

Government's decision to sell vital vaccine infrastructure 'is baffling and should be reversed,' argue experts

February 23 2022



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The UK government's decision to sell its Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Center (VMIC) is baffling and should be reversed, argue

experts in *The BMJ* today.

Launched in 2018 to develop and make vaccines, as part of UK efforts to prepare for future pandemics, the center is the jewel in the crown of the UK's COVID-19 [vaccine response](#), write Rebecca Glover at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and colleagues.

As recently as March 2021, the government described the VMIC as a "highly specialist facility" that can "respond to pandemics by producing millions of doses quickly."

So why is this key UK vaccine infrastructure being sold off, they ask?

According to the government, industry has effectively taken over production of COVID-19 vaccines, and "the need for VMIC's surge capacity has passed."

While it is true that large pharmaceutical companies are now producing billions of vaccine doses and that these same companies should be able to update vaccines to respond to emerging variants, is this really making the best use of public money, ask Glover and colleagues?

Or is it another case of what the former head of the UK Vaccine Task Force, Kate Bingham, recently described as the government's neglect of biological threats and lack of strategic scientific expertise in [decision making](#)?

As highlighted by numerous commentators, including Bingham, maintaining robust vaccine research, development, and manufacturing capabilities should be a cornerstone of any national security strategy.

But this requires long term funding and political backing and expecting industry to make these investments is naive, they argue.

The VMIC, which was conceived before the pandemic, was a sign of renewed political ambition and confidence in the UK's [vaccine](#) infrastructure, they say. Selling it without parallel improvements to strengthen the upstream innovation that led to much of the UK's early COVID-19 vaccination successes makes little economic sense.

Reputationally and strategically, the damage may be even worse, they add, "signaling a lack of government commitment that will deter investors who may wish to build British biomedical capacity—an important goal of post-Brexit [strategic planning](#)."

They point out that the government is entertaining offers for the VMIC, "but it has not yet accepted any, to our knowledge." Until it is sold, they say "there remains an opportunity for the UK public and its elected members of parliament to convince those in charge to protect what could well become a cornerstone of British [pandemic](#) preparedness and bioindustrial infrastructure."

More information: Editorial: Sale of UK's Vaccine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, *The BMJ* (2022) [DOI: 10.1136/bmj-2022-069999](#) , www.bmj.com/content/376/bmj-2022-069999

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Government's decision to sell vital vaccine infrastructure 'is baffling and should be reversed,' argue experts (2022, February 23) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-02-decision-vital-vaccine-infrastructure-baffling.html>

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