

## **UK Covid-19 Inquiry**

### **Equalities roundtable - ethnic minority, asylum and immigration discussion**

15 March 2022

Cardiff and online

[The Inquiry held an equalities roundtable. This was one of three breakout discussions and focussed on ethnic minority, asylum and immigration.]

#### *Participants*

Sabah Kaiser, UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Chris Dunn, Diverse Cymru

Martin Hogg, Citizen Coaching and Counselling

Claudia Mendoza, Jewish Leadership Council

Kirsty McNeill, Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

Christina Marriott, British Red Cross

Jabeer Butt, Race Equality Foundation

Lakhvir Sanghera, UK Covid-19 Inquiry

[There was a technical issue and some individuals were moved to the wrong break-out rooms. The first part of the meeting involved reassigning individuals to their correct rooms.]

**Sabah Kaiser:** Good morning. My name is Sabah Kaiser. I'm going to chair today's meeting. Because we've lost a bit of time, I'm going to move quite quickly into the first question. Can I just say, it's a small group, don't worry about the chat function, although if you want to put something in the chat function, you're very welcome. We will be keeping a record of that. Don't worry about also raising your hand, using that function. Just literally raise your hand and please speak. When you answer or when you speak for the

first time, please say your name and the organisation you represent, and then speak.

So, I'm going to move swiftly on to the first question. Before I do, in the room you can see there's a few of us. So as I said, I'm Sabah, the chair. We've got...

**Chris Dunn:** Chris Dunn from an organisation called Diverse Cymru.

**Sabah Kaiser:** And then we've got my colleague to the right of me.

**Lakhvir Sanghera:** I'm Lakhvir Sanghera and I'm on the Covid Inquiry set-up team.

**Sabah Kaiser:** And then next to Lakhvir.

**Martin Hogg:** I'm Martin Hogg from Citizen Coaching and Counselling. We're providing emotional support to help people engage with the Inquiry and you'll see the details on your letter, if you want any support from me or one of my team in the coming days after today.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. On the virtual links now, if people just want to raise their hand and say who they are and where they're from. I know we've got Jabeer from the Race Equality Foundation. Hi Jabeer. There's – please go ahead and speak.

**Claudia Mendoza:** I'm Claudia Mendoza. I'm the co-CEO of the Jewish Leadership Council.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Welcome Claudia. And yes, the other person who's just raised their hand.

**Kirsty:** I'm Kirsty and I'm a Policy and Research Officer at the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, based in Glasgow, Scotland.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Hi, welcome Kirsty. And then we've got one more person.

**Christina Marriott:** I'm Christina Marriott. I'm the Deputy Director of Policy Research and Advocacy at British Red Cross.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Good morning Christina, thank you. Okay, so moving swiftly on, we're going to go to the first question.

### *Question One*

So, you will have received in your pack via email a draft Terms of Reference and the first question is asking, does the Inquiry's draft Terms of Reference cover all the areas that you think should be addressed by the Inquiry? So again, just feel free to raise your hand and speak and answer the question. So, you might want to think about when you had a read of the draft Terms of Reference, was there something missing? Was there something you felt that's required that the Inquiry should consider in its remit?

**Chris Dunn:** I'm happy to kick off if that helps.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes, please.

**Chris Dunn:** There's three things that sort of leaped out for me. And again, I think some of them are going to be quite cross-cutting. There's the bits around sharing of information and guidance between sort of multiethnic, multicultural individuals and how the information was sort of provided and supported and organisations who supported it, particularly languages. I think it's really to kind of understand the, for want of a better word, the kind of cultural competence of the information that was given to the particular ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and immigration as well.

**Sabah Kaiser:** That's a very interesting point. Brilliant. So, excuse me, I should have said at the beginning that there's going to be – as our chair explained, there's going to be a transcript of our conversation, and I've got a note taker as well – but that's a brilliant, brilliant point. Thank you Chris. Does anybody else have anything to add?

