NHS COVID-19 APP

Thank you for your request of 6 June 2023 for data about the total cost of the NHS Covid-19 App. We have handled your request under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). Your specific request is set out in **Annex A.**

For the purposes of this request, when we refer to "the app", we mean the COVID-19 app which was used to notify individuals if they had been in close proximity to someone testing positive for COVID-19 (and not the separate NHS app which allowed individuals to view and share their COVID-19 vaccination status). You may be aware that initial development of the COVID-19 app was led by **NHSX**, part of the **Department of Health & Social Care**, working with external suppliers. App development was subsequently taken over by **NHS Test and Trace,** part of the Department of Health & Social Care. In 2021, a new body, the **UK Health Security Agency** took over the functions of NHS Test and Trace, including ownership of the app.

We do not hold data on spend on the COVID-19 app for 2021-22.

The NAO has published two reports on the overall COVID-19 test and trace service: an interim report in December 2020 and a progress update report in June 2021. These include some high-level analysis of spend data related to the app. As mentioned in your request, our update report found that, in 2020-21, NHS Test and Trace spent £35 million on the app (Figure 6). Please note that financial analysis for both reports was based on unaudited management data, with limitations and uncertainty in the completeness and quality of data. The spend and budget figures we reported were subject to change. Our first interim report had a higher estimated spend of £43 million on the app up to the end of October 2020, but we would advise that estimates from the second report would be more accurate (although still subject to differences from fully audited data).

In our financial audit capacity, we have audited the accounts of the Department of Health & Social Care for the years to 31 March 2022. While the 2020-21 and 2021-22 accounts include spend by the NHS Test & Trace Service, and NHSX, the accounts do not specifically identify spending on the COVID-19 app. The NAO audited the first accounts for the UK Health Security Agency for the year to 31 March 2022, following its establishment in April 2021, but a lack of sufficient, appropriate audit evidence and significant shortcomings in financial control and governance meant the C&AG was unable to form an audit opinion on these.

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Information on the total spend on the app may be held by DHSC (of which both NHSX and NHS Test & Trace were part), and UKHSA. If you have not already done so, you may wish to submit information requests to these organisations. You can contact them at:

dhsc.publicenquiries@dhsc.gov.uk

InformationRights@UKHSA.gov.uk

Our progress update report also notes that, in 2020-21, NHS Test and Trace spent £13.5 billion against a budget of £22.2 billion. Its budget for 2021-22 was noted as £14.2 billion, although the initial Spending Review allocation was £15 billion. (See paragraphs 2.3 and 2.6, and Figures 6 and 7.) The NAO report therefore suggests a combined budget for the whole of NHS Test and Trace across the two financial years 2020-21 and 2021-22 of £36.4 billion. This is of a similar order to the £37 billion figure being cited on social media.

Annex B sets out the steps you may wish to take if you are not satisfied with the way we have handled your request for information under FOIA.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

NAO FOI Team

Annex A

Request for information about NHS Covid-19 App:

I am writing from _Logically Facts_. This is regarding a fact-check we are trying to do about a viral claim linked to the NHS COVID-19 App.

We have recently encountered social media posts claiming that the NHS Trace and Test App cost £37bn. We would appreciate it if you provide a quote concerning the authenticity of such claims.

An NAO report states that approximately £13.5bn was spent on the Test and Trace program in 2020/21 and £35mn on the App for the same period. However, we did not find any recent data that shows the figure for 2021/22. It will be very helpful if you provide us with the current data showing the app's total cost.

Annex B

Statement of Policy

Our policy is to respond to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as helpfully and promptly as possible, having regard to the principles set out in the Act. I therefore hope you are happy with the way we have handled your request. If you are not, then you should take the following steps.

In the first instance, within 40 working days, write to the National Audit Office Freedom of Information (FOI) Team at FOI@nao.org.uk or by post to:

FOI Team, Green 2, National Audit Office, 157-197 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1W 9SP

The Head of FOI will arrange a review, which will be conducted by a senior member of staff who was not involved in decisions relating to your original request. Once the review has been completed, we will write informing you of the outcome.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The primary way of escalating your concerns to the Information Commissioner is at: https://ico.org.uk/foicomplaints

Alternatively you can contact the ICO at https://ico.org.uk/ or Information Commissioner's Office Wycliffe House Water Lane Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF.