

UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Post-16 Education roundtable

16 March 2022

Exeter and online

Participants

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Karen Moore, North West Regional College

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Sam Hartley: [00:02:38] Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining this consultation event on the Terms of Reference for the UK Covid-19 Inquiry. My name is Sam Hartley, I'm Director of Policy, Research and Analysis, and Deputy Secretary to the Inquiry. The Inquiry is in its set-up phase, as I'm sure you're aware, and doesn't start formally until after the Terms of Reference has been settled. And that's what this meeting is about.

This is an independent Inquiry and obviously, it's been set up to look at the UK response to the pandemic. And I would like to thank you first of all for taking time out to meet with us and share your views on the Terms of Reference.

The first thing that I do want to say before we get started is that in all of these sessions, we recognise that, even though you're here in a professional capacity, everybody has a different response and has had different experiences to the pandemic; we do have a counsellor with us today.

Obviously, most people are remote; we do have one person in the room, and a coordinator in the room. But Martin is in the room there. He's also available to take calls. If you need to step away, if you want to speak to him at any point, please do take some time out. I believe his contact

details are in the agenda that was sent to you. So if not, you can reach out to one of our staff as well who can put you in touch. And it's very important you feel that you are able to do so if you want to.

So over the coming weeks, we are meeting a number of sector organisations and bereaved families. And the purpose of these meetings are to consult on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, which I hope you've all seen were published last week by the Prime Minister.

As well as these events we also have an online consultation form where we're inviting both organisations and the public to submit their views through our website. Just a reminder to say that this meeting is being recorded. We are taking a transcript of all the meetings that we are having with organisations so that we can use and analyse the feedback that you've got and given to us.

The transcripts will be published at the end of the consultation period. If you would rather not be named, could you please contact one of my staff, either in the room or outside by email afterwards to let us know that you'd rather not be named in those transcripts. And that'll be fine. Thank you.

Obviously, this meeting is being conducted in the hybrid format, as are most of the meetings that we were doing. I myself had hoped to be in Exeter, along with my staff who are there at the moment, but unfortunately, I have a child with Covid at the moment. So I'm stuck at home as many people have experienced over the last couple of years.

Just a couple of bits of housekeeping about the conduct of the meeting. First of all, for Larissa's benefit in the room, there are no fire alarms planned. I can't speak for all of us around the screen but in Exeter there are no fire alarms planned. So if the fire alarm does go off, please follow the instructions of the staff there in the room.

The usual sort of hybrid meetings rules apply: if you would keep your microphone muted until you are going to speak, and then unmute yourself, and then re-mute if you can, as well. Please put your hand up virtually if you want to speak and I will come to you; I will do my best to manage everybody. Please do shout if I miss you. Please don't stand on ceremony: please come back and say that you've had your hand up, but hopefully I'll be able to spot when people have put their hand up to say something.

And then the final thing, when you speak for the first time, if you could introduce yourself, and the organisation that you're representing, as well – I have a list here but you may not all know each other so if you wouldn't mind just doing that the first time you speak, that'd be incredibly helpful for us and for the transcript.

I think that's all I want to say by way of introduction. So moving on to the crux of the meeting, which will take us through till about 11.30. And we'll try and keep this as structured as we can. But essentially, as I set out, the meeting is to hear your views on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry. The Terms of Reference, again, which I hope you've all seen, set the scope, I suppose, of the Inquiry - they'll set out to Baroness Hallett exactly what she should look at.

They don't say how she should do it, or the sort of depth or granularity, and we can come on to some of the questions that we asked in relation to the Terms of Reference there as well. But what they're not about is the experiences that people have had. So it can be quite difficult because obviously we've got to be really careful that we don't take any evidence at this stage, because as I said at the start, the Inquiry has not yet started. But inevitably, there will always be some stories, some responses and experiences that form your views on the Terms of Reference that you feel that you want to share, which is absolutely fine, but I just want to be clear from the start that this isn't about –

Speaker: [00:00:00] Recording stopped.

Sam Hartley: [00:02:00] Apologies for that. I'm not quite sure what's happened there. Hopefully my – the RTS team heard that. Paul at RTS, did you hear that the recording has stopped?

Paul: [00:02:55] I have indeed, there, Sam; Apologies for that. That was just me. We've got the recording going on the main side there as well.

Sam Hartley: [00:03:02] Okay, great. Thank you Paul. Apologies for that, everybody.

So I was just saying that this is not about collecting evidence and won't feed into Baroness Hallett's ultimate recommendations when she reports on the Inquiry but it is – I do want to try and keep it structured about what she should look at and how she should go about that. So if you can all bear that in mind, as you participate.

So without further ado, I think we can move on to the actual crux of the Terms of Reference, which again, I hope you have seen and the four questions that we have asked as part of the consultation period.

The first question is quite a wide one. 'Do you think that the Terms of Reference cover all the areas that should be addressed by the Inquiry?' And then, if not, what other things should the Terms of Reference consider? One final thing I should say - apologies, I should have said this at the start. The process of this is that we will collate all the views that we hear around the country and from the different sectors and organisations and also that we read from people sending in online.

Baroness Hallett will consider all those and make some recommendations to the Prime Minister after that, for the Terms of Reference are his. They are not ours: they are for him to decide as the sponsor minister. We will make strong recommendations based on what we hear about what should be changed. So please bear that in mind when you provide your views to us.

So if I open the floor, please do put your hands up virtually or Larissa, if you would raise your hand when you want to speak. Thank you, Josephine. I was going to say I intend to use first names. I hope that's okay with everybody. If you'd rather I didn't then please say, but for now, please call me Sam. Josephine, if you want to kick off, we have some more hands up as well. So thank you.

Josephine Attwooll: [00:04:50] Thanks, Sam. So I'm Jo Atwell. I work as Chief of Staff at Universities UK, which is the representative body for university vice chancellors. We've got 140 members across all nations of the UK.

One initial comment I had on the Terms of Reference related to – it sort of says that the Inquiry will examine the Covid-19 response and the impact of the pandemic, including restrictions on attendance at places of education. For me, I kind of think it should be broader than just attendance. The broader restrictions that we've had to deal with throughout the pandemic have obviously placed some limits on students actually being able to access in-person education. But even when they have been able to access in-person education, there's been a whole load of other restrictions that have impacted that student experience.

So for me, I think there's a wider point there, which is actually around how have the restrictions more broadly – not just restrictions kind of around attendance at education settings – how has that affected the education experience? I mean, I think things like social distancing, limits on housing, household numbers, testing requirements, you know, all this stuff around social interactions, all of those things have had a really big impact on the wider experience. So I'd say it's broader than just 'attendance' at education settings.

Sam Hartley: [00:06:25] Thank you, Josephine. I think Susan had her hand up next. But lestyn – do want to come in on that point, specifically?

Susan Pember: [00:06:31] Yeah, it is – it's nearly the same message really. So I'm Susan Pember. I'm the Policy Director for HOLEX, which is the Adult and Community Education sector. So my interest is adult education, but also young people who are taught in an adult education setting. And I just didn't feel that that particular bullet point was wide enough. Would it actually cover my providers? Would it actually cover my students?

So that was the first comment. And then still, on the Terms of Reference, there does seem to be some issues that run across everybody. And not just in education, but sort of equality and diversity issues. For example, we had – it impacted most on Asian women who were very reluctant to come into learning, to do online learning. So I'd like to see that caught up, and I know on the health issues it would have been – there are diversity and equality issues. There's also mental health running all the way through it for school children and university, and adult students and our staff.

There's also safeguarding issues, I don't know, where they'd be captured, again, for students and staff. In my world, you know, adult learners, who are domestic abuse survivors, that type of thing. And then lastly, connectivity and online, which seemed to be the thing that I learned the most, talked the most, and complained about. The lack of it for particularly poor adults. And it would be good if somehow the Terms of Reference could capture that.

