



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the office of Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation (Lords)
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By email to: Lord Kinnoull, euclords@parliament.uk

13 July 2020

Dear Lord Kinnoull,

C(2020)2296 : COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION on a common Union toolbox for the use of technology and data to combat and exit from the COVID-19 crisis, in particular concerning mobile applications and the use of anonymised mobility data

C(2020)2523 : COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION: Guidance on apps supporting the fight against COVID 19 pandemic in relation to data protection

Thank you for your letter of 29 June with further questions on the NHS COVID-19 App. As you note we have recently changed our approach to the app. I am happy to provide responses to your questions on the understanding that as we learn from the next stage of development, testing and preparing to roll out nationally it is possible that these will change.

Is the Government seeking to make any changes to [the Google/Apple] API or make any bespoke amendments? If so, what are these proposals?

Our new, de-centralised approach uses the Google/Apple 'Exposure Notification Framework' API. The framework limits the data on exposures that are transmitted between phones and to servers. In this case, the framework also narrowly defines what constitutes an exposure. All of the matching between phones takes place on each device, ensuring that each user's identity and social interactions are not shared with a server. We are now working towards a solution that brings together our app, and the Google/Apple API, particularly around estimating distance between users of the app which the Google/Apple solution does not currently do in the way we require. As we progress our development and testing, we will better understand what, if any, amendments may be needed.

When will the NHS app be launched? What is the Government's assessment of this delay's impact on the effectiveness of the test, track and trace system?

We will only release the app nationally when we are confident it is ready. As far as we can, we want the app to be trusted by, and work for, the 79% of UK adults who have a smartphone.

The app is part of the wider NHS Test and Trace service which brings together testing, contact tracing and outbreak management into an end-to-end service. We have prioritised the human-centred Test and Trace service as the fundamental component of our fight against COVID-19. We made the decision to ensure the Test and Trace service was operating effectively before introducing the app nationally.

What is the Government doing to learn from the experiences [of other European countries]?

We have actively engaged with other countries since March 2020 when we started work to develop an app. We are sharing learning and best practice through regular engagement with international partners including Germany, Switzerland, New Zealand and others. We are sharing source code, exchanging information on how to solve technical challenges, and addressing issues of shared concern.

Ultimately, each country will have to adapt its approach to digital contact tracing to its own local context, including integration with its own test and trace programme.

Will the UK app be designed to meet the EU's technical specifications to ensure interoperability? In particular, what is the Government doing to ensure that the UK app will be effective as users travel within the common travel area with the Republic of Ireland?

Interoperability is a key consideration for us as we take forward the app's development. Using the Google/Apple framework facilitates technical interoperability between countries using a similar approach. We are engaging colleagues in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on this and will continue to work with them on this issue as a priority.

Thank you for your continued interest in making sure we have an effective NHS COVID-19 App to support our fight against coronavirus.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bethell', is centered on the page.

LORD BETHELL