**Claudia Mendoza:** I did wonder why the Terms of Reference didn't make any reference to children and specifically mental health. As an umbrella body organisation, we have organisations who work in schools, also working with vulnerable people across the Jewish community. So that was definitely a concern.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Thank you for that. Thank you.

**Chris Dunn:** And on to that point, things around safeguarding. In particular around how children were kept safe. What I know from previous roles it was,

actually, the referrals in child protection, for instance, was quite low. Which was seen as both a positive and a negative. And I think it's how children's services in particular, but actually you could equally say the same for mental health support, how it responded to the initial lockdowns.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes, that's very interesting. So what are we saying? So we are saying that the investigation should make sure that it's looking at those areas and then provides recommendations?

**Chris Dunn:** Yeah.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Perfect.

**Jabeer Butt:** I've raised my hand but you perhaps can't see from there. In terms of the Terms of Reference, there's lots of good things in here and lots of valuable evidence. I'm really pleased, for example, they're looking at the procurement process and so on. People may not think that there is a race equality issue there, certainly one that lots of organisations I work with would highlight. I think there are lots of strengths but there are some significant weaknesses as well. So currently this seems to be a Terms of Reference that helps the system's approach and doesn't pay enough attention to communities themselves, particularly communities of interest or communities of experience. So when you mention immigration and asylum, I think what you're talking about then is the system around immigration and asylum, rather than those people who are migrants or asylum seekers. And I think that's an important difference and an important weakness.

And I've illustrated by saying that we've had experience of three recent inquiries that have tried to adopt a systems approach and have then found themselves in a situation where particular voices are missing. So the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, for example, adopted a systems approach and then discovered that very few people responded through the various initiatives for black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and therefore then had to do a specific piece of work around that. And I fear that you might find yourself in the same situation yet, with lots of us going to be outside saying, you need to pay attention to particular voices, yet struggling to find which of the groups that you've identified will be

the ones that give adequate time and effort to look for those voices to be heard.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. I take your point, Jabeer, and that's an excellent point. Thank you for raising that. Yes, it's important, isn't it, that the Inquiry at the outset has the necessary procedures in place that it hears from all diverse groups and it starts that good practice, best practice, at the start. Thank you for that, Jabeer.

How do people feel? We've now got approximately seven minutes before the break is going to happen. Remember that in your pack you also have the facility that you can respond either by email or through the submission form to add any further thoughts that you might have. What I'm thinking, if people agree, is that we'll move on to the next question. Is that okay?

**Kirsty:** Can I just comment on this question please?

**Sabah Kaiser:** Of course.

**Kirsty:** I think this is a similar point to what's been made. I actually think the first question is one of the most critical on the list and we've [inaudible] bit similar to what Jabeer's just said. I think in many ways, I know that the Terms of Reference can't display every single sound that you're going to do through the Inquiry, but it is kind of missing focus on equalities and racism throughout it. It's not mentioned at all and that can only lead to the Terms of Reference being quite narrow. I know there is that reference at the end that says 'Protected characteristics in the Equalities Act.' There isn't a mention of the Human Rights Act in there, which you might expect to find, but I think similar to what Jabeer said, if you're looking at it and say we will look at protected characteristics throughout, you might miss that kind of focus and the impact of racism, which as I'm sure we all know is the structural inequalities have been really exacerbated by Covid.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you for that.

**Christina Marriott:** Can I maybe build on that point?

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes, of course.

**Christina Marriott:** So, Christina Marriott from the British Red Cross. I'd absolutely agree, Chair, that you need to embed good practice from the very beginning. I'd just like to raise a couple of issues around that. So you'll understand British Red Cross at the moment is somewhat stretched, so the timing of this roundtable and the timing between – and I absolutely appreciate you wanted to put equality at the beginning of this set of sessions and I do genuinely appreciate that – but the sort of timings we had to prep for this, I'd think probably hampers the amount of useful input we can give you. So there's something here for me about allowing particular community groups, particularly voluntary groups, sufficient time to prepare and to give you valuable input.

There was something for me about the setting up of this group as ethnicity, asylum and immigration, because any of us who've worked in health or social care understand that those groups face very, very different issues and face very different issues under Covid. So I would just be careful about how you signal your current understanding of equality as you convene groups.

And there was one last piece I wanted to raise on the Terms of Reference. I was glad to see note 2, learning about preparedness. I just wonder how far that goes in thinking about things like the Civil Contingencies Act, particularly given that of course that's [inaudible 0:34:15] this month. So just that kind of interface, if we're taking a system approach, where does that interface into those other systems?

**Sabah Kaiser:** Brilliant. Thank you very much, Christina, for that. Some very valuable points you've just raised. Thank you very much. I'm very mindful of the time, so we've got approximately four minutes. Not a lot of time, I know, I appreciate that. What do the group feel? We could make a collective decision. We can just continue with this question and then fit in question 2 in the latter half. I'm actually wondering whether that's the best policy and we can finish off this question.

**Martin Hogg:** Yes, carry on.

**Sabah Kaiser:** So, Chris was there anything else that you wanted to raise? Jabeer, was there anything else you want to come back in with? Christina? Kirsty?

**Jabeer Butt:** If I can come back, I was going to add it to the chat but I'll say it here. One of the areas that doesn't seem to be covered by the systems approach is how the regulators have operated during the pandemic. And I mean everyone from the Care Quality Commission to the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Health and Safety Executive. All should have been playing a part in protecting communities as well as workers better than were actually protected. I do think there is a need to look at whether or not the regulatory framework has worked. Particularly if part of the mission here is to think about how we plan for future pandemics and ensure that in future pandemics we'll respond better. We've argued elsewhere that the regulatory framework has failed on a number of occasions and the regulators have failed on a number of occasions and really we need to look at why, what the reasons for that were and what we can do next time that is better.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Thank you. Thank you Jabeer. Absolutely.

**Christina Marriott:** On a similar point, I'd like to see the Terms of Reference slightly move out – so, don't get me wrong, I feel the statutory responsibility sits in those systems and it was public health rather than social care and civil contingency planning – there is a question for me about how do these systems interface with the other assets in our nation, in our communities. So how do they interface with, for example, St John's Ambulance and British Red Cross as auxiliary organisations to the British Government? How do they work with local voluntary sector organisations to really provide that knowledge and that reach into communities that we need to engage? And there's something for me about not just looking at the boundaries of each system because the answer was not necessarily those systems, the answer was in those systems working with auxiliaries and with the voluntary sector. So there's something there that Terms of Reference have to reflect that needs examination, because [inaudible] was felt that that failed in the early days.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Perfect, thank you.

**Chris Dunn:** And I think just two other points from me. I think I welcome that it's UK based and answers the approach of the devolved Governments, but actually really to getting the understanding of communities on the ground, it's just that advice that ensures that the devolved Governments or the devolved countries, the communities, really do have their say. Because actually the differences in the experiences between Government approaches - actually the experiences on the ground have been very different.

And the other thing is around, I know it's good that it's about the availability and use of data in evidence, but I'd quite like things around the reactions. Actually how Governments, how departments, how they reacted to the data when it was coming out, I think across the board but particularly we know around sort of hospitalisations of certain communities. All of those and actually were the reactions – actions – did the Governments and departments react appropriately to the latest data that was coming out? I think that would be quite interesting to understand that as well.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Excellent. Yes, absolutely, that's a really, really valid point. Thank you for that Chris. So before we have a break, was there just one final point if anyone might want to make? Excellent. Jabeer, did you want to –

**Jabeer Butt:** [inaudible] constantly coming back then. There is one final thing about experience with inquiries, is actually the make-up of the Inquiry team itself and the secretariat. We do hope issues around diversity of experience are properly addressed in the make-up of the Inquiry and the team. That's important as well.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely.