Sam Hartley: [00:08:18] Thank you Susan. Before I come to Noni and lestyn, can I just – can I pick up on the safeguarding point? Would you be able to say a bit more about the impact there and how we can look to expand the Terms of Reference to make sure that's captured?

Susan Pember: [00:08:32] Well, I think there's others on the call who can do this a bit more justice than me, but the main point for us was that in education, there are safe settings, mainly women, but also men, so that they can come into a safe setting so they get away from the domestic environment.

The same for schools, and I'm an ex-governor of a secondary school. I was still the governor for the first year of Covid. I mean, that was a real worry, you know; we kept the doors open for vulnerable students and extended the definition, because we were really worried about young people 11 to 16 being left at home. You know, they shouldn't be in that environment. The parents could only cope with them, like two hours of an evening normally; having them there all day. So there's a whole – for me there's a safeguarding issue around students of all ages.

Sam Hartley: [00:09:25] Thank you Susan. Noni or Noni, apologies if I pronounced that wrong, and then Iestyn and then Chris.

Noni Csogor: [00:09:32] I go by any of the above, but yeah, I'm Noni Csogor. I'm Research and Policy Manager at the Sixth Form Colleges Association. So we represent 16 to 19 specialist providers in England. And I think it's important to have a distinction between the educational impacts of Covid and the impacts of health-related restrictions. And to me, it seems as though the Terms of Reference with the attendance bullet points are trying to capture what was the effect of public health response on education settings. Whereas I think a lot of what we've been talking about so far, and a lot of what I think all of us would probably want the Inquiry to include, would be more of the impact on learning and on what goes on in education settings.

And I understand if that's out of scope of the Inquiry, because then we can move on to talking about the health impacts, we can talk about things like testing and safeguarding, all of those things that are more in line with the kind of factor that attendance is. But I think it's important to be clear about whether the educational impact is potentially in scope or not.

Sam Hartley: Thank you, Noni. So, you know, to your point, your question, I mean, nothing is out of scope at the moment. And that's exactly what this consultation is about. So if you think that there is a good argument for that, and I dare say you're not alone in thinking that, then it's really important that through this meeting, and also through – hopefully all your organisations will submit views online to us as well. It's important that you make those points now because this is the – this is the chance for the next few weeks or the one chance to shape the Terms of Reference. Iestyn.

Iestyn Davies: [00:11:24] Diolch Sam. And thanks to Sue as well. Nice daffodils, by the way, Sue, there the background, totally appropriate for March for an expat. I think, you know, at one level, Sam, you've got this places of education, I would imagine is a bit of a catch-all term. What would have been really useful [inaudible] would a lot of people up in this conversation, if you'd said 'schools', obviously, or 'university'. So good, well done in avoiding that sort of very specific set of terms.

But I think what we're looking for is a realisation, maybe in the Terms of Reference, or at least in the approach taken in order to meet the Terms of Reference, is the understanding that places of education or places of learning are many and varied. Your following bullet point, for instance, the closure and reopening of hospitality, retail, sport and leisure centres, they are for workplace learners or apprentices, or people who are on the job training as part of an FE college or indeed a degree programme. They are also places of learning or places of education.

And it's going to be about how the Inquiry in this area captures those nuances. So if you were to list every potential area of education as a physical place, it'd be replete wouldn't it. So I think it's

going to be about how you approach it, how will that bullet point, if it is extended – how will it enable you to catch the various places and locations of learning? And education as we would know, and Sue more than others in the room will tell you a lot about the difference between education and learning – learning can take place at home, clearly, and it was taking place at home. But education perhaps means a particular formalised delivery, and I think in that respect, then, you are going to have to start looking at the impact of blended or distance learning digital delivery.

So it is, again, how are you going to take it forward to the next level? How will you ensure the Inquiry team goes in the right direction, sets its radar if you like, to pick up the right kinds of things. So I think that that's very important. And there are other areas that perhaps I would draw attention to, and this goes back to the preamble rather than the bullet point – or the list of bullet points under one.

You've identified obviously, the areas of scope and in devolution. You mentioned, I think it's called evidence gathering, reporting established by devolved institutions, and also devolved matters. Again, that's good for a catch-all. But I think the devil will emerge in the detail and it's actually putting you on, if you like – on high alert about some of these areas. So there are some tranches that are devolved, in as much as say, for instance, the regulation of qualifications is devolved, you have Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or SQA. But the interplay beneath that level, or various functions of regulation, will often cross over borders and boundaries.

And that, for instance, is what gave rise to the challenges around results days, and assessed grades rather than formalised, you know, computer assessment. So it's, again, being aware of the nuance that lies beneath the bullet point, and the preamble. How you capture that, that's up to you, you're the experts in this but I think it's important that we make you aware it's that second level, I think you'll have many of our concerns.

Sam Hartley: [00:14:36] Thank you Iestyn. Yes, I wouldn't say that we're the experts, but we will be expert with your advice and guidance, which is what this is about. So thank you for that. Just to come back on the devolution point. I mean, just be assured that it is very, very near the top of Baroness Hallett's agenda to ensure that we get this right. It is a UK-wide inquiry. We're all very aware of, in particular, the calls for an inquiry in Wales. Obviously there is a separate inquiry in Scotland and the complexities of unpicking the reserved and devolved responsibilities in every sector, not just yours, it's something that Baroness Hallett is giving a lot of thought to. So thank you for that. Point well made and understood.

Chris first and then I can see Larissa's got her hand up in the room after that.

Chris Nichols: [00:15:32] Yes, smashing Sam; thank you for that. Good morning, everybody. I'm Chris Nichols. I'm one of the Area Directors for the Association of Colleges. And one of the things that occurs to me, having read the Terms of Reference, and some of the points that have already been made is about the attendance of education or access to education.

And one of the things is the digital technologies that we had to make available or digital poverty that we experienced as the pandemic started to take hold. And I know Sue touched on it a little bit, when she talked about connectivity and online. I think it's a vitally important point, not in terms

of just the hardware that was available to students and to colleges at the time, but the connectivity through Wi-Fi. The facility for online learning, the movement to online learning, the understanding of what online learning – all the technology around online – online learning looks like. I think it's just important to acknowledge that if we can, as part of the access to education, particularly. Colleges remained open throughout the pandemic, the early stages of the pandemic, for vulnerable students; just having access to that technology proved a great difficulty. And, yeah, that's my point.

Sam Hartley: [00:16:39] Thanks, Chris. If we come to Larissa, if you could turn your mic on. Great.

Larissa Kennedy: So hi there, I'm Larissa Kennedy, National President at NUS. And kind of echoing some of the earlier points that have been made around the need to branch out beyond attendance. I think, you know, just picking up on that point about digital poverty, we did research back in August/September 2020, that found that 27% of students were unable to access online learning during the pandemic. And so I think it's something around the kind of implications of digital poverty, the way that that has kind of exacerbated existing gaps in our education system.

You know, something also around disabled students in particular, in their experience of the pandemic, where many of the things that disabled students have been asking for for a long time became possible. But actually there are other elements of these shifts that made things inaccessible, particularly the loss of, you know, assistive technologies and so on, that we often see in in-person learning.

Kind of picking up on Susan's earlier point about mental health, I think we also have to think about the mental health implications for students, and particularly vulnerable students, young students, and so on. Again, our research has found that 52% of students said that their mental health had deteriorated or been affected negatively by the pandemic. And so you know, thinking about not only education as something that we interact with on a kind of cognitive level, but also as an experience. And the fact that many students were being relocated across the country or in some cases across the world, and then having absolutely no connection to their kind of support systems because they were then isolating and so on, on their own, some of whom were away from home for the first time in their lives.

Again, thinking about the affordability of education and by extension, the kind of impact again on diversity, inclusion, things that others have referred to, and the kind of – the way that not being able to tap into usual routes of income, like hospitality, leisure, and so on, and the way that that impacted students and their ability to engage with their education and afford to engage with their education.

And just coming back to the point around equality and diversity, phase two of our research also found that women, trans students, LGBTQ+ students, disabled students, and students with caring responsibilities, were all less likely to have had the necessary support they wanted to access during the pandemic. So just a few pieces there from our perspective at NUS.

Sam Hartley: [00:19:18] Thank you, Larissa. I'm going to come to Kevin next and then Alex, I think who hasn't spoken yet and then, then Josephine.

Kevin Gilmartin: [00:19:27] Thank you. Hi, Kevin Gilmartin. And I work for the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL). I've got a few points to bring to this. I think my list was a lot longer. But I think most of it's been covered and it's mainly through what looks like the limitation of that bullet point on just using the word 'attendance'. So I think everybody's explained a lot about that.

There are three other areas and it may well be that they're covered in other bullet points. If they are I apologise but I can't quite find them. The first one, there's no specific mention of poverty and hunger of young people. I couldn't find it under the economic section or how we might get to that, or where we might find that. But I think that's the particular area to be examined, the extent to which I think that surprised a lot of people. So if that could be or is included somewhere, that's fine. That's great.

The second point is, and I'm looking at the second bullet point, which talks about how decisions were made and communicated and implemented. But I think the point I would want to make is how the Government engaged in the first place with bodies, like schools and universities. So I think that's a different point about before – I think it comes before decision-making. It's about the actual engagement, and the way that that was conducted. I hope that makes sense.

And the third point is about how the Government worked with or directed other agencies – who in turn had an impact. For example, and you may not agree with them, how the Government might have liaised with some of the awarding bodies, with Ofqual, etc. So I'm not sure it – make sure that that is – that is picked up. So it's the impact of possibly the lack of engagement with those third parties that impacted back on some of us in the room. I hope they make sense, Sam.

Sam Hartley: [00:21:41] They do. Kevin, thank you. Yeah. Just on the engagement point. I don't want to put words into your mouths, I want to just hear a little bit more about what you mean by the engagement by Government to your sector –

Kevin Gilmartin: [00:21:53] Third party you mean?

Sam Hartley: Yeah.

Kevin Gilmartin: I think many of us who kind of – many of our members who are head teachers, mainly, and college principals, and people who work in the sector, they – the phrase 'passing the buck', and 'who do we speak to about this?' kept coming up. And right hand and left hand. So when they're trying to get to details or – and the big issue, I suppose, the biggest of all possibly – might have been around the summer exams with the Government saying one thing, but then Ofqual saying something else than the awarding bodies. So that hadn't been pre-thought through, possibly. So, I think that that's the issue I'm trying to bring out.

Sam Hartley: [00:22:32] Great. I think you answered my follow-up question, because I think it feels like it's more than just Government. It's the regulators –

Kevin Gilmartin: [00:22:47] Yes it is. Exactly.

Sam Hartley: Local authorities, maybe, as well. Local education. Fine. Okay. Thank you, Kevin. Alex, next, and then Josephine.

Alex Payne: [00:22:47] Hi, thank you very much. Yes. So I'm Alex Payne. I'm the Chief Exec of LANDEX, which is a membership organisation of land based colleges and universities. Yeah, thank you. I think, as you say, many of the points that I had have been picked up already. I think the way that I sort of encompass it, I suppose, is really, we spend a lot of time trying to close down achievement gaps across education. And I think there are a number of learners in those areas, within those groups of achievements that we – that we analyse on a yearly basis that were more heavily impacted. And therefore, that's that – that distance grew. And that's not necessarily just in terms of achievement, but in access to education. And I think, as my colleagues are discussing all those areas, including safeguarding, those young carers, etc., those are picked up in those achievement gaps that we would normally analyse. I think that might be a way of picking up some of that information, but not just in the achievement area, but in the access and the broader impacts as a result of that.

So yeah, I think just some reassurance that within that broader scope, within that sort of attendance measure, that a number of those areas are going to be picked up. Particularly obviously, within our area, I'd say, they're also around the difference between yes, you can access online as long as you weren't disadvantaged in terms of accessibility, and IT, etc. The theoretical but actually the practical skills development that there was a gap, as a result of the pandemic and the pickup of that longer term.

And just because obviously, I know it's not to do with education, but I just wanted to raise it, and I may be completely wrong, and it may be picked up somewhere else within the Inquiry. But I think there's an opportunity to look at agriculture, the supply chain and food security. And I just wondered, where – you know, that's absolutely fine, we can leave it for another meeting, but I just wonder where that would fit in. Because I think that's an area that if we're thinking about safeguarding for the future, I think is certainly an area that we should be considering in there.

Sam Hartley: [00:25:00] Thanks. Thanks, Alex, could you say a bit more about that? So sort of for my learning or my benefit, what do you mean by that? I'm just trying to – scanning the Terms of Reference as you're talking just to see where we can – how we can...

Alex Payne: [00:25:12] Yeah, I mean, I think when we talk about the sectors that were impacted, and I can see all the areas that you've got on there, including sort of, judicial work and that sort of thing, but actually, I think within food security and agriculture and supply chain, the restrictions that happened, and the impact of the pandemic affected that. Yes, people saw that within supermarkets. But actually, in terms of on farms, in the field, there were real issues in terms of staffing and moving those products throughout the country. Some of those impacts are still being felt now. So I think that might just be something to think about in terms of that, that food security, and how that was impacted and how we can mitigate that in the future. That's all, but I realise that might not be for this meeting.

Sam Hartley: [00:26:06] Great. No, definitely worth mentioning. Thank you, Alex. I think Josephine, yes, you've had your hand up.

Josephine Attwooll: [00:26:14] Thanks Sam. It was just a couple of additional points. Firstly, I think when we're looking at kind of the impact of what's happened on students, it's probably worth

recognising within the Inquiry and trying to draw out within the Inquiry, the sort of – you know, there's a lot of nuances here.

So, for example, even within higher education, the experiences of the pandemic across the higher education student body is going to be wildly different for a number of different reasons. As one example, practical students, after Christmas 2020, heading into 2021, were allowed to come back to in-person study, but students on non-practical courses weren't. So even within the higher education sector, there are different ways in which kind of restrictions played out depending on what course an individual student was studying. And trying to draw out those kinds of differential impacts may be quite hard to do but I think it's worth at least sort of trying to sort of draw out some of those distinctions.

I also think that we can't look at every bit of the education sector in isolation. So what happened in schools, for example, or in colleges is going to have a really big impact on the transition of students who were doing their A levels, or BTEC or whatever, when they're transitioning into university.

So you know, we've had students coming into higher education who've had a massively disrupted kind of final couple of years of their secondary education, and how is that actually kind of impacting their transition, or indeed, their desire to go to into higher education?

I think another point really is just around the definition of – the Terms of Reference, talk about getting the views of those who've experienced bereavement, hardship or loss. And I think when we're looking at hardship, we need to take a broad approach, and I think others have mentioned that, but I think, you know, we're talking about mental health, we're talking about isolation, you know, loss of income, exacerbate – exacerbation of learning gaps, the differential impact on different generations as well, all of those things, I think, are quite important.

And I think my final comment is just around the actual health and the response of the health and care sector. There is a question for me around the effectiveness of securing support from partners to support that national effort. So universities were trying to kind of donate things like equipment and PPE, and, you know, enabling their students to volunteer to support the health effort, that kind of thing. And how – you know, what lessons can be learned on the effectiveness of drawing on local partners across the education sector, in supporting the national effort.

Sam Hartley: [00:29:11] Thank you, Josephine, just before I invited lestin to come in, I just want to pick up on this point about hardship versus loss, I suppose or bereavement, which is really, really well made. And again, Baroness Hallett is very conscious to make sure that we do capture that properly in the Terms of Reference and in her work. I'd be interested in your views, Josephine, and others, subsequently, about where you think the impact of hardship isn't, in chronological terms, right now.

