

Exhibit 610

Government's ethics committee shut down after
challenging the ethical basis of
key pandemic policies

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Government's ethics committee shut down after challenging the ethical basis of key pandemic policies

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In a new book published this week — **THE ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICIT** — Molly, Arabella and Ben of UsForThem have revealed that senior officials at the Department for Health and Social Care sidelined and then demobilised the Government's committee

of expert ethics advisors at the height of the pandemic and following a series of unwelcome challenges to the Government's policy ambitions.

With a trail of evidence lifted from official published records, they have documented the brief life and premature demise of the Government's expert group of moral and ethical advisors known as MEAG. Two former members of MEAG agreed to be interviewed and quoted about what happened, provided they were not named.

UsForThem approached almost all of the major UK daily and Sunday newspapers with this story. Most of them acknowledged its significance. Three were keen to publish articles. Two got as far as writing it up, and one proposed to run it on the front page. In each case though, the story was dropped at the last minute without a cogent explanation. This is odd, because the paper trail for the entirety of this story is in public records and so is capable of full verification.

This is a significant public interest story which demands accountability. Please read it and, if you agree with us, please share it. The fully referenced version of this story can be read in **THE ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICIT**, available now at Amazon and other book stores.

The genesis of MEAG

At the outset of the pandemic MEAG, the Moral and Ethical Advisory Group of approximately 20 experts selected as leaders in their fields of medicine, ethics, law, social science and religion, was tasked with advising Ministers and senior officials on the challenging ethical aspects to decisions that would need to be taken. The DHSC was to convene weekly meetings of that group.

The three years of MEAG's official existence coincided with a complex pandemic response which included lockdowns, mass school closures, mass population testing, the Covid vaccine roll-out and related passports, and the vaccination of children. Each of these policies involved weighty ethical considerations, so one might have expected the Government's advisory group on ethical issues to play a central role during this period; and for it to have been vocal, and instrumental in setting ethical guardrails for legally and ethically robust policy decisions.

Early disappointment

Yet after having first felt to be “*in demand*”, according to one of our sources, by September 2020 MEAG members appeared disillusioned by a lack of engagement from the Government and so resolved in one of their meetings to “*reach out proactively to senior civil servants in key policy areas*” including the vaccination programme, mass testing and the impact of the pandemic on cancer screenings. Just a fortnight later, the DHSC appears to have clipped MEAGs wings by directing that it should shift its focus “*to response work, acting as a constructive sounding board...*”. ‘Speak when spoken to, and be more constructive’ appears to have been the message.

An unexpected intervention

Following its final meeting of the year in December 2020, during which the public record shows that MEAG raised serious ethical concerns about the Government’s plans to launch a Covid status certificate or pass, the group reconvened in January to find that Chris Whitty, the CMO, had reportedly spoken with one of the Co-Chairs of MEAG and “*counselled against producing documentation that offered recommendations, given the political aspect of decision making*”.

In other words, the CMO appears to have instructed MEAG not to put its recommendations in writing including, presumably, its views on Covid status certification. We do not know whether Whitty gave this instruction on his own initiative or as a messenger, but this is all the more surprising in light of Professor Whitty’s oral evidence to the Covid Inquiry this week about the imperative for SAGE to conduct its business with formally minuted discussions: “*I was very firmly of the view that ... [conversations] were much better done ... where the scientific debate could be had with all the right people in a minuted conversation*”.

Thereafter, MEAG’s meetings became infrequent. Our MEAG sources confirmed to us that this was a disappointment for the group’s members: “*initially the Government had seemed very accepting of our advice — as things went on they seemed to want to do what they wanted to do for other reasons*”, said one.

A second wind...

In February 2021, the group sought to re-establish its voice by recording that *“The ethics of vaccinating children would be an appropriate topic for MEAG to consider in the future”*, and adding that *“The Group agreed that where possible they would like to consider future items early on to maximise MEAG’s ability to aid decision making”*.

