

## Supplementary Written Evidence Submitted by Paul Gliddon (C190116)

The UK government, in a controversial move, is looking at Covid vaccination passports as a seeming response to Covid 19. Although the idea itself is controversial enough, there's a lot of debate in the UK about how meaningful (or otherwise) the official 'public consultation' on the issue has been, and the apparent determination to impose these passports anyway.

Some critics of the scheme have now found out that plans for 'vax passports' aren't all that new after all. It turns out that before Brexit happened in January 2020, plans were being made at EU level for a European 'common vaccination passport'. As a then-EU member, the UK was involved in this proposal, and enough information exists about it to identify a few findings about vax passports:

- Vaccination passports, whether national or international, were planned before Covid 19 emerged.
- Covid is not the reason to implement them, instead it's being used as the excuse.
- Vax passports are not limited to tackling Covid, but are devised to amass all sorts of data about each individual.
- They are designed as a permanent measure, not a temporary one. Even if Covid 19 were no longer a threat, the threat of the passports would continue.
- Cross-border schemes in Europe are devised to integrate with national schemes.
- Vax passports may previously have been a well-intentioned idea, limited to dealing with concerns about communicable disease, but in politicians' hands they offer a means for state surveillance and social control.

The above gives a gist, but for the *really* interested, more can be said about vax passports:

The idea of vaccination passports, both nationally and EU-wide, took off in a big way in 2018, although the idea, in a very basic and limited form, dates back well before then. But that year, pressure for vax passports at EU level increased, amid fears about low immunisation uptakes (see below for more information on the institutions involved). As the pressure stepped up, so did the scheme's ambitious scope. As an EU-member state until 2020, the UK was involved in work on the scheme.

Evidently, despite leaving the EU, the UK did not abandon the idea of vax passports. It's hardly a coincidence that the UK was contributing to discussions about vaccination passports until 'Brexit' in January 2020, and then later the same year, journalists found out that the British government (despite many repeated denials) was working on a scheme to introduce such passports in the UK.

High-level discussions of vaccination passports indicate that elites in politics and health services, within and beyond the EU, have uncritically accepted the idea of the passports. There will be some well-intentioned participants who welcome them as an aid to health policy (i.e. combating infectious diseases), while other supporters have seen a wider potential, i.e. for social control. The more well-intentioned apparently have ignored, or simply not realised, the possible downsides. There is no sense from such discussions of any awareness of possible pros and cons. In short, as often happens a sort of 'groupthink' has emerged within the Whitehall, Brussels and Strasbourg 'bubble.'

Vaccination passports were initially designed as a fairly basic measure: assisting patients to maintain up-to-date vaccination status, helping health authorities to maintain reliable records, etc. However, their linkage to electronic databases, smart phones carried by individuals, and the recent background of non-pharmaceutical intervention in response to Covid 19, may make them open to abuse by governments. Vax passports offer a temptation for social control and surveillance that today's political elites are apparently finding hard to resist.

In other words, in the hands of those who find power and control addictive (in such quarters 'control freakery' is virtually an epidemic worse than Covid 19) they are the ultimate 'fix.'

As the more detailed account below shows, vax passports will not be confined to confirming each person's 'Covid vaccination status.' On the contrary, they are designed to be part of a very extensive health profile, for each individual, linked to national and EU-wide databases. Nor are they intended to be merely temporary measures - quite the reverse: they're designed to support a policy of lifelong and up-to-date vaccination, and so by definition cannot possibly be temporary. And decisions taken about the scheme indicate that a 'common vaccination passport' at EU level, for cross-border use will be linked to national schemes for domestic use (in fact some countries already have such schemes).

In summary, quite a few myths about such passports can be dispensed with. They are not a response to Covid, will not be temporary, will not be limited to dealing with Covid, and they will involve a measure of internal state control as well as cross-border control. They also have downsides in that they are hardly practical or useful, and will damage relations between individuals and the state (see Appendix).

To fill out the above picture: the *really, really* interested might want to look a little more closely at available information about EU-level discussions:

Pre-Brexit, the UK was represented in all the EU's institutions. As far as I can tell, the following ones in particular were important in devising the vaccination passports policy:

- British health ministers liaised with their counterparts in Europe on health policy, and subsequent reporting to Westminster tended to be

vague. Probably only people (like me) who go to a lot of effort to find out what's going on would probably find out anything much. These ministers, EU-wide, approved a common vaccination passport in December 2018 (1). But probably few, if any, MPs or peers were aware of this at all, let alone the possible implications.

- Even if parliamentarians had been aware, they might have assumed that because the UK would be leaving the EU the issue would be merely academic. In fact, proposals for vaccination passports assume that national and international measures will complement each other (2). And the UK government shows every sign of taking this on board even post-Brexit.
- In practice, British health ministers relied on senior UK civil servants (the Permanent Representatives to the EU or their deputies), who undertook the detailed preparation for Council of Ministers' decisions.
- The European Commission put proposals to health ministers (the Council of Ministers), but depended especially on specialised input from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Health Parliament (see Appendix).

It's worth quoting what some EU-level supporters of vaccination passports were saying in 2018. They had quite ambitious plans: a common vaccination passport across the EU would be part of each person's 'overall personal electronic health record', which would 'ease surveillance and data collection' and assist healthcare professionals in 'tracking and verifying the immunisation history of EU citizens', at a 'national, EU and global level' (3).

Surveillance, tracking and verifying, in the sense that health professionals think, involves keeping up-to-date with prevalence of disease and aggregate levels of data on disease. However, the terms surveillance, tracking and verifying might well appeal in a different way to politicians and civil servants at a senior level. These things might be (and indications in the UK are that they're set to be) applied in a more sinister respect, i.e. state control of access to facilities and services, and prevailing upon people to police each other by requiring vaccination status to be presented.

This is not far-fetched, since in the UK, tracking and monitoring is already happening as the state currently requires people to give their names and contact details when accessing hospitality and leisure, and staff in those facilities have to implement this.

In fact, as the Covid situation in the UK has improved during 2021, those who govern have not relaxed their hold on people's day-to-day behaviour, but have actually tightened their grip. For instance, each individual is now required to give contact details rather than just one person in a group when visiting premises, and draconian penalties for transgressing the Covid rules have been increased.

Such social control was not an inevitable outcome of vaccination passports when they were first proposed but experience of the UK already shows that governments are only too ready to exercise and step up such control.

Overall, it's clear that vaccination passports, either at EU or national level, are not a response to Covid 19. On the contrary, plans were being laid for them long before Covid came on the scene, so Covid provided the excuse. Health practitioners probably did not originally intend vax passports to be a way of controlling people's access to facilities and services. However, politicians have taken the opportunity to expand this scheme into one of domestic surveillance and control. In the case of the UK, although we can't prevent other countries making a vax passport a condition of entry to their territories, that shouldn't automatically mean that British citizens should be required to have vax passports for activities here. But it is cause for concern that there are people at all levels in the UK, from senior government level to staff doing jobs 'at the coal-face', who have found this sort of coercion highly addictive, and who would embrace vax passports. This does not make for a socially (or even medically) healthy community.

## Appendix

### A. Vaccination passports and immunity passports

A distinction to be made is between:

- Covid vaccination passports (which give proof of vaccination against Covid 19), *and, alternatively:*
- Covid immunity passports (which give proof of immunity against Covid 19, either by vaccination or by recovery from previous infection).

Many of the objections to Covid vaccination passports ('vax passports' for short) apply also to Covid immunity passports.

### B. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Health Parliament (EHP)

Senior medical officers of EU member states (including the UK before Brexit) met in the ECDC, whose discussions seem to be quite obscured from the public.

The EU's so-called 'European Health Parliament' is a talking shop between selected health professionals, who liaise closely with commercial interests (including vaccination producers), the European Parliament and the European Commission. Its membership again is obscure but a reasonable assumption is that the UK played a part in this (though this cannot be confirmed for certain) and it does make some information about its activities publicly available.

Incidentally, the European Parliament (as distinct from the EHP) has supported measures to reduce vaccine hesitancy generally, but doesn't seem to have adopted a formal resolution approving vax passports specifically.

### **C. Summary of downsides to vax passports**

Opponents of vax passports within the UK argue that they would have serious consequences, including the following:

- A vax passport will have little or no practical use, as in the long-term only a minority can have it on the basis of a recent enough (or indeed any) vaccination.
- It's uncertain whether Covid 19 vaccinations will be effective against transmission of the virus, or against future mutations, so a vax passport might be of no use anyway.
- Additionally, it's uncertain how long any protection against Covid 19 from vaccination or previous infection might last.
- A UK vax passport is unnecessary, because if the Covid 19 vaccine works well in preventing serious illness (as it seems to) then people (including those considered particularly vulnerable) can choose to have it. Should things turn out otherwise then the vax passport would have no value anyway.
- Vax passports would be discriminatory and repressive, aggravating inequality and giving the state excessive control over the population.
- They would be unethical in various other ways, including infringement of the right to privacy, and bringing about mandatory vaccination by the back door.
- There is concern that vaccination passports might have the opposite effect on vaccination hesitancy to that intended by their supporters. Such measures might increase suspicion of vaccination rather than encouraging the public to engage with vaccination.

There are many other objections, omitted here for reasons of space.

### **D. Vaccination passports and wider health policy**

Some advocates of vax passports have idealistic aims: eradication or elimination of some infectious diseases in Europe (e.g. measles, rubella), and vax passports are among the ideas suggested to further these aims. There's an obvious comparison with a hope in some quarters that zero or maximum suppression of Covid 19 might be sought in many countries including the UK, although the feasibility of this is the subject of intense debate.

#### Notes

(All sources accessed 7 April 2021)

(1) Council Recommendation of 7 December 2018 on strengthening cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases (2018/C 466/01), The Official Journal of the European Union C 466/1, 28 December 2018. Available at:

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1228\(01\)&from=GA](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H1228(01)&from=GA)

(2) Council Recommendation (as above), and:

European Health Parliament (2018), Committee on a European Vaccine Initiative: Knowledge is the best vaccine. Available at:  
<https://www.healthparliament.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Knowledge-is-the-best-vaccine.pdf>

European Health Parliament (2018), European Health Parliament 2017-2018: a promotional booklet for the European Health Parliament. Available at:  
[http://www.activecitizenship.net/files/patients\\_rights/events/the-challenges-of-life-course-vaccination-to-enhance-public-health-protection-in-europe-a-multi-stakeholder-approach/Calabro.pdf](http://www.activecitizenship.net/files/patients_rights/events/the-challenges-of-life-course-vaccination-to-enhance-public-health-protection-in-europe-a-multi-stakeholder-approach/Calabro.pdf)

(3) European Health Parliament (2018), European Health Parliament 2017-2018: a promotional booklet for the European Health Parliament. Available as above.

Other sources used in this account are:

Acumen Public Affairs (2018), The challenges of life-course vaccination to enhance public health protection in Europe: a multi-stakeholder approach, 28 February 2018, European Parliament. Available at:  
<http://www.interestgroup.activecitizenship.net/files/news-and-events/the-challenges-of-life-course-vaccination-to-enhance-public-health-protection-in-europe-a-multi-stakeholder-approach-key-notes.pdf>

European Commission DG Health and Food Safety (2018), 14<sup>th</sup> eHealth Network 13 November 2018, cover note by eHealth network secretariat. Available at:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/ehealth/docs/ev\\_201811135\\_co015\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/ehealth/docs/ev_201811135_co015_en.pdf)

A European Commission, 'Roadmap on vaccination', update: Q3 2019, is also available via the EU website.

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