Obviously, we're two years into the pandemic. We think it's accepted that we won't know the impact in certain ways for quite some time. And I know that other sectors, other people are thinking about how we try and capture you know that – there must be a cut-off to the Inquiry. We can't keep doing this forever and ever, and we'll come on to talk a little bit about timing and some of the other questions as well. But just in terms of realising the impact on the post-16, higher and

further education sectors, have you got a sense of that, you know, yourself Josephine or for others to think about coming on?

Josephine Attwooll: [00:30:20] I mean, I think there's probably quite a lot of evidence that universities could highlight in relation to sort of usage of their mental health and their broader kind of counselling services and that kind of thing. And I think there's probably a lot that they could say, in terms of pluses and what that might have looked like, what the demand looked like before the pandemic and what it looks like now. As you say, it's hard to predict the future, and we can't necessarily say in a year's time whether or not that demand is going to be the same or greater or less, but I certainly think that the Inquiry should take, you know, consider as broad a period of time as it can, in relation to the evidence on that – on that area.

Sam Hartley: [00:31:08] Yes. Thank you, Josephine. Iestyn.

Iestyn Davies: [00:31:15] Yeah, thanks very much. I was leaning towards that, essentially, in main bullet point two, bullet point three, where the Terms of Reference look at the response of the health and care sector. And also, then we look at the economic impact.

So a kind of quick hold that thought, I think we can – and I'm sure when we come to give evidence to you we will be able to demonstrate that in some sectors of education, there was a Covid or pandemic dividend. Because we potentially might have seen young people for instance stay in school or sixth form college or choose to study A levels rather than vocational and technical subjects. There seems to be some evidence of that which we'll need to return to and provide for you from our various perspectives and parts of the UK.

But if that is the case, there is a definitely positive outcome in some areas and negative in others. So I think we will need to look at how that trend progresses through. I'm sure Josephine like me read her online version of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* this morning, where Australia is saying they had a bit of a pandemic dividend, if you like in terms of enrolments, particularly centralised enrolments, only to see that now as restrictions are dropping off. The old Aussie predilection to go on a year's gap year and travel to the UK is starting to potentially return.

So I think you will see a medium to long term disruption. But the area that perhaps concerns me most is both a disruption to vocational and technical education within colleges themselves or in the workplace learning environment. But the impact that has first and foremost on the healthcare and care system. So we would potentially anticipate maybe an impact in the immediate Covid period where courses weren't likely to be finished, because you simply couldn't get the numbers of on the job experience or out of college experience. And vice versa, for apprentices into college. To allow, not just the health and social care, which would be the case across all regulated health professions to be able to get past the threshold for the public, professional regulatory bodies or healthcare registers.

So I think we would need to look at bullet point two, for the impact of the prior challenges on the provision immediately on healthcare and social care. And then the residual effect of that going forward. So you highlight the impact of staff and staffing levels, for instance, but I think you mean that likely in the context of, do you have enough staff to be able to be numerary, to be able to offer clinical care, but perhaps that needs to be unpacked and say what impact will it have going

forward on staffing levels, because we'd anticipate perhaps a slowing down of throughput into nursing and other health care courses.

The same there would be the case for care homes and care settings, all regulated professions. So I think you'd probably be worth pulling out, in the Terms of Reference, the impact on regulated professionals in particular.

Then really go into the third bullet point, are we likely to see in terms of skills, not-spots, if you like, within the economy that would immediate – we all know about the immediate lack of certain areas. But can we then look at the impact it's going to have – this is back to your boundary setting or when did it stop being a Covid effect and when does it become an ongoing failure in policy, if you like. And I would suggest that we would need to be looking at a three-to-five-year window for the direct Covid effect. But in that time, start looking at, if you like, how we manage that, which then becomes a general failure of public policy rather than a specific challenge caused by Covid.

So setting those benchmarks particularly for those of us in vocational education and training to be useful, because you will discern what happened to the flow, if you like, of graduates, of registrants within the Covid period and the extent to which we've been able to redirect potential learners into these priority areas as part of a post-Covid public policy response. So sorry for the long points, but I think it's worth teasing those out as a consequence of bullet point one, bullet point two and bullet point three.

Sam Hartley: [00:35:31] Don't apologise. I mean, that does go to the heart of my question, I think about the level of the medium to long-term effects, potentially, of the pandemic and how we try and capture that whilst respecting the fact that we must have an end date to the Inquiry. So that's very helpful.

I'm really sorry, Susan, Noni. I didn't see who put their hand up first. And I know Larissa wants to come in after that. If anyone wants to jump in first please do. Noni, would you like to go first as you're top left of my screen? And before I go to you to say what you want to say, Noni, I just want to say I'm conscious of the time moving on. And I do want to leave enough time particularly for question four. Baroness Hallett is really interested in hearing about some good suggestions about how we capture the views of people outside, if you like, the formal structure – formal legal structures of the Inquiry process. So I do want to come to that in due course. But for now, Noni, do you want to come in, then Susan, and then Larissa, I think you want to speak in the room.

Noni Csogor: [00:36:34] I think, to sort of pull back and look at all of the educational impacts that we've talked about: the equality and diversity impacts, the mental health, and the impact on students' learning and outcomes, none of which are sort of currently captured – that would probably necessitate creating a sort of new subheading alongside the impact on health and social care and the economic response.

And I appreciate that you'll probably be talking to lots of sectors who also think that their area deserves its own large element. But in terms of making that case, for an education-specific component to the Inquiry, I think I would say, if you're measuring it against the economic impact, for example, estimates do vary. But I think it is estimated that some of the lost learning created by

the pandemic will have a greater economic impact on the UK's economy further down the line than the sum total of all of the Government spending and support that came out during the pandemic. So I would argue it's at least equally important.

Sam Hartley: [00:38:01] Thanks, Noni. Susan.

Susan Pember: [00:38:05] Just on one thing that we've not talked about, but touched upon, which is the organisation of volunteers. And I don't know whether that comes under your third set of bullet points or your third where you've got identified lessons learned. But I think we could have been all quicker off the mark on that. And having – where we seem to have quite a few rules on most things, there wasn't a rule about if you lend your staff to the sort of corporate centre to help organise, like, testing, you know, was that good or bad? And could your salaries be still pulled down by Government funding?

So there was still a bit about the organisation of volunteers and how we improve on that for the future. And I also think, under lessons learned, I worked in local authorities a long time ago, but we did a lot on disaster planning. That didn't seem to be there. People weren't ready, partnerships weren't developed. So some new things had to be established, which made everything a bit slow, at the beginning. So I think there should be some sort of feature on disaster planning.

And about your questions about what should be done first. I mean, the public interest is really health. I'm a great believer that we should have education up there, at this point in life, I think it should probably take second place. Because that's not where the public is still very much concerned about. And then you said about timing. And maybe you're going to go on to this, but I think you have to – personally, you have to have a set time limit now. You know, Covid is two and a half years old. People want answers for the first year of Covid. And maybe there has to be some other review about, you know, the impact of long Covid or the impact – the long term impact. But I think you need to get some answers and some learning out as quickly as possible, because people are sort of a bit frustrated about it. So I hope that's sort of helpful.

Sam Hartley: [00:40:18] Very helpful, Susan, thank you. I'll come to Larissa in a minute, but I really welcome views after Larissa's contribution about that issue about timing, and not quite prioritisation, but are there – is it that we should be looking at health first? We've already heard comments, quite rightly, about the cross-cutting nature of almost everything in this pandemic, which makes the challenge pretty difficult. Should we look at health first, should we take a more chronological approach? And you mentioned disaster planning Susan as well. Should we be looking at preparedness first?

So after Larissa, interested in views on how we should do this Inquiry, whether we can – whether it's feasible to look at distinct things first, whether breadth and depth is more important than promptness and making recommendations that can make some changes, you know, what – how to balance that trade off, as well. And then later, we'll come on to the – to the other – to how we seek people's views outside of the formal process. But before then, Larissa, would you like to come in?

