

Questionnaire

UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to Professor Robert West - Reference: M2/SAGE/01/RW

1. A brief overview of your qualifications, career history, professional expertise and major publications.

See attached CV

2. A list of the groups (i.e. SAGE and/or any of its sub-groups) in which you have been a participant, and the relevant time periods.

I participated in SPI-B between March 2020 and February 2022.

3. An overview of your involvement with those groups between January 2020 and February 2022, including:

a. When and how you came to be a participant;

I was invited to be a member of SPI-B soon after it was set up.

b. The number of meetings you attended, and your contributions to those meetings;

I attended 20 or so meetings and contributed to discussion and with drafting and revising of papers for the meetings.

c. Your role in providing research, information and advice.

I drafted and commented on reports and contributed to discussions.

4. A summary of any documents to which you contributed for the purpose of advising SAGE and/or its related subgroups on the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

I contributed to many of SPI-B reports and co-led two.

1. A behavioural science approach to identifying options for increasing adherence to social distancing and shielding vulnerable people.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882722/25-options-for-increasing-adherence-to-social-distancing-measures-22032020.pdf

2. How to sustain Covid protective behaviours in the long-term

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spi-b-sustaining-behaviours-to-reduce-sars-cov-2-transmission-30-april-2021/spi-b-sustaining-behaviours-to-reduce-sars-cov-2-transmission-22-april-2021> Whilst this was 'published' by SAGE in April, it was held back from release by Government till July 19, 'Freedom Day'.

5. A summary of any articles you have written, interviews and/or evidence you have given regarding the work of the above-mentioned groups and/or the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

Two articles written based on the first and third SPI-B reports above:

Michie S, West R, Rogers MB, Bonell C, Rubin GJ, Amlot R. (2020) Reducing SARS-CoV-2 transmission in the UK: A behavioural science approach to identifying options for increasing adherence to social distancing and shielding vulnerable people, British Journal of Health Psychology, 25, 945–956. 10.1111/bjhp.12428

Michie S, West R, Pidgeon N, Reicher S, Amlôt R, Bear L. (2021) Staying 'Covid-safe': Proposals for embedding behaviours that protect against Covid-19 transmission in the UK. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 26, 1238–1257. 10.1111/bjhp.12557

Article written in response to the misleading term “behavioural fatigue” that had been ascribed inaccurately to SAGE/SPI-B:

Michie S, West R & Harvey N. (2020) The concept of “fatigue” in tackling covid-19. *BMJ*; 371:m4171. 10.1136/bmj.m4171

6. Your views as to whether the work of the above-mentioned groups in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (or the UK's response more generally) succeeded in its aims. This may include, but is not limited to, your views on:

a. The composition of the groups and/or their diversity of expertise;

SPI-B: High quality work from committed and competent behavioural scientists.

b. The way in which the groups were commissioned to work on the relevant issues;

SPI-B was surprisingly not asked for comments or reports relating to key decisions that were taken or communication strategies and there did not appear to be a mechanism for SPI-B pro-actively offering advice.

c. The resources and support that were available;

All the participants were undertaking their role in addition to their academic duties so it would have been helpful to have some resource to help with literature searching etc.

d. The advice given and/or recommendations that were made;

I thought the advice was generally sound, based on the best available evidence and communicated in a way that should have been actionable if there had been the political will to do so.

e. The extent to which the groups worked effectively together;

I thought that SPI-B worked very well as a group and was very impressed by how committed its participants were to the work of the group. Meetings were always positive and collegiate.

f. The extent to which applicable structures and policies were utilised and/or complied with and their effectiveness.

I am not sure what is meant by this. If it refers to the extent to which SPI-B used and complied with structures and policies, then as far as I know it did.

7. Your views as to any lessons that can be learned from the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular relating to the work of the above-mentioned groups. Please describe any changes that have already been made, and set out any recommendations for further changes that you think the Inquiry should consider making.

The main problem seemed to be that government policies and practices appeared to bear no relation to the advice that was given. In fact in some cases it appeared to be the exact opposite to the advice given. Neither could I see any evidence that any of the advice was informing the communication strategy adopted by the government and the statements made by government spokespeople, which mostly seemed to be based on a naïve version of 'common sense' rather than any evidence.

Obviously policymakers have to make their decisions based on a range of factors others than scientific advice, but the divergence between the advice received and what government spokespeople were saying and doing was very striking and unusual in my experience. I don't know whether it is because none of the advice got through to the policymakers or whether they did not understand it or whether they chose to ignore it. In future I think there would be merit having a more transparent process for seeing what happens to advice and whether or not it has been considered when making decisions. Then at least it would be clear where accountability lay and perhaps it would provide a greater incentive for political decision makers to take a more professional approach to their responsibilities. The other home nations seemed to have a better system for doing this.

8. A brief description of documentation relating to these matters that you hold (including soft copy material held electronically). Please retain all such material. I am not asking for you to provide us with this material at this stage, but I may request that you do so in due course.

I think I hold electronic copies of all the reports to which I contributed.