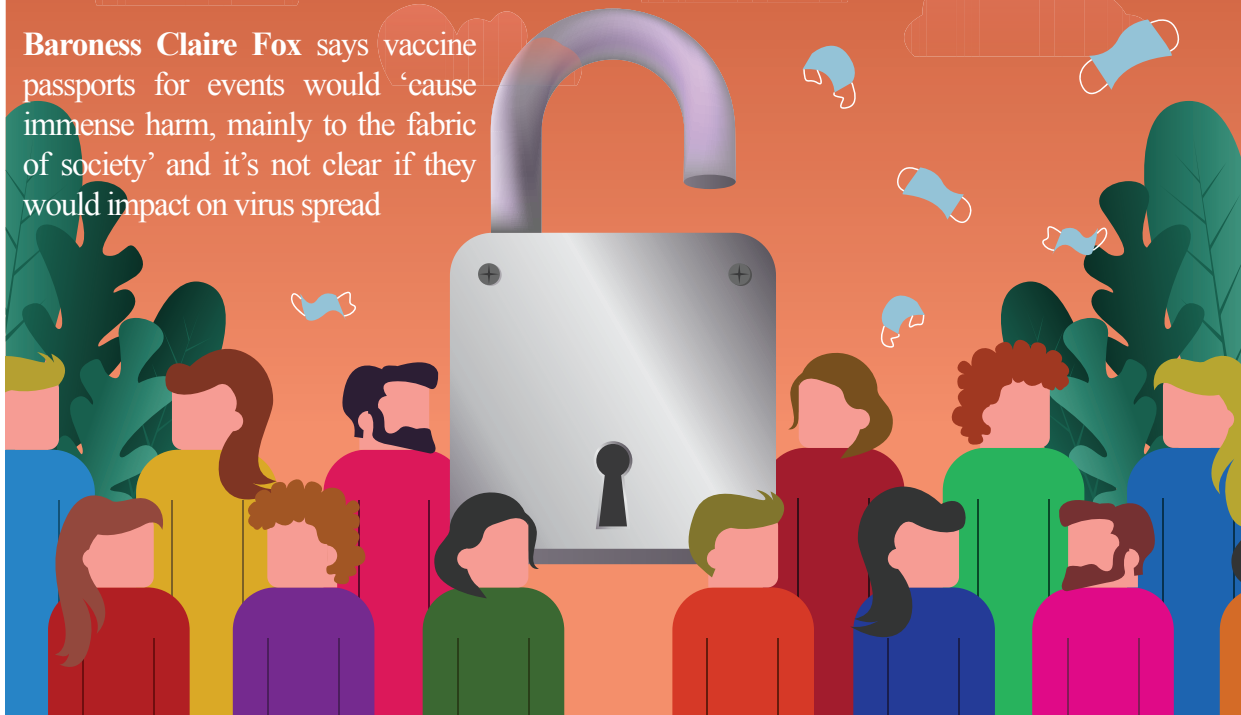


## We need to move on

Baroness Claire Fox says vaccine passports for events would 'cause immense harm, mainly to the fabric of society' and it's not clear if they would impact on virus spread



In a packed beer garden last week, I was surrounded by five hen parties. For once I was happy to have my sedate drink disrupted by roars of raucous laughter. After postponed disappointments of impending nuptials, these young women were making up for lost time. Similarly, my street is filling up with students and rather than moan about their loud parties, I relish them. Now that the lethal threat of COVID-19 is fading and with the vast majority of adult citizens vaccinated, at last – after a hesitant start – society is beginning to open up. Everything from family gatherings to local choirs are meeting for the first time after many months and are full of joyous hugs and catching-up chatter.

More people are returning to the real-life office, remembering that it can be fun to work alongside peers, indulge in office banter and gossip about the bosses. In other words, communities are starting to feel – well – communal again. The public are back in the public sphere, and wow – what a difference it makes to the atmosphere.

So why on earth did the Government threaten to ruin it all with its recent announcement of divisive vaccine passports for events? Such passes are so contentious that politicians themselves seem torn. As I write, only a week after vaccines minister Nadim Zahawi declared vaccine passports a necessity, health secretary Sajid Javid has announced they will be scrapped. This stop/go approach hardly gives confidence in policy-making.

Was it the decline for the Conservatives in polls or the fight-back by civil libertarians? Will there be more U-turns? It seems that leaked letter two weeks ago, describing plans as in 'chaos', was spot on. Regardless, such policies need to be debated on principle, so we can avoid knee-jerk responses. To add to the confusion, Scotland has just passed vaccine passports into law.