Larissa Kennedy: [00:41:25] Thank you. Yes, I mean, to my understanding part of the Inquiry is about understanding the kind of preparedness in the face of this pandemic, and potentially preparedness ahead of future pandemics, touching wood, knocking on everything. But you know, I can't talk about this without thinking about the kind of A level scandal, the GCSE scandal, the BTEC scandal, and the kind of impacts of those quite disruptive moments for students and the kind of harm caused by the chaos of that. And I think it'd be great to see the Inquiry looking into the kind of flexibility of our education systems. But I guess other systems as well, and how do we make sure that something like that where policy was kind of exacerbating existing gaps in our education system – that something like that never happens again?

And I think it'd be interesting, I think, also to apply that to other areas of the Inquiry. Things that went wrong, how do we make sure things like that don't happen again? And how are we creating preparedness? And then it made me think, to Kevin's earlier point about the agency of institutions and awarding bodies and so on, and in fact, to think about what was the agency of students in any of this, and to make the point that NUS were excluded – kind of explicitly not invited to the government's HE Task Force during the pandemic. I think we were quite surprised to be invited to this, to be honest. And there's been a kind of systematic exclusion of students and the views of students throughout policy, kind of progression in the space. So I'd really like to see the Inquiry taking that into account and thinking about how we make sure that it isn't kind of a closed door to those people who are on the receiving end of this work and of these policies.

Sam Hartley: [00:43:17] Thank you Larissa. Point very well made. So I have just been reminded, I should have said at the start. Some people are using the chat, which is excellent. Thank you very much. We will capture those as well. So please do feel free to put in, as some of you have been, comments through the chat box as well. I see no one's taking the bait and helping me out with whether we should be looking at breadth and depth or promptness and quick recommendations. But I would be really interested to know, for some help, I suppose, that I can take to Baroness Hallett about what is important – whether we should be setting an end date for the hearings. You may have picked up in the announcement the other day that we don't think the hearings are able really to start because the Inquiry start has been slightly delayed. We don't think we could start the substantive hearings, if you like, on the evidence on the different bits in Terms of Reference until 2023.

Should we be saying actually, we're going to finish the hearings by this date and therefore make recommendations, should we be looking at interim reports as is suggested in the Terms of Reference potentially, that we can do interim reports? Is it more important to do a very, very thorough, very long-reaching very long-winded inquiry to cover off every single aspect before reporting or should we, as Susan suggested, be looking at doing some interim hard hitting recommendations just in case, again, touch wood as Larissa has done, that this happens again? Iestyn, I come to you with that easy question.

Iestyn Davies: [00:44:53] Thanks very much. I guess it all depends, what is the purpose of the Inquiry and I'm sure there are various answers to that. I think the point of view of working in a sector as part of public sector delivery - this report, could be very, very useful if and when, probably when rather than if, we face a similar sort of situation again. So for the Inquiry to be of

real use for those of us in these public service environments, it would be really good to have some very – I hate the phrase ‘quick wins’ or ‘low hanging fruit’ that get used time and time again, and you know, they become meaningless.

But it is likely that we will revisit this sort of situation, unfortunately. So I think it's important that we are able to avail ourselves of those lessons learned and they're applied across, as I mentioned, sorry, in chat, just to Sam and everybody else, about the wider governance rather than just Government responses. So I think having that to hand will be very, very useful.

I think there's probably a case elsewhere, to address if you like some of the more scandalous elements of the responses to the pandemic that do exist. But it's important that we recognise that sometimes these are decisions that were made in a hurry by well intended people; they weren't made to, if you like to curry favour in a particular way. I think there are possibly elements where some of the inter-Governmental relationships could have been improved. And that's worthwhile addressing.

But for the sake of this Inquiry, I would like to think that you could focus on a timeframe that's reasonable. So I would suggest that by the end of this month, we are past the initial pandemic phases, and it's accepted that we enter into an endemic phase of dealing with these kinds of situations. And that might be a useful, I feel like, sort of cut-off period for the period under review. And ultimately, what we want to know is what could we do better. There are other places for recourse to what went wrong, and the point that was scandalous, if you like. And there were clearly some of those things happening. But the purpose of this review, I think, needs to be something that can be as positive as it can be to allow public services to improve, as we anticipate a potential sort of move forward.

So hopefully, that helps answer the depth and breadth question. The breadth should be the period of pandemic, the depth should be to allow us to be able to make recommendations to public authorities, public sector organisations and bodies. And ultimately, I think, as I guess, I put in the chat, to Sam and to everybody else, I'd love there to be a [inaudible] education. But I think the question of what education can give and provide on the health and economy is actually how can the UK as a whole, and Governments particularly, become much more resilient?

And I think it's about resilience and recovery if you like is the missing bit; the recommendation should be targeted to that end. How can the UK become more resilient? And how can we aid recovery? And I hate the phrase again: how can you build the ‘new normal’, not the old normal? So hopefully, that for me sets out what I would think would be valuable framing in terms of time, breadth, and also, the purpose behind the review.

Sam Hartley: [00:48:08] It does, lestyn. Thank you very much. And we already heard from Susan about the idea of having some sort of quick recommendations, and I won't be giving away too many confidences to suggest that I think that's on Baroness Hallett's mind as well. She obviously wants to do a forensic job on what's happened, but she doesn't want to take a long, long time to do it and therefore miss the chance to have an impact short term in case this happens again. Susan?

Susan Pember: [00:48:36] Yeah, just one other thought. I am assuming that the departments themselves are doing a learning exercise, because I'm sure the Education Department could learn about the things that they did well, and the things that they didn't do well, and that they've got that in hand now. Just to make your job easier, it would be much easier for you to be able to say, we agree fully with Education's own recommendations for the future in this area. I'm just hoping they are actually; I'm sitting here thinking I hope the whole of Whitehall isn't waiting on this review, and are doing their own reviews and action plans now. And if not, that should be one of your first recommendations.

Sam Hartley: [00:49:24] It's a really good point, Susan, I can't speak for the departments about what they're doing. I would anticipate – I would fully expect that they are doing something. However, the point of an independent inquiry is that we do things independently, and we verify that the right lessons are being learned. It'd be quite right for the department to do that. And I don't doubt their intention in doing so. But I'm sure Baroness Hallett would feel that she would nevertheless still want to ensure that those lessons learned exercises are being done properly and scrutinised properly. Larissa, did you want to come in?

Larissa Kennedy: [00:49:59] Yeah, I mean, I just wanted to jump in on that to be the cynical student in the room, and express that I think we would have concerns about the Department self-reflecting. Of course, that's important. But I think that the power of this Inquiry is that it can go beyond that kind of self-reflection, where we may feel that the Government's reflections - the Government's own report card of themselves might be quite different than what an independent inquiry is able to unearth, particularly because of the kind of nature of some of the decision making and the intentions behind the decision-making. So that would be our reflection from a student perspective.

Sam Hartley: [00:50:47] Thank you. So yeah, I think we would entirely agree with that position. And that's exactly what Baroness Hallett intends to do. I'm going to resist the temptation to comment on Chris's comment in the chat about timing, and general elections and so on; that obviously won't be a fact that Baroness Hallett will take into account – being a little bit political about it. I don't see any other hands up, we've about half an hour to go. And I will make sure that we finish promptly and just have a bit of time for summing up at the end. And I do want to come on to the fourth question about how Baroness Hallett can hear from people outside the structures. Does anyone else want to come in before I do that, on this issue of prompt recommendations or interim reports versus taking much more time and depth and breadth?

Okay, super. And just once more before I do move on, Karen, I see you popped in there about the lack of preparedness by our regulators. We touched on it a little bit earlier, in terms of the kind of different actors within the field. Is there something else you want to say about – not so much Government? I mean, I guess [inaudible] suggested a very good sort of description of governance generally. Is there anything you want to say about regulators and their preparedness in particular, just to flesh that out a little bit?