**Jabeer Butt:** [inaudible] an issue that voices less often heard are actually given time and support.

**Unknown:** And it's going to be so important to build trust within communities themselves, in particular I think having that sort of, yeah, when it comes to

the options of how people contribute, having that multifaceted approach. But equally completely agree, it's actually the make-up of the teams as well.

**Sabah Kaiser:** I absolutely agree. Okay, thank you very much. It's been an interesting first half. Again, apologies for the confusion with setting up this morning. I feel that we've had quite a valuable discussion, you know, just between us even though we had the problems this morning. So now it's break. So please take 15 minutes. And we shall meet back in this room for 11.05. Now, I think when you take your break, perhaps just leave everything connected as it is. You know, you can turn your screens off, turn your mics off, and then you come back. How does that sound? Excellent. Okay, I'm going to see you back here at 11.05.

*Break*

**Sabah Kaiser:** I think we've got everyone. Okay, I hope you had a good break. I was thinking perhaps not to let us have a break and continue answering the questions but I felt we had such a stressful start this morning, I wanted people to be able to collect themselves. So thank you for giving your valuable insights to the first half and the first question.

Now in this second part, we've got three questions to answer. I would like to allocate a significant portion to question number four, but what I'm thinking of doing is if we start now with question number two, and that question is, which issues or topics do you think the Inquiry should look at first? Does anyone want to start? Jabeer, please.

**Jabeer Butt:** In terms of looking at the experience of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, we've had a very difficult – and I would say some of the evidence of the last 18 months to two years when a set of independent organisations and academics have argued for disproportionate [inaudible] yet more than three Public Health England reports all started to argue for other explanations rather than racism being the cause of that impact, including the last one suggesting that there may be actual biological factors at play that make men at increased risk. And I do think that there needs to be some attention paid to generating an independent assessment of the impact that the pandemic has had on black, Asian and minority ethnic

communities. And an assessment that we can all get behind rather than the continuing, rather convoluted debate that goes on.

The reason I think that's important also is that if we're going to be serious about looking at how the systems did or didn't respond, we do need to have that starting point that everybody accepts.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes, absolutely. Thank you for that, Jabeer. I think someone in our group did also bring up something relevant to what you said, Jabeer, and that's making sure that this Inquiry considers racism, inequalities and of course human rights. Absolutely right.

Yes, I saw another hand just pop up.

**Claudia Mendoza:** Yeah. I suppose the Terms of Reference are so broad and wide, I find it difficult to be able to make an assertion on what I think should be looked at first, because I think all the points are equally important as well as some of the things that haven't been listed, which we talked a bit about previously. So I don't feel comfortable enough to be able to say I think this should come before something else. So I'm sorry I'm not really able to give an answer on that.

**Sabah Kaiser:** No, I absolutely understand and hear what you're saying. It's very difficult, right, prioritising and how does one do that? For sure.

**Chris Dunn:** I think I'd echo that to be perfectly honest. I think something that's been so cross-cutting against the individual's life, not just from health perspectives or information and Government perspectives but from their employment, housing, all of those. I think for one person housing could be the most important thing, for others it could have been health. I don't think there's going to be any one issue. And the critical thing that links to the fourth question is the Inquiry is prioritising hearing the direct experiences of people, communities, representative organisations. I think that has to be at the forefront of this, because I think having that advice, that guidance, that lived experience for want of a better word, lead the direction of the Inquiry or be heavily involved in that direction, is so important.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes. Absolutely. Did Christina or someone else just want to come in on that question before we move on to the next? So just to remind you, which issues or topics do you think the Inquiry should look at first?

**Christina Marriott:** I don't think I've got anything to add on that.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Okay. Thank you.

