



Policy Brief

UK Pandemic Ethics Accelerator: Public Values, Transparency, and Governance

Mr Jamie Webb, University of Edinburgh

KEY INFO

Research question: How can ethical analysis and public deliberation enhance understanding of pandemic response and experience and improve policy and practice?

Policy area or theme:

- Ethics, Procurement and Governance
- Guidance, Messaging and Behaviour Change
- Healthcare
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Methods: Conducting public deliberative work; conducting policy forums; ethical analysis of pandemic governance, trustworthiness, and public engagement.

Geographical area: UK-wide

Research stage: In progress

Summary of the research

The UK Ethics Accelerator brings ethics expertise to bear on the ethical challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its Public Values, Transparency, and Governance workstream is led by Professor Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Professor of Medical and Family Sociology at the University of Edinburgh, and Hugh Whittall, former Director of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics. The early career researchers on the workstream are Jamie Webb, a doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh, and Kiran Manku, a research assistant at the University of Oxford. Its work has critically reflected on pandemic public engagement and made proposals for more inclusive forms of decision-making. Furthermore, it has led public dialogues on the ethical values most central to participants engaged in these dialogues.

The results of these dialogues informed in-progress policy workshops, engaging policy makers from across the four UK regions, to influence the future of the UK's Covid-19 response. Further work is anticipated, including around trust and trustworthiness in government and governance.



Policy recommendations

Knowledge of and engagement with publics during the pandemic has tended to focus on eliciting their beliefs, intentions and opinions rather than engaging citizens in developing policy responses.

- Public engagement in the UK needs to place more emphasis on deliberative democracy: engaging ordinary citizens in developing policy solutions. Surfacing and attending to the ethical values underpinning citizen responses should be at the heart of the Covid-19 recovery.
- Policy makers need to reflect on how and why they are engaging with publics and the methods they are using to do so. A deliberative approach can involve a range of methods to ensure inclusivity and diversity and promote engagement.
- The Accelerator's own public dialogue identified the following key public priorities for Covid-19 recovery and future pandemic responses:
 - o *Re-balance inequalities that Covid-19 has exposed and exacerbated*: Address disparities in healthcare, particularly for those experienced by people with Black, Asian and minority ethnic heritage, and combat poverty which has worsened alongside intolerable inequality.
 - o *Build trust and transparency into government policies and actions*: For example, through greater collaboration across the home nations to provide consistent and clear messaging and communications for citizens across the UK.
 - o *Public involvement in policy making*: To create a society which is resilient in the face of future pandemics, the public want to be involved in shaping future policies.¹

Key findings

- Our review of Covid-19 public engagement critically evaluated 30 engagement activities conducted during the pandemic. It found that as well as posing practical challenges to engagement activities, the pandemic has demonstrated tensions in epistemic and political authority, health communication, public values, and methodological choices within public engagement work.²
- A piece shared with media at the Accelerator's launch event called for greater public involvement in the pandemic response, through deliberative mechanisms like Citizens' Juries and Citizens' Assemblies, to ensure that policy-making is responsive to the informed values of the public.³
- A survey of literature from the 2014-16 Ebola outbreak assessed how the lessons of meaningful community engagement could be learnt by British policymakers responding to covid-19 and preparing for future pandemics. These include the importance of respect for marginalised and potentially distrustful communities, well resourced contact tracing, and tailoring intervention and communication strategies to local contexts.⁴
- Our ethical analysis of Conservative MPs' opposition to vaccine certification in the run up to Christmas 2021 provided a philosophical critique of libertarian opposition to vaccine certification, arguing that the measure could be justified on the grounds of harm, freedom, and equality.⁵
- Our public dialogue engaged 24 members of the public in exploring the ethical dimensions of covid-19 and providing recommendations for the planning for future pandemics.¹
- Our upcoming policy workshops will engage senior policy makers in the four regions on integrating public values and ethical expertise in pandemic decision-making.



Further information

Pandemic ethics: a public dialogue. The ethical and societal considerations of Covid19, Covid-19 recovery and future pandemics (September 2021)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56f16de77da24f3e5612733b/t/614c8bae3d881c1e28957279/1632406454206/HVM+Pandemic+Ethics+Report+Sep21.pdf>

Pandemic Public Engagement: An Ethical Analysis (September 20 2021)

<https://ukpandemicethics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Pandemic-Public-Engagement-An-Ethical-Analysis.pdf>

Living and dying with Covid: Resolving the hard questions of living with Covid-19 – the need for public deliberation (May 24 2021) <https://ukpandemicethics.org/living-and-dying-with-covid-resolving-the-covid-trilemma-the-need-for-public-deliberation/>

Blog post: Public engagement in a healthcare crisis: lessons from Ebola for Covid-19 and the pandemics to come (June 10 2021)

<https://ukpandemicethics.org/blog-post-public-engagement-in-a-healthcare-crisis-lessons-from-ebola-for-covid-19-and-the-pandemics-to-come/>

Ethical analysis of Conservative MPs' opposition to Covid-19 certification (December 21 2021)

<https://ukpandemicethics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Ethical-analysis-of-Conservative-MPs-opposition-to-covid-19-certification.pdf>

Pandemic Public Engagement Tracker (last updated October 26 2021)

<https://ukpandemicethics.org/library/pandemic-public-engagement-tracker/>

Response to the Department of Health and Social Care consultation on mandatory vaccination in care homes: Data use and Public values, transparency and governance workstreams (May 28 2021)

<https://ukpandemicethics.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Mandatory-Vaccination-in-Care-Homes.-Response-from-the-UK-Pandemic-Ethics-Accelerator-Data-use-and-Public-values-transparency-and-governance-workstreams.pdf>

Contact details

Jamie Webb, jamie.webb@ed.ac.uk, 07815 165 994

11 January 2022