Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer
Department of Health
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

28 May 2021

Dear Dr Holohan,

As you are aware an expert advisory group on Travel was established on 1 March 2021. Following a Government Decision on 9 April, membership of this group was augmented to include expertise on border security, hotel quarantine logistics, international travel law and foreign relations. This entails official representation from the Department of Justice, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Defence. This revised composition allows for consultation with a wider group of stakeholders at an earlier point in the process. As Chair of this group I consider that it is working well as a means of enabling colleagues in other Departments to understand the depth and breadth of analysis being brought by the technical experts to this challenging task.

Following the most recent meeting of the EAGT, on 28 May, the most recent international epidemiological situation was assessed and discussed. The Technical Advisory Sub-group (TAS) Chair, Dr O'Flanagan, presented the enclosed technical report to the group advising of the current methodological approach and the sub-group's recommendations with regard to designation and revocation of Designated States, as provided for in the Health Act 1947, where "*there is known to be a sustained human transmission of COVID-19 or any variant of concern or from which there is a high risk of importation of infection or contamination with COVID-19 or any variant of concern by travel from that state"*.

The group discussed the detail of the technical report and agreed the report would be forwarded to the Chief Medical Officer to inform your advice to the Minister on the designation and revocation of Designated States under the Health Act 1947. Following consideration of the sub-group's technical report, the group noted the following:

Following a review of the epidemiological situation no additional countries are recommended for designation at this time. It is recommended that **Belgium, France and the United States of America** be revoked as a designated state on the basis of variant of concern (VOC).

Following a review of the incidence data no further designations or revocations are advised at this time. Following a review of the epidemiological situation with respect to variants of concern it is recommended to continue to designate **Canada and Luxembourg**.

Following agreement at the meeting of 21 May the Technical Advisory Subgroup in collaboration with HSE-HPSC have developed a risk matrix which was discussed at the EAGT. This matrix takes account of a composite of measures including VOC; Incidence; Testing; Vaccination; Travel and broader information, with the latter taking consideration of information relating to informing designation on the UK Red list and third countries listed as 'Annex I' countries by the European Commission. Subject to any amendment, validation, and acceptance by the EAGT I will provide fuller detail in relation to same prior to its adoption. The EAGT welcomed the development of the matrix approach. It noted assurances from the technical advisory group that processes are adaptable and kept under continuing review in the context of changing epidemiology both domestically and internationally, and has welcomed both a review and revision of the multiplier informing the threshold of high risk incidence criterion, and the planned transition to the risk matrix-based approach.

The EAGT notes that potential reduced vaccine efficacy against VOCs, including preliminary data from the UK in relation to the B.1.617 variant, remain a concern, and understand that separate risk assessments are being conducted, on a regular basis, with respect to same. The EAGT continues to support the exemption from MHQ for persons fully vaccinated[1] with an EMA (European Medicines Agency) authorised vaccine[2] or equivalent, and welcomes the consideration of vaccination as part of the risk matrix.

The EAGT also notes that following the continued improvement in the epidemiological situation across Europe, no countries are being proposed for designation based on incidence rates. Members noted that to date the Minister and the Government have been open only to the application of the VOC

[1] An individual is considered fully vaccinated 7 days after the second dose of Pfizer/BioNTech/Comirnaty®, 14 days after second dose of Moderna®, 15 days after the second dose of Vaxzevria®/AstraZeneca and 14 days after Johnson & Johnson/Janssen® vaccine
https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/covid19vaccineinfo4hps/clinicalguidance.pdf
[2] Currently EMA approved vaccines include Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson/Janssen https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/treatments-vaccines-covid-19

criteria when considering designation of EU/EEA countries, noting additionally the economic and diplomatic implications decisions on designation can have.

Finally, the EAGT continues to favour weekly reviews of epidemiological data with a view to timely revocation of designated status where such a decision can be supported on public health grounds, and as per previously agreed process, now meets on a weekly basis.

I hope this information is useful to you, to ensure that your advice to the Minister for Health in relation to designation of states under section 38E of the Health Act 1947 continues to be informed by the best available and most recent data and analysis.

Yours sincerely,

Fergal Goodman

Chair Expert Advisory Group on Travel