

28 April 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Cc Health Secretary, Chief Medical Officer, Chief Scientific Advisor

We write together to you today to call for greater transparency and public involvement as we move towards phase two of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We appreciate the promise you made yesterday to ensure “maximum transparency” about how decisions to tackle COVID-19 are being made. These are critically important issues that engage every person in the UK. We need to talk about them together.

We welcome the fact that the Government has, throughout, been guided by scientific advice. But following the science is not enough. While science can predict their likely effects, it cannot determine the choice of strategies. It can help define the level of risk, but not which risks are worth running. Science does not provide certainty and it cannot deliver policy decisions alone. These questions of policy necessarily involve judgements and values. The public need to know and understand what values are in play and what judgements are being made and on what advice. But Government also needs to attend to the values expressed by all sections of society in response to this unprecedented situation. Ultimately Government must be accountable.

Phase two of the response to COVID-19 must address many questions of how different interests and risks are being balanced (for example, the needs of those who are economically very precarious, and those who are at greater risk of complications from COVID-19, especially older people); of what interests take priority and why; of who will bear the greater burdens and why that is fair; of what principles or values are informing the decisions about how to move forward; and what lasting effects to their way of life people will be asked to accept.

Engaging with, and accounting in a transparent way to, all sections of society for the decisions that are taken is essential for trust and trustworthiness. We call on you today to:

- **Show** the public what you are doing and thinking across the range of issues of concern
- **Set out** the ethical considerations that are informing judgements
- **Explain** how you have arrived at decisions including where your advice is from
- **Invite** a broad range of perspectives into the discussion, including wider cross public representation
- **Think ahead – consult and engage** other civic interests through genuinely open for a and deliberative processes such as citizens’ assemblies

The urgency of the situation presents huge challenges for Government and for policymakers. But the implications of COVID-19 and our responses to them involve everyone. It is essential for effective policy and for social cohesion, in both the short and long term, that key decisions are taken with the widest possible engagement across all sections of society.

Yours Sincerely,

Dave Archard

Chair

Nuffield Council on Bioethics

Tim Hughes

Director

The Involve Foundation (Involve)