# Michael Gove's conduct under scrutiny in UK Covid-19 inquiry



During the ongoing UK Covid-19 inquiry, troubling allegations are surfacing regarding the conduct of former minister Michael Gove during the pandemic, specifically his questionable handling of a ventilator proposal from Sir James Dyson. Evidence presented by a health watchdog suggests that Gove attempted to "circumvent" essential regulatory processes to expedite the approval of Dyson’s ventilators—devices that ultimately failed to pass critical testing.

As Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Gove has vehemently rejected any insinuation that he pressured the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for approval. However, amid ongoing scrutiny, he claimed, "No, and it's ludicrous to think that any minister could have done." Such defenses only raise further questions about the accountability of government ministers scrambling to meet what Gove dismisses as “arbitrary deadlines.”

Richard Wald KC, counsel to the inquiry, unearthed an email from Graeme Tunbridge, director of devices at the MHRA, pointing to apparent pressure from Gove’s office to fast-track Dyson's proposal without fully grasping the inherent risks. Wald read from the email, highlighting the unrealistic timeframes imposed by the Chancellor's office: “CDL was keen to press forward with Dyson’s proposal to a timescale that is totally unrealistic, based in part on promises made by Dyson that are already not being fulfilled.” This indicates a chilling willingness to bypass established regulatory safeguards.

Gove admits to a more "direct involvement" with Dyson’s proposal than other applicants, yet insists he had no authority to instruct the MHRA on approvals. His bleated line—that he could neither tell nor would tell the MHRA what to approve—smacks of desperation. This mischaracterization of his influence suggests a troubling disconnect from the principles of transparent governance. The language employed, he argues, was a mere “shorthand” of hope rather than a directive, but this so-called shorthand reflects a pattern of manipulation in the face of public health.

The inquiry has also revealed that senior civil servant John Manzoni expressed grave concerns about possible indirect pressure on the MHRA, prompting him to intervene in a meeting with Gove, Dyson, and Chief Commercial Officer Gareth Rhys Williams to ensure proper regulatory practices were maintained.

Correspondence analyzed by the inquiry has unveiled tensions surrounding the urgency of Dyson's project. A correspondence from 25 March 2020, documents Rhys Williams' observation of Gove’s “unreasonable” approach. His remark: “Even if he was correct that we had delayed anything, which I don’t believe he is at all, his tone is... regrettable” illustrates a broader issue of governance where desperate measures supersede reasoned decision-making amidst a crisis.

As the inquiry continues to peel back the layers of these troubling transactions, discussions surrounding the government's procurement strategy have become increasingly scrutinized. One Tory Treasury minister highlighted the dual nature of Dyson's involvement, cautioning that it might serve immediate necessities but also open paths to international market exploitation.

A spokesperson for Dyson maintained that Sir James Dyson responded to a direct call from Boris Johnson amidst the crisis, purportedly to develop a medical-grade ventilator. However, the narrative that Dyson did not intend to profit while diverting significant resources from other projects rings hollow, especially as the need for mass ventilators dwindled.

In light of these developments, the inquiry raises significant concerns—not merely about Gove’s actions but about a government that appears to have prioritized expediency over the safety and well-being of the public. The resurgence of initiatives emphasizing accountability and transparency is not just desirable; it is imperative in the wake of such revelations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.the-independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/chancellor-james-dyson-michael-gove-medicines-and-healthcare-products-regulatory-agency-duchy-of-lancaster-b2712464.html> - This article supports the claim that a health watchdog suggested Michael Gove attempted to 'circumvent' regulatory processes for Dyson's ventilators. It also mentions Gove's denial of any pressure on the MHRA.
* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Controversies_regarding_COVID-19_contracts_in_the_United_Kingdom> - This Wikipedia page provides context on the broader controversies surrounding COVID-19 contracts in the UK, including issues with procurement and regulatory processes during the pandemic.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzwHtrzs66g> - This video from the UK Covid-19 Inquiry provides live coverage of the inquiry's proceedings, which include discussions about Michael Gove's involvement in pandemic-related decisions.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/medicines-and-healthcare-products-regulatory-agency> - This official MHRA website provides information on the regulatory agency's role and processes, which are relevant to the context of ventilator approvals during the pandemic.
* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-and-constitutional-affairs-committee/news/2020/covid-19-contracts-report-published-20-10> - This link from the UK Parliament discusses reports on COVID-19 contracts, highlighting issues of transparency and accountability in government procurement processes.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-62534149> - This BBC News article covers the UK Covid-19 Inquiry and its findings on government handling of the pandemic, including procurement controversies and regulatory challenges.