

STATEMENT BY INDEPENDENT SAGE ON THE HOUSE OF COMMONS REPORT “CORONAVIRUS: LESSONS LEARNED TO DATE”

Independent SAGE welcomes [today's report](#) by the Commons Health and Social Care and Science and Technology Committees, “Coronavirus: lessons learned to date”. The report criticises how “the UK approach reflected a consensus between official scientific advisers and the Government [indicating] a degree of groupthink (*sic*) that was present at the time which meant we were not as open to approaches being taken elsewhere as we should have been”. It also calls for greater transparency, including rapid publication of the advice it receives. This also demonstrates the inadequacy of how the government claimed to be “following the science”. These concerns were exactly the rationale for forming [Independent SAGE](#), set up in April 2020, at a time when the membership of SAGE and its advice were still secret.

Many of the criticisms of the government's response echo those that we made at the time, such as the failings of the approach to [Test, Trace, and Isolate](#) and the disproportionate impact on [minoritised populations](#). We particularly note concerns about the failure to draw on experience from other countries, evidence that has informed our work throughout, drawing on the extensive international engagement of our members. These inadequacies continue. For instance, current government policy on COVID safety in schools and eligibility of children for vaccination are confused, lack transparency, and are not following best practice from abroad. However, the important thing now is to incorporate these lessons into the continuing response to this deadly pandemic.

Independent SAGE now calls on the government to implement the recommendations of the Committees in full, noting in particular:

- *“Plans for the future should include a substantial and systematic method of learning from international practice during the course of an emergency.”*
- *“In a pandemic, the scientific advice from the SAGE co-chairs to the Government should be published within 24 hours of it being given, or the policy being decided, whichever is the later, to ensure the opportunity for rapid scientific challenge and guard against the risk of ‘groupthink’. In addition, minutes and SAGE papers should be published within 48 hours of the meeting taking place.”*

The report presents a wealth of material that will require careful and methodical reading but it also raises many further questions. Consequently, Independent SAGE calls on:

- The scientific community in the UK to convene its own inquiry into the generation and use of scientific advice, ensuring that those undertaking the inquiry include substantial representation of scientists from outside the UK, and with a wider spectrum of relevant disciplines and experience, including public health academics. The aim of this inquiry would be to provide recommendations to ensure the UK's scientific advisory mechanisms are future-proof and fit for purpose.
- Officials to undertake a rapid assessment of areas where the UK remains out of line with policies and practices elsewhere and, where it is considered that the UK's policy should be, as the Report described, “*particular and, in some respects exceptional*”. In these instances the rationale for deviation from what is done elsewhere should be clearly articulated. Priority areas include [ventilation of public spaces](#), mask wearing in closed and crowded spaces like public transport, and measures to control [spread in schools](#)
- The Report's call for rapid publication of advice by SAGE to be [extended to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation](#).