

## Vaccination certificates - impact on the high street



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**The road to recovery will be hard, our hospitality and retail sectors do not deserve for this road to be even harder with more bureaucracy.**

The economic picture in the UK is not a happy one. In 2020 GDP fell by 10%, the biggest drop in recorded history<sup>1</sup>. Sweden, which experienced a similar level of infections to the UK but which imposed very few if any business closures, has seen a reduction of just 2.6%, far lower than the EU average of 4.8%.<sup>2</sup> By January 2021 unemployment had risen to a four-year high of 5%<sup>3</sup> but the real impact on jobs and bankruptcies will only become evident when the various Government support schemes come to an end. It seems likely that the restrictions will result in large parts of the hospitality, travel and tourism, events and arts sectors no longer being viable.

Unable to open and with operating restrictions there can be no question that restrictions have damaged local commerce. Vaccination Certificates for hospitality and offline retail are an unnecessary and discriminatory step in pandemic management. National Health England (NHE) suggests that vaccine uptake in the over 75s (one of the most vulnerable groups) is 93%<sup>4</sup>. The UK has a good track record in voluntary uptake of vaccines, compulsory uptake would only seek to heighten suspicion and mistrust in the vaccine especially in ethnic groups where confidence is already low. A person's medical record is private to them and their GP. With such high uptake in what is considered one of the most vulnerable groups, there seems little need or justification for pursuing a domestic Vaccination Certificates with the administrative cost and burden that it would entail. As shown above, the UK economy is in an already precarious state and money could be better deployed clearing the waiting list backlog in health care, projected to rise to 6.9 million by the end of the year,<sup>5</sup> than pursuing domestic passports. The WHO does not advocate a Vaccination Certificate for international travel, let alone in a domestic setting<sup>6</sup>.

NHS Test and Trace is not working effectively. The burden of collecting Test and Trace information falls on pubs, restaurants and cafes, yet there is no reason that sitting two metres apart in a restaurant is a riskier pastime than shopping in a supermarket. What grounds are there to bring in Vaccination Certificates that would only threaten our local high street further? Town centre hospitality often has a symbiotic relationship with offline retail. If one side of the equation is lost the other may collapse equally quickly.

Retail and hospitality workers are not the police. Vaccination Certificates create the potential for unwanted additional confrontation for business owners and their staff when dealing with the public. In the week following the introduction of face masks in the UK in July 2020, the Co-Op reported an increase of abuse towards staff with some 990 incidents in that week alone.<sup>7</sup> In August 2020 Sky News reported that according to a union representing retail staff,<sup>8</sup> violence and abuse towards shop workers had doubled during the coronavirus pandemic. This echoed the data from The Grocer in April 2020<sup>9</sup>. Expecting shop and hospitality workers to cope with Vaccination Certificates would only heighten that abuse.

According to industry figures from Jan 2021,<sup>10</sup> almost 6,000 licensed premises disappeared from Britain in 2020 as the Government's pandemic policy took its toll on the hospitality sector. Vaccination Certificates will further damage already reduced footfall and make these sectors even greater victims of the restrictions. Livelihoods will be lost, unemployment will rise and there will be fewer working people in the economy, which means less spending power overall and lower tax take. Those who remain unvaccinated for whatever reason would be unable to spend money at pubs, restaurants, cafes and shops. Such a government policy of potential coercion will only hurt the economy with hospitality and offline retail bearing the hardship.

In simple economic terms why would any physical shop and hospitality venue want to cut its potential market for no good reason? Look at the parallel in the "hound pound" market. Towns and villages that have increased the number of dog-friendly venues, have seen trade soar not decline. Openness and inclusivity is a winner for increasing profits, whereas conflict, segregation and embargo leads to reduction in potential market share. Pet friendly tourism was estimated to be worth around £4billion back in 2018 with the share growing as more towns embrace the concept.<sup>11</sup>

The last year has not been a level playing field for offline retail and hospitality, especially smaller high street and independent retailers. As the country locked down online retail has gone from strength to strength. One of the largest online retailers Amazon UK had sales worth \$14,524 million in the UK in 2018, \$17,527 million in 2019 and \$26,483 million in 2020. This represents market growth of 21% 2018/9 but a staggering 51% 2019/20<sup>12</sup>. While Britain's high streets lost more than 17,500 chain store outlets in 2020<sup>13</sup>.

Endorsing a policy that only strengthens internet sales at the expense of high street sales is hardly something local businesses would seek to support. Internet giants aside, during lockdowns, the local high street has been unfairly disadvantaged by the supermarkets, which have been able to sell all manner of goods, from pillows to buckets when the same products have been unavailable for purchase on the local high street.

The high street has had one of its most difficult years ever. The road to recovery will be hard, our hospitality and offline retail does not deserve for this road to be even harder with more bureaucracy and stress.

## Endnotes

- 1 [GDP monthly estimate, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)
2. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet\\_file\\_entry/2995521/2-02022021-AP-EN.pdf/0e84de9c-0462-6868-df3e-dbacaad9f49f](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet_file_entry/2995521/2-02022021-AP-EN.pdf/0e84de9c-0462-6868-df3e-dbacaad9f49f)
3. [Labour market overview, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)
4. <https://www.nationalhealthexecutive.com/articles/uk-vaccine-uptake-plan>
5. <https://www.nhsconfed.org/news/2021/03/copy-of-warning-that-nhs-waiting-list-could-be-scratching-the-surface>
6. <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/interim-position-paper-considerations-regarding-proof-of-covid-19-vaccination-for-international-travellers>
7. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/convenience/face-mask-rules-add-to-worst-week-of-staff-abuse-co-op-reports/646840.article>
8. <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-violence-and-abuse-against-shop-workers-doubles-during-pandemic-12054201>
9. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/people/shopworker-abuse-frequency-has-doubled-since-coronavirus-outbreak/604225.article>
10. [https://www.bighospitality.co.uk/Article/2021/01/22/6-000-pubs-were-lost-for-good-last-year-because-of-Coronavirus?utm\\_source=copyright&utm\\_medium=OnSite&utm\\_campaign=copyright](https://www.bighospitality.co.uk/Article/2021/01/22/6-000-pubs-were-lost-for-good-last-year-because-of-Coronavirus?utm_source=copyright&utm_medium=OnSite&utm_campaign=copyright)
11. <https://www.scottishfield.co.uk/outdoors/perthshire-looks-to-capture-the-hound-pound/>
12. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1035592/net-sales-amazon-united-kingdom-uk/>
13. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/mar/14/great-britain-high-streets-lost-more-than-17500-chain-stores-in-2020-covid>