

## IEMAG

**Minutes of meeting – Thursday 30 June 2022**

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**Attendees:** Philip Nolan (Chair), Catherine Timoney, Cathal Walsh, Chris Brunsdon, Conor Keegan, Conor McAloon, Conor Teljeur, Darren Dahly, Eilis O'Reilly, Francis Butler, James P Gleeson, Jim Duggan, Katie O'Brien, Maire Connolly, Máirín Ryan, Mark Roantree, Seán Lyons,

**Apologies:** Ajay Oza, Alan Cahill, Ann Barber, Breda Smyth, Brendan Murphy, Elizabeth Hunter, Eoghan McCarthy, Guy McGrath, Jamie Madden, John Kelleher, Justin Gleeson, Malachy Corcoran, Patrick Wall, Simon More

**DOH:** Elizabeth McCrohan, Ronan O'Kelly, Nikita Ellul

**Secretariat:** Darragh Turner, Fiona Tynan, Ivan Murphy

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**Chair's Update**

- The Chair welcomed the group and outlined the agenda for the meeting.

**Update on HPSC Modelling & Biostatistics Unit**

- The establishment of the modelling and biostatistics unit within the HPSC is progressing but has not yet been finalised.
- The Department of Health is supporting the establishment of the unit and there is HSE budget approval.
- Job descriptions are completed for three data analysts, a data scientist, IT support, and a project manager. Recruitment has not yet commenced.

**Seroprevalence Estimates of Infection**

- The HPSC presented results from collection cycle 1 of the National Serosurveillance Programme. These results will be published online in the week of 4 July 2022.
- The group discussed the benefits and limitations of SARS-CoV-2 serosurveillance, highlighting the importance of enhancing and sustaining this work for future pandemic preparedness.

**Wastewater Surveillance**

- The HPSC presented the most recent results from the National SARS-CoV-2 Wastewater Surveillance Programme. These results are available on the [HPSC website](#).
- The group discussed the value of wastewater surveillance for estimating disease prevalence as levels of testing are scaled down and the importance of continuing to build wastewater surveillance capacity as an early warning system for novel variants or future pandemics.

**Data Engineering Update**

- The data engineering group are looking at the broader issue of interoperability and how new data assets can be created for public healthcare systems. Data governance remains an important challenge. The group have recently submitted an academic paper for publication.
- The group discussed the importance of advocating for unique health identifiers and looking at what other countries are doing in terms of bioinformatics.

**Other Subgroup Updates**

- An academic paper on the age-cohort model is being prepared for publication. The theme is using operations research to solve real world problems.

**Wind down of IEMAG & Skills Transfer**

- The Chair advised that the group is now in a position to wind down. Ireland is now in a phase of the COVID-19 pandemic where population immunity and protection is at such a high level that the biostatistical analysis and scenario modelling that was of such importance in the earlier phases of the pandemic is now of limited value in guiding public policy. The focus now should be on institutionalizing and embedding biostatistical and modelling expertise within the public health system.
- IEMAG will reconvene in Autumn 2022 to review progress on the establishment of the modelling and biostatistics unit in the HPSC and will advise the CMO on the establishment of a small Scientific Advisory Group. This group will oversee the transfer of the tools and technologies developed by IEMAG to the HPSC, and act as a standing advisory group to mentor and develop the new unit.
- In the interim, should there be a public health threat or emergency which requires the expertise of IEMAG, the group will remobilize if requested to do so by the CMO.

**AOB**

- The Chair commended the groups work and discussed the importance of continuing research projects that would be useful in preparing for future threats. The Chair discussed plans for a focused call for specific research that would help in preparing for future pandemics, sponsored between Science Foundation Ireland and the Health Research Board.
- The Chair thanked each member of the group for giving their time and expertise, in a voluntary capacity and in addition to their other duties, to conduct the biostatistical and modelling work which was so important to the national pandemic response. The Chair expressed his gratitude to the IEMAG for the quality and quantity of work over an intense and sustained period of time. The Chair also paid tribute to the many colleagues in the DOH, the HPSC and the HSE, who supported the groups' work.

**Actions:**

1	IEMAG will now wind down.
2	IEMAG will reconvene in Autumn 2022 to review progress on the establishment of the modelling and biostatistics unit in the HPSC and will advise the CMO on the establishment of a small Scientific Advisory Group.
3	Should there be a public health threat or emergency which requires the expertise of IEMAG, the group will remobilize if requested to do so by the CMO.