DHSC and Cabinet Office officials later scheduled a meeting of MEAG for June 2021 to discuss the planned vaccination of children. In advance of that meeting, some members of MEAG circulated a memo which has never been published. We understand that memo referenced the rapid rate at which adults had been vaccinated, recognised that vaccination could save lives but also cautioned that children needed to be thought about separately, not least because the Covid vaccines are invasive, irreversible and may have long-term side effects which have yet to be identified. The memo reportedly also challenged the purpose of vaccinating children, questioned the known benefits and harms for individual children, and called for urgent consideration of the issues.

... short lived

But the DHSC apparently cancelled the meeting on the day it was due to take place, ostensibly because the JCVI was thought to be preparing to advise against the mass rollout of Covid vaccines to children. Though the roll out to children nevertheless went ahead a few months later, the meeting with MEAG was never reconvened.

MEAG was not then asked to meet for the entire summer period of 2021. This was a surprising moment for MEAG to be given an extended break by the DHSC: the Government was grappling with the hot potato of Covid status certification; a chaotic programme of testing and repeated self-isolations of children was being pilloried by politicians, experts and parents as unfair and unethical; and the JCVI was still considering whether to recommend the mass vaccination of children – all of which engaged material moral and ethical considerations.

MEAG was never given its chance to discuss the moral and ethical considerations of vaccinating children against Covid, despite the JCVI having confirmed that ethical considerations would form no part of its advice on vaccination strategy.

Restrained then retired

MEAG was reconvened on just three further occasions, but its attention was conspicuously directed away from the pandemic. In September 2021 as the UK's four CMOs were controversially being asked to reconsider the JCVI's decision to decline to recommend a mass vaccination of 12 to 15 year olds – one of the most contentious ethical decisions of the pandemic – MEAG was asked to advise on the topic of virginity testing.

In October, as the controversial Covid passes debate was crescendoing, MEAG was asked to advise on an extension to the statutory storage limits for eggs, sperm, and embryos. And then in December 2021, as attention moved to the ethically contentious question of whether the Covid vaccination programme should be extended to 5 year olds, MEAG was asked to advise on the use of artificial intelligence in medical imaging.

These were the last meetings of MEAG. “[The DHSC] just didn't send any further business”, explained one of our sources. “I think in the end they realised that you can't have a moral and ethical committee without trespassing on things that Ministers think are political judgments... and that's why it was shut down”, said another. MEAG was formally — and quietly — disbanded in October 2022.

Ethical vacuum

In the absence of MEAG's input from June 2021 onwards, it is far from clear how the moral and ethical implications of policy decisions were adequately identified and taken into account in the Government's pandemic decisions. There appears to have been an ethical vacuum at the heart of UK pandemic policy-making.

We might have expected the Covid Inquiry to have probed the role of ethics and ethical advice in the Government's decision-making processes, perhaps particularly during its questioning this week of senior officials. As THE ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICIT explains, though, surprisingly the only mention of ethics and MEAG during the Inquiry's hearings so far has been to imply a more prominent role for the group than the evidence suggests it ever had.

We believe this may be one of the most damning untold stories of the pandemic: it seems that ethics were not just disregarded at key moments in the pandemic, but that

ethical advice from the country's leading experts was suppressed, and those experts were then shut down, ostensibly for the crime of speaking truth to power. The result was a pandemic response which at times seemed to lack any ethical guardrails.



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sunsandwind Nov 23, 2023

Really unsurprising that ethics was never truly considered during this time. All that matters, both then and now, is control over the population by a technocratic bureaucracy who will not only tell us how to live but force us to do as we're told. That desire for total control of people is being played out every day in countries around the world. The apathy of those who are targeted is amazing.

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Twiglet Nov 23, 2023 ❤️ Liked by UsForThem

"We believe this may be one of the most damning untold stories of the pandemic".

Totally agree.

I haven't had time to watch UK Column in the last couple of weeks so forgive me if they've profiled this work, but if not, suspect they'd be pleased to.

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