Karen Moore: [00:52:13] No, sorry, my name is Karen Moore. I think I'm probably the only representative from Northern Ireland today. I am the Head of Quality at a further education

college. Our systems are a wee bit different from England. And I was chair of the Covid champions group for the colleges in Northern Ireland.

And no, I think there was a frustration that they – Ofqual – went straight off the blocks whenever the Covid started. And, you know, they only started a consultation in January 2021. I think March maybe we knew the outcome, we were writing – we then all had to write policy around how grades were going to be and there was [BTEC] Q-TAGS and all of that. But it was just very late for students and for staff. And I think that lack of communication from the regulator was not helpful.

Everybody has covered – I think there's all the things that have been said – by all of our other colleagues on the meeting. I think everything has been well covered: the poverty, the connectivity, safeguarding, you know, all of those are very valid points. I think you're right, attendance doesn't even nearly get to the crux of where education actually went. So, I mean, I think everybody has it well covered.

Sam Hartley: [00:53:58] Thank you, Karen. Okay, let's just take 15, 20 minutes or so just to talk through this last question. Question four. So as a reminder, I'm sure you've got it in front of you, but – but this is thinking about not so much about the Terms of Reference, but actually about how the Inquiry and Baroness Hallett can hear from people that have suffered harm.

And I think the way the question is phrased – bereaved people and those who have suffered harm as a result of pandemic. And I think we've already quite rightly had some points made about how we define harm and what that means in a sort of social and educational context as well. But the point of this question is really – I'm sure most of you will know, that a statutory inquiry is a legal piece of work, it involves copious amounts of written evidence, involves hearings, sort of quasi-judicial hearings, and that inevitably limits the amount of people that can participate and actually limits the levels of inclusion if you like. And Baroness Hallett is very, very keen to make sure that doesn't exclude people from feeling like they've had their say and feeling like that they have participated and shared their experiences.

So we're really interested to hear about any ideas or anything that you've seen done well in the past. I mean, obviously, there's been nothing on this scale before. But there have been other inquiries such as the child sexual abuse inquiry that has done something similar with what it called the Truth Project there. But I'm really interested to hear from people as to whether this is a useful proposal, how it can be done, whether it's practical, or the purpose and so on as well. I'll open the floor. There are no hands yet which – again, it's a difficult question. But thank you, Susan, would you like to come first?

Susan Pember: [00:55:50] Yeah, I don't know whether you want to use intermediaries but I know, like in London - there's the GLA, the Greater London Authority. They have an online network of a couple of thousand Londoners that they use to ask questions of. And that is a sort of way you can get some more people. Because I can see a difficulty, because those of us who are used to writing and responding to inquiries will. But how'd you get to the people who are really vocal, maybe on social media, that haven't had a chance to express their thoughts?

So it's either going through in my mind through intermediaries who've already got big online networks, or both going through social media, but it's such a sensitive subject. I can't see how you actually write the sort of text that says, I don't know, I suppose, 'Have you been touched by Covid? Would you like to respond to the review?' That seems quite a sensitive set of words, you know, but I think you should be using social media, it's there. That's where it's been most, you know, the noise about good and bad has been seen the most. And when you think of volunteers, that's what happened in the end. It was social media that was used to mobilise local groups into action.

Yeah, I'm sure we would also be happy to ask our staff to contribute; I've already sent out your survey link to say, could you... would you take some time and do that survey? Or would you get your students to do it. So, there are different channels to be used. I don't envy you all, this is one of those difficult ones.

Sam Hartley: [00:57:43] Thank you. Yes, again, it's the challenge of the scale of people affected. In our heads, it's 67 million people because everybody in some way, may not suffered bereavement or harm in the conventional sense, but in some way would have been affected by the pandemic. So thank you for that. Iestyn and then Kevin.

Iestyn Davies: [00:58:08] Thank you, Sam. The question of user voice, student voice learner voice, pupil voice is a complex one, normally under normal circumstances. So again, as Sue said, this is something that you are right to be really mindful of. So I'll try to corral my thoughts into thinking about the FE and workplace learning environment, and particularly obviously, that which takes place on the good side of the Wales-English border.

One of the challenges I think we have to recognise quickly in the FE environment is that the cohort of learners is by nature very varied: by age, by programme of learning that they might be involved in. So I think you have to be really careful that we don't simply take one voice, if you like, within the context of what is a very plural learning environment. And I hope you know, Karen in particular, again, would support this, that we need to be able to look at different voices within programmes and forms of learning. Because the experience of an FE learner doing an A level, for instance, would be very different to somebody doing level 3 health and social care or construction. So these are very different experiences.

I think, in trying to understand in some of those particular nuances around the learner or young person's voice, and indeed those who are more vulnerable outside of education, the role of the children's commissioners, for instance, would be very important, and whether or not there needs to be steps taken to empower them again, to build on the work I know they've already done, at least here in Wales, to try to go beyond the institutional response. And the point that was made earlier on is asking anybody to mark their own homework is not a good idea, but actually giving them the questions in the way they can actually best answer it to their benefit is not a good idea either.

I must admit, often I would have found myself during the pandemic trying to make sense of what the education FE sector was doing, and having to pause and think well, you know, yes, I'm trying to make sense of it. But is that spinning a line? Is it trying to promote a positive gloss on what

we're doing? So hopefully, the Commission will always be aware of that. And it is important, I think, that people within representative bodies within trade unions, or it might be, are allowed their own personal reflections. If you asked me the question as the Chief Executive in the middle of a pandemic, versus what I believe personally, perhaps you might get a slightly different nuanced response.

And it's important that people are allowed to speak freely. And you said, obviously, in this meeting, the comments will be unattributable. So I think it's important that maybe we have that opportunity to give that as individuals who've been involved in this. Some of the decisions, thankfully not the big decisions, are what happened on a Friday afternoon, were often down to those of us who were in the room, it was a very much, 'We need to make this decision, make it now,' kind of circumstances. So I think it's important that you allow us as well as other people, who are more widely able to give you our personal reflections in the roles that we occupied during the pandemic, and not simply ask for our institutional response.

So hopefully, that gives you a slightly richer voice as well. Or maybe it's just me that's prepared to spill the beans perhaps, I'm not quite sure. But I'm sure that all of us in this room would have our own personal reflections, as well as the reflections for our organisations. And please feel free to ask us that; it's important that you do.

Sam Hartley: [01:01:31] Thanks Iestyn; that's really a fantastic point. I completely echo that. It is, and you know, hence why I said at the start that, this has affected us all personally, and I hear some of the stories that you've been telling about the people, you – the groups you represent, the people and the young adults and adults that you represent. And I recognise a lot of them personally as well. So it's a really good point well made. Thank you; Kevin, and then Josephine.

Kevin Gilmartin: [01:02:00] Yeah, I don't know if this is appropriate, or if this is the way that Inquiries are handled Sam or not, but we would certainly extend an invitation to the Baroness if she wanted to come along and speak to a group of heads, you know, maybe our council, for example. So we had our annual conference last week in Birmingham and Nadeem Zahawi always does his keynote – or the Secretary of Business keynote speech. But then they always have about 30 to 40 minutes off record in a closed room with, you know, there's about 20, 25 head teachers. And they seem to think that is a really good way of just gathering informal views and just saying things that – and if you do get that, if you do – that's an invitation in the first place. I know I can speak on behalf and say that she'd be very welcome to attend. And maybe there are other similar gatherings. If it's an hour, she will hear from – if she hears from 10, 15 heads that could be 20,000, young, 16 to 19 year olds – or whatever. But that's one suggestion. I don't know if it's an appropriate way or not. But that's certainly something if you're interested, we could follow up with yourselves.

