

## Coronavirus

# Immunity Passports: The Desperation of Fact Checkers

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by Mike Robinson

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Censorship will be one of the biggest issues of 2021. The UK has been **building up to legislating for censorship** for a few years now, and its “online harms” bill is expected early in the new year. The EU announced their effort just a week or so ago.

The principle is very simple: “harm” is being done by misinformation and disinformation circulating online, especially on social media. Primary sources for this misinformation and disinformation are “Russian-backed” media and the ignorant general public.

In order to deal with the nasty Russians and public ignorance, governments encourage reliance on “trusted” sources, such as the BBC, and “fact”-checking organisations; self appointed information launderers whose job it is to shore up an

ailing government narrative in the face, not of public ignorance, but of public awareness of the scale of the government lie.

Full Fact, Snopes, Media Bias/Fact Check, BBC Reality Check, Channel 4's FactCheck blog and a host of others have popped up in recent years, all claiming to merit "trust".

But as time has passed in 2020, as the government's narratives fall apart, there has been a hint of desperation in the output of these "fact checkers"; levels of spin and hair-splitting which would make Alastair Campbell proud.

The **latest such example** comes from Reuters Fact Check.

Headlined "Fact check: Britain has not awarded a contract to develop a vaccine passport", unidentified Reuters staff set out to discredit two Facebook posts ([here](#), [here](#)) claiming that the government has issued a contract for "vaccine passports".

According to Reuters:

The posts show a genuine contract awarded by Britain's Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) for a "Covid-19 Certification/Passport", which can be seen ([here](#)).

The contract, awarded to a company called Netcompany UK Limited, is not for a vaccination passport, but for a certificate system for people who test negative for COVID-19.

*Not a vaccination passport. A certificate system for people who test negative:*

DHSC is planning to deploy negative Covid-19 test certification minimum viable product, to enable workplaces, educational centres, health and social care services and places of business to open to members of the public who have tested negative for COVID-19 within a specified timeframe in addition to other criteria.

The level of hair-splitting here is off the charts. This may not specifically be a "vaccine passport", but since the British government has itself been so keen to conflate immunisation with vaccination (itself misinformation, since the vaccine does not provide immunity), it's hardly surprising that people do the same.

But in any case, what are these "other criteria"? They remain unspecified, and singularly ignored by Reuters.

**So let's fact-check the fact-checkers.**

The government contract is for a “Covid-19 Certification/Passport MVP”. An MVP is a Minimum Viable Product; a version of a final product with just enough of a feature set that it can be piloted with a select group of testers.

This might sound similar to beta testing, but it isn't. MVP is an experiment to validate an idea. Beta testing is a final pre-release product almost ready to go, which just needs some feedback and minor bug checking before release.

What we have here is a contract awarded to **a global IT company** to validate an idea. But there are many companies already with functional products competing in the immunity passport space.

So why the MVP?

The British government has been desperate to take the opportunity of the SARS-CoV-2 “pandemic” to justify bulk data collection on the UK population. Their first attempt, via the Track and Trace app, failed spectacularly as they were forced **to abandon their collect-all centralised server architecture**, falling back on the much more anonymous Apple/Google framework instead.

The new contract was signed by Chris Barlow, the Department of Health and Social Care's Commercial Lead, Test and Trace, and the sample use case makes it clear that facial recognition is a key part of the architecture:

Assisted tests. Supervisor registers citizen by entering name, email address (optional), photo (from smartphone camera) and scans QR code on testing box to enter details including unique identifier of the test itself automatically. An audit trail is required to determine who assisted with the test. Citizen takes test, supervisor validates result and Negative COVID Test Status is issued, possibly as a QR code.

It continues:

Negative COVID Test Status Evidence is provided in form of a QR code that can be scanned and verified by other individuals/organisations.

Appropriate anti-fraud measures

It is true that these requirements could be achieved by simply encoding immunity status within the QR code. However, this looks to me like DHSC is once again looking at a centralised server architecture. How else could they guarantee “appropriate anti-fraud measures”?

The opportunity for bulk data collection is, I suspect, just too enticing to be passed up.

Consider: every individual in the UK is denied access to workplaces, educational centres, health and social care services, and places of business unless they can prove their immunity status. They must have a QR code scanned every time they go to work, school, the dentist and the supermarket.

This may not provide data on who individuals are associating with, which is what the UK Government wanted with its Track and Trace app, but it offers an unprecedented level of profiling nonetheless.

Did Reuters consider any of these points when they ran their fact-check hit piece on two social media posts?

They did not. Rather than challenging the government narrative with a view to accountability, they instead hunted for the finest hair to split in order to underpin the government narrative.

2021 will be the year that the information war comes to a head. The lines are now clear. It is a war with government and its corporate media whores on one side, and the general public, social media commentators and shoestring alternative media organisations on the other. Government will attempt to legislate to protect their narrative. It is vital that every MP understands that such legislation will not be tolerated.

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