groups or government departments.
18. The SPI-B chair is responsible for:
  - liaising between SPI-B and SAGE, attending SAGE to represent the views and advice of the Group, and providing written and/or verbal updates as and when required;
  - representing SPI-B at the GO-S Science Coordination Group;
  - chairing meetings and moderating offline discussion;
  - signing-off on all advice of the Group.The chair can deputise to other participants of the Group to chair sessions and sign-off on SPI-B products as required.
19. Officials from each of the Devolved Administrations may attend SPI-B or sub-group meetings as observers. Attendance of other observers will be at the discretion of the Chair and Secretariat. Policy officials may attend SPI-B or subgroup meetings where they have an interest in the advice and views of the group, or to provide further context for discussion on specific topics.

### **Expert participation**

20. Participants are experts in behavioural science, psychology, anthropology, criminology, sociology, ethics, human geography, or a related field, drawn from industry, academia, third sector and public sectors. GO-S has a commitment to diversity and recognises the importance of participation from a representative range of sociodemographic groups
21. SPI-B is not a membership body; participants are called upon to advise according to their relevant expertise.

## SPI-B Terms of Reference, Effective from October 2020

22. Science advice will be provided and coordinated by a SPI-B co-ordination group of limited size, supported by specialist subgroups and temporary working groups as necessary. Participants in subgroups will be drawn from a long list of experts, supplemented by additional experts invited to participate as required.
23. The SPI-B co-ordination group comprises the SPI-B subgroup chairs and additional experts in key disciplines, comprised of a representatively diverse group that encompasses a breadth of academic expertise.
24. Experts will be invited to participate in working groups and subgroups by the SPI-B Secretariat on behalf of the Chair. Participation is at the discretion of the Chair and participants will be invited to attend a given meeting if discussions are to be held on an area of their expertise.
25. When invited, participants will:
  - provide expert guidance in discussions relating to an issue, drawing upon their particular area of expertise;
  - directly contribute to the consensus view and decision-making processes of the group, providing high-quality and considered advice;
  - provide expert advice on relevant issues outside of group meetings
  - adhere to the Code of Practice for Science Advisory Committees<sup>1</sup>.
26. SAGE and subgroup participants are not directly remunerated by GOS but may claim reasonable personal expenses. Further assistance may be possible in discussion with the Secretariat, according to the individual commitment required.

### **Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest**

27. In line with GO-S and SAGE transparency policy, SPI-B papers are publicly released after they have been delivered to SAGE, subject to the approval of the GCSA. Content from SPI-B meetings and SPI-B correspondence is confidential until release and must not be discussed outside of government. This includes the nature of participants' specific involvement and all discussions within meetings. Breaches of confidentiality will have a bearing on continued participation.
28. Participants are free to speak to the media as independent experts, but should not speak publicly on behalf of or as a representative of SPI-B unless requested by the chair(s). Participants can disclose their involvement in SAGE and SPI-B.
29. The names and affiliations of everyone who participates in the group will be made public on the SAGE website. A request not to disclose participation will be considered in exceptional circumstances (e.g. on grounds of security) and must be approved by the Secretariat.
30. All participants must declare any potential conflicts of interest to the Secretariat upon acceptance of these terms. This could include, but is not limited to, professional, social, or financial associations, or activities that might, or could be perceived to, undermine the independence and effective operation or deliberations of SPI-B or SAGE in providing advice to the Covid-19 response.
31. Any changes in interests or memberships must be declared to the Secretariat and SPI-B Chair and may have a bearing on continued participation in SPI-B.

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<sup>1</sup> Government Office for Science; Science Advisory Committees Code of Practice  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-committees-code-of-practice>

## **ANNEX A – Model Terms of Reference for SPI-B Subgroups**

### **Purpose**

1. SPI-B subgroups will be established to provide advice on specific policy areas led by individual departments during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each subgroup will focus on the provision of science advice that is cross-cutting in nature and beyond the existing capability of individual departments.
2. Lead departments will provide the secretariat for SPI-B subgroups. If particular circumstances prevent this, SPI-B Secretariat will act as the subgroup secretariat.
3. The subgroup secretariat will act as a conduit for all requests should the subgroup require additional information or data from other subgroups or government departments.

### **Participants**

4. The chair(s) of the SPI-B subgroup will be SPI-B co-ordination group participants. They will attend SPI-B co-ordination group meetings and provide updates on the activity of the subgroup. Further to this, each chair is responsible for liaising between the subgroup and SPI-B, chairing meetings and moderating offline discussion, and signing-off on all output of the subgroup.
5. Participants are invited by the SPI-B Secretariat in association with the SPI-B chair(s) and the subgroup secretariat (if different from the main SPI-B Secretariat).
6. The subgroup draws on a pool of experts in relation to the topics considered and in order to promote diversity of thought. The invitation to participate is at the discretion of the subgroup chair(s).
7. All experts invited to participate in the SPI-B subgroup's work will adhere to the 'Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest' section of the SPI-B terms of reference.

### **Governance**

8. All commissions will be agreed by the subgroup secretariat and the subgroup chair(s). The group will prioritise commissions from SAGE.
9. Lead departments and the subgroup secretariat are responsible for disseminating advice produced by the subgroup, which may include organising seminars and circulating papers.
10. Outputs from SPI-B subgroups are signed off by the subgroup chair and are classified as an output from that specific subgroup. Outputs will not be classified as SPI-B outputs unless they are signed off by the SPI-B co-ordination group at the request of the relevant subgroup chair. Outputs for SAGE will be channelled through the SPI-B co-ordination group before being tabled at SAGE.
11. By default and in line with GO-S and SAGE transparency policy, SPI-B papers are publicly released after they have been delivered to SAGE. The release of all SPI-B papers is subject to the approval of the GCSA. SPI-B subgroup papers submitted in response to departmental commissions may also be publicly released with GCSA approval. Redactions will be limited and will be applied to protect personal data of individuals and to protect national security.