Sam Hartley: [00:03:11] Thanks, Kevin. That's really helpful. Really welcome. I will not give an answer or promise right now. But thank you for that. And maybe if you could drop the team a line as well, just to follow up on that – that'd be really important – really useful to us. I'll just say two things before I move to Josephine. And then Alex, and I think Larissa has a hand up as well in the room. So just on – on Baroness Hallett's involvement, it's a really tricky one, because as I said, this is a legal process, a legal statutory inquiry. And she has to be very careful that

essentially, she's acting as a judge in this and she has to be very careful as a judge would in any court case not to take evidence outside of the court area. All that said, the question is all about – and I acknowledge the questions about how she and we the Inquiry can hear in a more inclusive and accessible way from some of the experiences. So we are designing that at the moment. That's a really interesting – really a welcome invite and a really interesting thought, and we will certainly factor it in but I won't make any promises right now if that's okay. But thank you for that Kevin. So, Josephine first, I think, then Larissa had a hand up in the room first, and then I'll come to you, Alex.

Josephine Attwooll: [01:04:26] Thanks, Sam. I guess just to echo what Kevin said, if there are appropriate means of engaging with kind of university leaders, you know, that fit within how these inquiries are normally run then obviously, there's an offer from UUK as well to help with that, whether that's with our broader membership, which is 140 universities, or indeed with our board, which is 21 of our members, and that's cross-UK representation.

I think I'd add there's a huge amount that an organisation like UUK can do to, I guess kind of mobilise our individual members to engage with the Inquiry. There's huge diversity across our membership in terms of the types of universities, their student demographics, all of those things. And indeed, I think there is also a distinction, when you look at the different nations of the UK, so the rules that have applied to Scotland are quite different to what's applied to England.

And by virtue of that, the student experience has been somewhat different, and the impact on individual students and staff. So I think, within the UK, there's a lot that we can do to mobilise our members, and also, I guess, gather evidence from our members, which we then present as a kind of organisation-wide sort of piece of evidence about impact and engagement and all the different questions that you're asking in relation to this Inquiry. So yeah, I mean, we're well used to doing that as an organisation. And that's something that we can absolutely continue to do.

Sam Hartley: [01:06:07] Thanks, that would be much appreciated. I think this is inevitable, given the scale of what we are facing here, the number of people and organisations affected, I think we will be looking to umbrella groups representing membership bodies, and so on to help corral, bring together a sense and a sort of strategic reflection. But nevertheless, you know, back to lestin's point, not taking away from the ability for people to express their personal views and their personal experiences, as well. Larissa, if I come to you in the room, and then Alex.

Larissa Kennedy: [01:06:41] Thank you. Yeah, I mean, echoing similar to other organisations who are saying the same, but we'd be really happy to help facilitate engagement with students and also with student officers. Because our membership is made up of circa 600 member unions, all of whom have sabbatical officers who are elected to represent their seven million members. So if there was some way that we can kind of facilitate that authentic engagement with students, with those elected to represent students, we definitely be interested in doing that and helping facilitate some of that – that voice that comes from our students directly.

Sam Hartley: [01:07:19] Great, thank you, Larissa. Alex.

Alex Payne: [01:07:22] Just to say, obviously, more than happy to support in terms of our membership and the board. But again, Larissa has said exactly what I think; actually, you know,

when we think of the membership of all of the organisations that you have in the room, they will all have student governors, student bodies that exist there. And if there was an opportunity to have a succinct question that we put out to the wider student population, that could then be brought together, and those student governors could then be representative in a meeting, as well as our membership organisations, at least it would allow for, I think, what you're looking for in terms of the impact of the Inquiry for people to feel as if they've been heard. So I think it's finding a way in which you can broaden it to such an extent that everybody feels as if they have had the opportunity, but narrow it from your perspective, so that you can actually manage the feedback. So I think utilising what are already good processes in places to gather learner feedback might be worth it, both in university, college and school sector.

Sam Hartley: [01:08:28] Thanks, Alex. Yeah, your tacit acknowledgement there – it's a balancing act, isn't it? We do have to make sure that we can do this forensically, hear the right evidence, reach the right conclusions and make the right recommendations. And that inevitably can't mean hearing from 67 million people and feeding in their views and experiences. It's got to be more strict than that. But nevertheless, we need to find a way to make sure that people do feel like they have been heard. So that's really helpful. And thank you to the others in the chat, who are making the same offers, as well, which is really helpful. lestyn.

lestyn Davies: [01:09:06] Yeah, thanks, everybody. I think it's important we hear a wide range of voices; we all agree on that. There are mechanisms for doing it. There are also mechanisms for doing it badly. So I think we do need to be mindful of that, and it can't be an emotive free-for-all. So my question really to the Baroness and yourself, Sam, is how will you balance gathering empirical data, the economic numbers, or the HESA database, or the relevant lifelong learning records that exist in each the institutions, to be able to plot and chart some of the more empirical if you like data, and then be able to reflect one against the other?

You know, it's a classic methodological approach, isn't it, balancing qualitative and quantitative data together. So I think it's important that that comes into the discussion. And I wouldn't underestimate actually even in the context of education, trying to paint the picture of what has happened in terms of learner flows and learner outcomes. That's not an insignificant task: four administrations, four sets of data gathering. HESA, I believe – Josephine could probably help us here – being the only consistent data set that we have in terms of learning outcomes. And linking that then to some of the LEO data will help us in terms of understanding the longitudinal impact of the pandemic.

But again, only in the context of progression from an HEI into a graduate level job or otherwise not. So I think there's an important data gathering empirical role, if you like for the stats office, and official statistics to be able to allow us to understand dispassionately what happened particularly in this area of who was impacted when and how in a [inaudible] education. So again, some understanding of how you're going to go about that, maybe some insight to make sure you are capturing the right data as it sits in different areas in different databases under different jurisdictions.

Sam Hartley: [01:11:03] Yeah, thanks, lestyn, you hit the nail on the head really - that really goes to the point about why the substantive hearings won't start till next year, because a lot of this year,

once we actually get through the consultations and Terms of Reference and the Prime Minister has settled on the final version, most of this year will be about that very aspect of gathering data, and starting to build that empirical, quantitative picture so that Baroness Hallett and her team of incredibly bright lawyers and analysts and so on can then drill into the real nub of the issues, and focus the hearings and focus the evidence, the further evidence gathering and witness statements and so on, on those points of contention, those points of difference, those points of inconsistency, such that she can draw recommendation.

So, yes, we are designing what that looks like right now. It's never been done on this sort of scale before and a lot of this year looks like asking for or demanding as the Inquiry has the power to do, for data, evidence, backgrounds, information from a wide variety of organisations, obviously Government, and general public sector and governance, but also potentially others as well. Thank you for that.

Right, we're coming towards the end; I think I've got some really good ideas in the chat as well about, again, echoing the social media aspect for students and others as well to try and capture those views. And I want to put one more brief question to you, if I may, and then I'll try and sum up as much as I can, before we finish promptly at 11.30.

And that's a question about how Baroness Hallett and the Inquiry can keep your trust, can keep your organisations and the people you represent not just in professional terms, but obviously your students as well, how we can keep your trust that this is going to be done scrupulously, independently and so on. We touched slightly on this earlier when Larissa made the points about the Department of Education doing their own lessons learned. And I hope I convinced you that the whole point of the Inquiry is that it's independent and will be scrutinising them as much as it will be anyone else. Interested in any of your views about what we can do to make sure that we keep your trust through this, this process. And so that when the recommendations come, even though some people may not agree with the outcome, they can trust that the process was followed rigorously, independently and scrupulously. Thanks Susan.

Susan Pember: [01:13:44] Yeah, actually, you've done a lot for my trust by having this meeting. And the fact that I was able to tell people that we've been invited to it, because normally we're a sector that we have to bang on the door to say, 'Remember us.' So first of all, well done for that.

But now is the second thing about, right, you've brought us in, like how do you keep us engaged? I would value something like a regular update. It doesn't have to be personalised, but just something to say we've reached this stage, we're doing this next, you can contribute at this stage again, or, you know, something like that without tying yourself up to dates really. If I was you I'd avoid dates. So, you know, I love it that the spring in DFE terms can be anything from January to July. So, you need a bit of that. But it would be good to be kept in old style, a regular sort of mini newsletter, but maybe not called that, because that seems a bit frivolous for something that's so serious.

