



1 November 2021

Victoria Muninn
fyi-request-17008-b02b3439@requests.fyi.org.nz

Ref: OIA-2021/22-0373

Dear Victoria Muninn

Official Information Act request relating to behavioural scientists employed across government

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 2 October 2021. You requested:

“How many behavioural scientists are being employed across government internally, as individual consultants, or part of a consulting company, as part of the Covid-19 response; which ministries or cross-ministry units or groups are they employed by; to which ministries are they attached; and what are those units or groups' names?”

Please provide a brief description outlining the focus and activities of each consultant, unit, or group.

In respect of the BIT, please also provide any documentation relating to the establishment of the Wellington office in New Zealand, as well as all communications related to its establishment with the UK Cabinet Office, No. 10 Downing Street, and innovation charity Nesta.”

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet holds one active contract with Dr Sarb Johal of Equanimity Limited to provide relevant clinical psychological expertise to support, guide, and inform the COVID-19 Group's strategic thinking and work programme development. While it might not be outright behavioural science, the COVID-19 Group has also commissioned The Research Agency and Moana Group to survey sentiments and understand behaviours of New Zealanders, to build a better picture of how people are feeling and improve our response to COVID-19. You can find out more about this research on the Unite Against COVID-19 website: covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/proactive-releases/research/

I note the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has received support from the Ministry of Justice's Behavioural Sciences Aotearoa in relation to behavioural insight reporting as part of the COVID-19 response. To this end, I would have transferred your request to the Ministry of Justice, however, I understand you have made a similar request to the Ministry already, and therefore have decided that such a transfer is unnecessary at this time.

I also note that you have requested this information from New Zealand Police, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry for Primary Industries. I trust each agency will respond to your request as far as it relates to them.

In relation to the second part of your request, relating to documentation regarding the establishment of the Behavioural Insights Team, I do not believe that the information is held by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, or any other New Zealand Government agency or Minister of the Crown, therefore I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

We do not intend to publish this response on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website, as no information has been identified for release.

Yours sincerely



Cheryl Barnes
Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Group