

Terms of Reference: Events Research Programme

Context

The government's publication of 22 February, 'COVID-19 Response – Spring 2021' ('the roadmap'), describes plans to explore when and how events with larger crowd sizes, less social distancing, or in settings where transmission is more likely, will be able to return safely.

The Events Research Programme, announced in the roadmap, will oversee this work, bringing findings from across different settings and different sectors to determine a consistent approach to lifting restrictions on events, in the hope that the government will be able to do so as part of Step 4 of the roadmap.

Objectives

The Events Research Programme will oversee a range of pilot events in Spring/Summer to build evidence on the risks associated with Covid-19 transmission routes, the characteristics of events and surrounding activities, and the extent to which mitigation measures can effectively address these risks. The evidence from these pilot events will be used to inform the government's decision around Step 4 of the roadmap and will shape government policy to bring about the phased return of fuller audiences to venues and events up and down England.

Scope

The Events Research Programme will focus on the measures necessary to ensure safe return of large events and closed settings, which the roadmap envisages as part of Step 4. It will not be responsible for advising on the timing of this reopening; this will be decided by Ministers as part of the overall package of roadmap steps.

The Events Research Programme will explore how this reopening can be conducted safely, including without social distancing. The programme will gather evidence, and inform the evidence-gathering taking place elsewhere in government, on the precautions which can be taken to allow large events to resume without jeopardising the broader objectives of the government's pandemic response. This will include a consideration of the role of testing, though the Events Research Programme will not have any role in the delivery of testing programmes. Other relevant reviews and working groups will be taken into account to identify the best-practice approaches for conducting the Events Research Programme and work undertaken by government, for example on vaccine rollout, social distancing, and other forms of certification. The Events Research Programme will not be responsible for the government's wider review of social distancing, also described in the roadmap, though the programme's evidence will contribute to this process.

The remit of the programme includes but is not limited to: sports events; music festivals; theatres; stadium events; concerts; large weddings; nightclubs; conferences. The research will examine a range of settings to produce generalisable results that can be applied in analogous settings and in other sectors.

The pilot events will examine a range of factors, including but not limited to: indoor and outdoor settings; small and large venues; seated and standing events; different forms of audience participation; transport to and from events; duration; ventilation.

The data and analysis from the Events Research Programme will not inform decisions taken as to whether adjacent sectors to those described above, such as transport, hotels, restaurants, pubs, etc. should be reopened.

Process and timings

The Events Research Programme is being led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), with support from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC).

Due to the ambition set out in the roadmap to fully reopen all sectors by 21 June, the pilot events will be run as soon as is practicable. Each event will be subject to formal approval from a scientific, delivery and policy perspective, as well as ministerial approval, prior to going ahead.

The programme will report to the Prime Minister through the joint Chief Advisers to the Events Research Programme and will be led by the DCMS Secretary of State. The Events Research Programme will provide regular updates on its work, with a final report due by the end of May. While the DCMS Secretary of State is responsible for overseeing the Events Research Programme, this will not change DCMS's current departmental policy responsibilities.

Governance

The governance structure of the Events Research Programme comprises of:

- The joint Chief Advisers, Sir Nicholas Hytner and David Ross, will co-chair a small, advisory Senior Steering Board. The Chief Advisers will oversee the Events Research Programme, reporting into the Prime Minister. The Events Research Programme will be led by the Secretary of State for DCMS, and will advise other Secretaries of State, including BEIS and DHSC. The Chief Advisers will draw on the expertise in existing groups and task forces established by DCMS to explore how events will be returned safely and advise Ministers on the approach to the return of events.
- A Joint Programme Board chaired by the Event Research Programme's joint Senior Responsible Officers. The Joint Programme Board will work across government to inform policy development on reopening sectors ahead of Step 4 of the roadmap.
- A Science Board with an independent chair. The Science Board will provide scientific assurance across the programme and ensure events are following ethical and scientific principles and will generate evidence of sufficient quality to inform decisions.