Sam Hartley: [01:14:57] Thank you. That's really helpful. I know we've got my colleagues from the Communications and Engagement Team listening in avidly and will be taking notes on that. Yes, I'm always baffled myself by governmental seasons too. Noni.

Noni Csogor: [01:15:11] Yeah, just to say absolutely agree with Sue. There might be really long periods where you don't need to hear from us or are not looking to engage our members. But if even during those periods, we've got a little bit of an update on what's going on so that we can let our members know, sort of this is what's going on, if there's a delay, this is why, that'd be really helpful.

Sam Hartley: [01:15:38] Thanks Noni. Larissa, I can see your hand.

Larissa Kennedy: [01:15:42] Yeah, I mean, my members are, let's say, difficult to please when it comes to wanting engagement and wanting to know that this is going to be independent and transparent. And I think already I posted on my Instagram that I was coming here and all the responses are, that's not going to do anything – so I really want this to engage students, and the fact that they are feeling incredibly unheard over the past few years. And I think the kind of core to that is transparency: transparency around kind of who's this accountable to and, you know, what's the demography of people who are working on this behind the scenes?

You know, I think particularly for students, and students, of course, are of all ages, but for the younger demographic among us, a feeling that a lot of decisions are being made about our lives without any engagement with us. So what does that look like? How is it going to make sure that there is some accountability to younger people who often don't have that kind of agency over the spaces, and again, just thank you for the invitation, of course.

And I just think any levels of transparency that can be given, they will always be welcome, so that we can keep communicating that this is going on, this is how to engage, this is going to be around on social media, these are the really quick ways to engage, but these are also the kind of more in depth ways for folks who have that interest in engaging further. But yeah, I think students are probably a sticky one to get around in that sense.

Sam Hartley: [01:17:22] That's great. Thank you, Larissa. And that is our intention. We hope by starting this process that things will change when the Inquiry becomes formal. And that's exactly why we asked question four about how we design our processes so that we can actually continually engage and listen to not just individuals but groups as well. And we will certainly take it into consideration. Josephine first and then Kevin.

Josephine Attwooll: [01:17:48] Thanks Sam. It was actually just to echo the point that Larissa just made, I think the transparency point is absolutely critical on this. I think someone's also posted in the chat around a dedicated website. And I know that's something that's quite common with sort of formal inquiries. So something along those lines would be helpful. I also found the video that's posted on the Inquiry site that Baroness Hallett had sort of done where she was talking about the Inquiry, I thought, I think things like get put on social media and that people can kind of see some visibility about what's going on, I think those kinds of regular outputs are quite helpful. So, you know, more of that kind of thing, I think, would be very useful.

Sam Hartley: [01:18:41] Thanks, Josephine; we do intend to continue that process. It's very early days. And as you know, this has been obviously, on the one hand, the Terms of Reference has been delayed coming out of Government. On the other hand, we've had to move quickly to get

the conversation up and running. And we've done our best in the short space of time, but we will be increasing that sort of activity. So thank you; Kevin.

Kevin Gilmartin: [01:19:05] quick one. Is there a pre-16 or an or an early years similar context to this Inquiry, please?

Sam Hartley: [01:19:17] Yes, there is. Yes, we are – I couldn't tell you when the events are, but there will be – we're asking the same questions of that sector as well.

Kevin Gilmartin: [01:19:26] Which sector? Are you splitting it up? Or is it everything pre-16? Is that one sector? Do you know?

Sam Hartley: [01:19:34] That is a good question. I'm afraid I can't tell you off the top of my head.

Kevin Gilmartin: [01:19:37] You haven't had it yet either.

Lizzie Kumaria: [01:19:40] I can tell you. Hi, it's Lizzie in the room. So we've got a roundtable similar to this at the end of next week, which we've called 'children', and it's covering education, but also other aspects of children's lives throughout the pandemic. So it's relatively broad, but it will cover what you're talking about.

Kevin Gilmartin: [01:20:05] Thank you.

Sam Hartley: [01:20:06] Thanks Lizzie. Thanks, Kevin, for the question. Okay. It's 25 past. I'm going to ask for any final contributions, I will attempt to just do a quick summary of what we've heard – I don't know how successful I'll be. Lizzie, maybe you can answer that question to Kevin in the chat there about AFCL. If there are no further contributions, I've just jotted down a few notes. Again, these are not extensive. And as I said, we will be scrutinising the transcripts in due course, when we analyse all the results of these roundtables, and what everyone else has sent into us.

The things that I've heard coming through fairly strongly is that first, obviously, the description on the bullet point about restrictions on attendance not being broad enough to capture. That was a point that was made very strongly at the start. And certainly one that we will go away and reflect on. I will say on that, as I said in similar roundtables yesterday, and I'm sure I'll say it in the future as well. Obviously you will appreciate there is a trade-off to be had between granularity within the Terms of Reference and having something that allows Baroness Hallett the freedom to look at things in the way that she wants to do.

And I should say that terms reference set the scope, but won't be the detail of what she does – once we've got through this, she will certainly be issuing responses to what she's heard and read, as well.

I've heard points made about the importance or the impact on safeguarding, the devolved issues, devolved and reserved and the way the functions are split up. And of course, that cuts across lots of different sectors as well. Really made points about the levels of inequality that came through, not just in terms of the diversity of the nation and diversity, the geographic diversity, and demography, but also in the digital sense as well, the digital poverty points to the online earning points as well.

We heard quite a lot about the levels of engagement from what Lestyn I think helpfully called Government sectors, and not just the Government but regulators, devolved Governments, local governments, and potentially others as well that we can look at.

Really interesting points about bereavement, hardship, loss, other impacts, how you've been affected, how people are affected, not just looking at in the lens of bereavement event itself, or indeed, medical harm, but also social harm, obviously educational harm, as part of that as well. And a general disruption to people's lives that have been affected through the pandemic.

So useful points I think from you on not quite the priorities but, you know, can we look at things first, whether it might be the medical impact, first as the sort of most pronounced, but potentially economic impacts as well, to follow on after that, but actually, I think your sector cuts across all of that, as well. So we'll have to think about how we try and factor that in.

The flexibility of the education system and I think it's a point that Larissa raised, which I think we'll look carefully at across the different parts of the education sector, but also, its interactions with other sectors as well. And then, finally, I think we made some really good, well-made points about the importance of interim recommendations, some early wins and things that we can do that will make some tangible changes if we have to go through something like this again, versus the depth and breadth and the longer – the longer scale side of things.

And then some really useful information and really useful points about how we can reach and how we can hear from everybody. Not just your own professional sectors but you personally and also the people that you represent, the students you represent, as well.

So apologies, that's obviously not a very thorough summary. But I want to finish by thanking you all for what has been a really, really helpful and constructive discussion. Thank you for your participation. I daresay I will see you again at some point in the future. We will go away now - as Lizzie has just said, we are doing lots of other rounds. Consultation closes on 7 April, Lizzie?

Lizzie Kumaria: [01:24:39] Yes, that's correct.

Sam Hartley: [01:24:41] Yes. Thank you. I heard a few people say that they've sent to your colleagues as well - thank you. Please encourage your friends and colleagues and your members to respond to the consultation which is on our website, as well.

After the consultation finishes, we will then take a few weeks to analyse what I think will be the tens of thousands of responses I would imagine to our consultation before Baroness Hallett makes recommendations to the Prime Minister on the future and the Terms of Reference, then hopefully, the Inquiry can formally shortly after that.

Thank you, everybody. Please stay in touch. Please let us know if you want further information through the emails that you have. And we will certainly be considering and thank you for the invites to come and speak and we'll be considering how we can take that forward. I think that is probably all I need to say. But thank you very much for your participation. And as I said, I'm sure we will speak again. Good bye everyone.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]