

UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to Professor Aris Katzourakis - Reference: M2/ISAGE/01/PAK

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

I am a Professor of Evolution and Genomics, at the University of Oxford, Department of Biology (Department of Zoology during the period covered by the inquiry). I have been a full Professor since 2017, Associate Professor from 2011-2017, and am also a Tutorial Fellow at St. Hilda's College, Oxford. I have held several international fellowships in the past, including from the Royal Society and MRC, and am an ERC Consolidator Award grant holder.

I am an expert in viral evolutionary biology, genomics, and genetics, with a particular interest in virus/host interactions. I have been involved in work on SARS-CoV-2 to various extents during the pandemic. I have published extensively in viral evolution (see Google Scholar profile <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=sISa2ecAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao>), including during the pandemic.

In addition to my academic roles, I am on the National Executive Committee of UCU, and serve as the Oxford Branch Honorary Secretary. During the first year of the pandemic, I was co-opted onto Scientists for Labour and helped draft one of their early reports, and participated in various online meetings that included representation from Labour MPs and Lords.

2. An outline of when you participated in Independent SAGE, the role that you performed and any matters that you advised on.

I joined independent SAGE in January 2022, therefore was a member for just under two months for the period covered by the inquiry. I provided expertise on matters of virus evolution, virus/host interactions, variants, and virus/host immune interactions.

3. A summary of any reports and/or articles you have written, interviews and/or evidence you have given regarding the work of SAGE and/or its subcommittees and/or the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

I have not fed directly into the work of SAGE. However some of my work has been widely cited including in policy documents, in particular my 'World Views' column in Nature on endemicity, see - <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00155-x>.

I helped draft the 'vaccines plus' work for the BMJ and have participated in several opinion pieces, reviews and original research articles on policy during the pandemic, including the below:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41579-022-00722-z>

<https://academic.oup.com/mbe/article/39/2/msac009/6509523>

<https://www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj.o1/rr>

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fviro.2022.942555/full>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/01410768211052589>  
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)01589-0/fulltext?fbclid=IwAR0twk-fkcJdMWJWO45gTK0Z7Rei5Ou8hO2Wy8lilEJkY1SKlImkJFIAPAb0&s=09](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)01589-0/fulltext?fbclid=IwAR0twk-fkcJdMWJWO45gTK0Z7Rei5Ou8hO2Wy8lilEJkY1SKlImkJFIAPAb0&s=09)  
<https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/6-282>

4. Your views as to whether the work of SAGE and/or its subcommittees in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (or the UK's response more generally) succeeded in its aims. We have previously invited independent members of SAGE and its subcommittees to address this issue by reference to the matters set out below. You may find them of assistance, although we recognise that some are likely to be beyond your knowledge. Please address this issue as you see fit.

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

I have not been a member of SAGE nor am privy to the minutiae of its workings, beyond following information that has been made available intently. It is my perception that the composition of the groups has at times been characterised by being UK centric, and could have drawn more widely from wider international public health expertise. For example, it is my perception that it perhaps took longer than it should to come to terms with the data coming out from China, with serious concern being raised by SAGE in the second half of March 2020, informing the government decision to enact first lockdown in the UK. It was clear to many that the problem would require immediate action before this point. However, from outside, it is impossible to know exactly why this was.

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

It is my perception that the questions asked of the groups have at times been very narrow, and that wider impacts and direct feedback from the frontline have not always been part of the brief. While the government is at the centre of decision making, it has not been clear to me whether a mechanism existed for members of the groups to raise additional items and feed into the commissioning, not for non-members to feed into the work of the groups.

c. The resources and support that were available;

I cannot comment here.

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

Much of the work produced by the groups has been outstanding and exemplary, and has undoubtedly saved lives. I have agreed with a lot of the papers that I have read and recommendations that have come out of SAGE and other groups. The recognition of the alpha variant, transparency around that, vast amount of work produced and speed of

communications is a case study in my view on how science can feed into policy in real time. There have been occasions where I have been puzzled by and disagreed with some recommendations, for example the lack of speed with which children and adolescents were part of the vaccine rollout. I also do feel that more attention was warranted on the impacts of transmission on morbidity, as well as future viral evolution, and what this might mean regarding our vaccination strategies in future.

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

I cannot comment on this.

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

There have been more than one occasions where there has been a lag between the clarity and speed of the recommendations made by the working groups, and the speed with which these have been implemented and acted upon by the government.

5. 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 SAGE and/or its subcommittees. 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.

There needs to be a more formal mechanism whereby concerns and information can be fed in for consideration formally. This would greatly reduce the risk of siloing, and allow material considerations to be fed in more broadly.

6. 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.

My work for independent SAGE can be found on [www.independentsage.org](http://www.independentsage.org). All of my publications and policy documents are freely available on the web and via my Google Scholar Profile.