Nicola Sturgeon, temporarily supported by Mr Zahawi, claimed, the 'certification

scheme' is necessary to prevent another lockdown.

Such schemes would cause immense harm, mainly to the fabric of society. It is not clear if they would have any discernible impact on virus spread. While it is fantastic news that vaccines are highly effective at preventing serious illness, evidence shows they are far less effective at preventing transmission. So, critics ask, what's the point of passports unless they are a hefty nudge to coerce the unvaccinated minority?

### We shouldn't let schemes such as vaccine passports demoralise and divide communities between the jabbed and un-jabbed

Pressuring people to undergo a medical procedure is itself ethically dodgy. More fundamentally, such policies would change the nature of citizenship. Being forced to declare your medical history as a condition for entry into nightclubs, concerts, football matches and a swathe of events would mean participation in civic life becomes contingent on official clearance, a privilege, not a right.

Unusually, I agree with every word uttered by Michael Gove when arguing against ID cards in 2003: 'We as free citizens devolve power upwards. We don't operate at the licence or leisure or pleasure of those who happen to govern us at any given point... The idea that we should be licenced to exist by the state... seems to me, as a matter of principle, to be wrong.' Hear, hear!

Mr Gove's warning is one I've quoted previously, when – long before the pandemic – I cautioned that local government was setting a dangerous precedent for a 'show your papers' society, through demanding

licences to carry out a range of everyday activities, from busking to leafleting, and its promiscuous use of Community Protection Notices. Digital passes would also damage social cohesion.

The Academy of Ideas is about to hold its annual Battle of Ideas festival, aiming to attract the widest cross-section of attendees (beyond the usual suspects or Westminster bubble). Can you imagine how destructive it would be to implement a checkpoint system, turning away undocumented students keen to engage in political debate?

Readers of *The MJ* are welcome; should we be forced to ban those of you unwilling to prove your medical status on principle? So much for accessibility.

Would councils be happy seeing nightclub owners and theatre managers become state policing agents, mandated to demand audiences show their papers prior to entry, sorting the public into two queues, one branded 'unsafe'. Institutionalising such discriminatory, privileged access is a slippery slope to a two-tier society.

Coronavirus is still with us. It always will be, but must be consigned to the same status as other dangerous viruses humans have learned to live alongside. We shouldn't let schemes such as vaccine passports demoralise and divide communities between the jabbed and un-jabbed. We need to move on and open up society with minimum restrictions so that we can kick-start productive economic life, creating the wealth needed to pay off lockdown debts so we can rebuild social bonds damaged by anti-social atomisation. ■

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● The Battle of Ideas festival is on 9-10 October. Visit: [battleofideas.org.uk](http://battleofideas.org.uk)

## soapbox



By Graeme McDonald

The immediate reaction and analysis to last week's long-awaited announcement on social care focused on the hypothecated rise in national insurance and how the extra revenue raised would be allocated to health and social care services. While arguments will persist through the Spending Review and beyond about both the sufficiency and immediacy of the financial support given to the social care sector, an equally pressing (and not entirely separate) problem is presenting itself.

Pre-pandemic it was estimated there were at least 120,000 social care vacancies, while the Government expects 40,000 care workers to leave the sector by the middle of November as a result of the requirement to be vaccinated. And then there is the impact of Brexit to consider.

Last week, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services reported recruitment and retention issues meant 13% of service users are being offered care and support they would not have chosen.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's most recent Labour Market Outlook survey showed nearly 70% of employers are looking to recruit new staff. This is great news. But with well-publicised labour shortages in many markets, councils are increasingly finding it hard to recruit because there are not enough applicants and they are struggling to offer competitive salaries. As one chief executive said to me: 'How do we attract young people into local councils when they can earn significantly more in hospitality or at the local supermarket?'

This inflationary pressure cannot be separated from the longer-term problem of developing a skilled and diverse leadership pipeline.

Whether it's the tangible challenge of filling roles now, or the less tangible challenge of developing a pipeline of talent fit for the future, Solace believes we need a more strategic and sustainably funded approach to talent development specifically, and workforce, more generally.

The Government's social care plan does at least acknowledge the workforce challenge and includes £500m over three years – but it will take a lot more than that to address the global labour market challenges which are being felt locally and can't be tackled alone. ■

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