



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation (Lords)*

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Lord Kinnoull
Chair
European Union Committee
House of Lords
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13 November 2020

Dear Lord Kinnoull,

Thank you for your letter dated 30 October concerning the NHS Covid-19 contact tracing app. As of 5 November, the NHS Covid-19 app became interoperable with the contact tracing apps in operation in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Gibraltar, & Jersey. The agreement underpinning this arrangement was negotiated and signed jointly by all parties on 28th October. Our phased approach to delivering this technical solution, whereby the NearForm-built apps relying on very similar underlying architecture connected first, ensured that we had in place all necessary technical, security and governance measures to guarantee a successful launch. With interoperability now in place, we will continue to work with colleagues in the Devolved Administrations, Jersey, and Gibraltar to maintain this functionality and deliver further benefits to app users across the UK.

We can further build upon this success by continuing to work together as we explore the potential for international interoperability, across Europe and beyond. Officials have spoken with the European Commission to understand any barriers and explore opportunities. We are also working with teams across government to understand what data sharing agreements may need to be in place to facilitate interoperability between the NHS Covid-19 contact tracing app and those of our European neighbours. Our cooperation with our European partners on this matter has the potential to yield clear benefits to citizens, especially ahead of an eventual resumption of international travel

Thank you for highlighting the issue that affected some users who attempted to use the app when their phone was set to an unsupported language. We monitor feedback closely from users and had registered this as a technical issue requiring resolution. We released an update to the app on 29th October which has resolved the issue. We continue to work to ensure the NHS COVID-19 app is accessible to all who want to use it. The app is currently available in 11 languages in addition to

English. These languages were prioritised based on which are most widely spoken in the UK by those who are least likely to have access to English as a second language. Languages such as French and Spanish are in the top 10 most widely spoken after English and Welsh, however they have a higher percentage of speaking population proficient in English. The technical changes we have made will ensure that users can access the app automatically in 12 languages according to the settings of their phone, defaulting to English if the phone is set to a language other than these. We are also introducing a language toggle setting in the app, in order to give users greater flexibility over how they access the app.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you or the other members of the European Union Committee have further questions on this subject.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bethell', written in a cursive style.

Lord Bethell