

# More evidence from Luxembourg how Boris Hancock have failed in their political panics

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## Postcard From Luxembourg

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The day before England woke up to its third lockdown, Luxembourg announced that it was actually going to relax its own restrictions. Yes, here in Luxembourg the shops will all be opened, the children back at school following a slightly extended Christmas holiday and we will even be able to go to the cinema and the swimming pool.

Perhaps there has been a slight whiff of *Schadenfreude* as the Luxembourgish authorities clamped down on arrivals from the island with the now famous mutant variant following Matt Hancock's frantic ringing of the alarm bell. After all, this is the same little country that was among the first to be kicked out of Grant Shapps' travel corridors with COVID-19 cases persistently in excess of 20 per 100,000. Do you remember that frightening threshold that forced so many holidaymakers to flee the pestilence and return to the UK before it pulled up the drawbridges? Maybe you have forgotten about it being so busy clearing streets of bodies now that cases exceed 1000 in so many British towns. Or perhaps not.

Whilst all of Europe sneered at Trump when he suggested that the more you test, the more cases you find, it was not long before the Luxembourg government was saying something similar. Boris might have talked about moonshots, but Luxembourg really did roll out real mass testing early on. I don't know how many invitations I have received for members of my household to be tested. It is possibly in double figures now. Of course, the sad consequence was that it was always up there near the top in terms of COVID-19 cases detected and much to its consternation, rather than receiving a pat on its back, other countries simply slapped restrictions on travel to and from Luxembourg. This eventually led to the wonderful controversy of the pugnacious Luxembourg Foreign Minister refusing to be tested before entering Germany for an EU summit in Berlin and declaring that the imposition of mandatory tests before crossing the border was "pure harassment".

Despite this brilliant rollout of mass testing throughout the Summer, the action that we were all told was meant to stop COVID-19 in its tracks, Luxembourg has seen far more people reportedly dying of Covid since October than it did during the Spring – more than three times the number and with a youthful average age of 85. This meant that restrictions were progressively ratcheted up again until we had a curfew beginning at 9pm, non-essential shops shutting, masks, restaurants closed... you know the drill. But now the cases are dropping, the hospital beds are emptying, and the health service emergency level has been downgraded. To be honest, the numbers were already heading downwards before the intensification of the restrictions over Christmas. None the less, the Government bowed to the Covid hysteria and to a political opposition tapping into it (as they seem to do all over the Western world) and that was the end of the outdoor Gluhwein gatherings in Luxembourg's Place d'Armes.

I think we have been quite lucky here. We have been spared a lot of the excesses that seem to have been and to remain prevalent in the UK. There have never been restrictions on how much time we can spend outside and enforcement by the authorities seems to have been far less zealous. I did not even notice much (albeit some) evidence of “clap for carers” even though I would prefer the local healthcare system over the NHS by and large.

But Luxembourg leaves some puzzling questions: Why didn't such a comprehensive testing program prevent a so called second wave that far exceeded the Spring outbreak? Why was the first wave so much smaller *per capita* than the UK despite a lighter touch lockdown? Why is the second wave now in such obvious decline despite the fact that the vaccine has hardly been rolled out at all in Luxembourg?

Whilst we ponder these questions, we watch the fiasco of the EU vaccine rollout. In such a pro-EU country, it is the first time that I have ever seen so much criticism of the EU. The Luxembourg Government, as ever so desperate to signal its European credentials, has relied on the EU for the purchase of the vaccines. And the EU has not been up to it. The Prime Minister, Xavier Bettel, so happy to have been the attack dog for the EU when Boris Johnson last visited Luxembourg, is now left squirming with a late and insignificant rollout of the vaccine. It is fortunate for him that all the data is showing COVID-19 to be receding without a vaccine, so clearly that he hopes to have the restaurants open again in a few weeks. And if it doesn't –well, he can always blame the British and their monster mutation. There is always an excuse when you, ahem... “follow the science”.