**Kirsty:** I could just come in really quickly. First of all, if the Inquiry is not able to look at the impact on racism and many of these issues, it's not going to be a credible inquiry for communities across the UK. And in terms of the priority of the issues, I would say that anything that's still got an ongoing effect, though that applies obviously to a lot of them, but there's pandemic effects still going in terms of healthcare and hospitalisations and things like that, so healthcare things I would say would be a priority to prevent the impact of the pandemic on black and minority ethnic communities continuing.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Thank you.

**Jabeer Butt:** And if I could –

**Sabah Kaiser:** Sorry.

**Jabeer Butt:** – [inaudible 0:59:10] it'll be really important to look at the response to particular groups of workers and their better protection. So, for example, the NHS is the biggest employer in Western Europe, yet it failed to carry out the risk assessments that they are required to do as an employer under the health and safety legislation and didn't issue any guidance until the end of May, by which time we'd already got quite a lot of documented information about the disproportionate deaths particularly of medical staff but also other staff in the NHS. And it is crossing my mind that there needs to be some kind of attention to the experience of those working in actually addressing the impact on the pandemic as well. And, you know, bus drivers and transport workers and so on, I suspect, would fall into that category as well. Those people who couldn't work from home had to carry on and were a significant part of the response in ensuring that we were able to deal with the pandemic.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. That's a really good point. Thank you for that, Jabeer.

**Christina Marriott:** Can I just come back on Kirsty's point around healthcare being a focus. And this is more like a personal view than a British Red Cross view, and it will come from the fact that my previous job was as the chief executive of the Royal Society for Public Health, I would just make a plea that if we're going to look at where the greatest impacts are, actually public health has a huge impact on community susceptibility to Covid and therefore for the need for healthcare. So I'm not saying that healthcare's not important, but for me it would be very difficult to prioritise healthcare above public health.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Okay. I hear you.

**Christina Marriott:** And I absolutely accept that, you know, ongoing impacts on healthcare are huge.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Of course.

**Christina Marriott:** And, you know, it's necessary that we understand those very quickly. But I wouldn't want to see that to the exclusion of public health. And as I say, that's probably a personal view, probably not a BRC policy view.

**Sabah Kaiser:** No, I appreciate that, thank you, Christina. Okay, so unless there's any final points that anyone wants to raise in response to the second question, I'm going to move on to the third question.

### *Question three*

So the third question: do you think the Inquiry should set a proposed end date for its public hearings so as to help ensure timely findings and recommendations? I'm just going to repeat that question, actually, one more time. So, do you think the Inquiry should set a proposed end date for its public hearings so as to help ensure timely findings and recommendations?

**Christina Marriott:** So this seems to me to be completely key for this Inquiry. I mean, it's set out as another inquiry, isn't it? How broad do you take your evidence suite compared with the timeliness of the report back? Given

that this is about preparedness and resilience for national emergencies, we have significant lessons to learn from the last few years and we have no guarantee that there isn't another variant of Covid that could strike. My view is that we should look towards timeliness and we certainly should look towards that for anything that helps us plan for future preparedness or future resilience. So I think some of the soul-searching we can maybe leave – you know, some of the why stuff happens. So for me it's about what we need to learn from and that needs to be taken as rapidly as possible and reported as rapidly as possible and taken back into preparedness and planning, and again I would raise the Civil Contingencies Act as one of the things that might want to be on the agenda. That may be slightly different from an inquiry into what the mistakes were and why and how, that's a different set of unpicking.

I think this, again a personal view, may not be as significant to those in getting this Inquiry up and running. We are two years into a pandemic. I don't think we'd want to wait another two years to hear anything, because by then we will have had another variant, we will have had to have responded again. So for me there is a real urgency around reporting and that's where my preference would be.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely, I hear you.

**Chris Dunn:** I think is there an idea when the recommendations will be out?

**Sabah Kaiser:** So, that's not something I can answer right now but, Chris, definitely feel free to use the online submission or indeed just respond to the email to ask that question. But it's a really important point that both yourself, Chris, and Christina that you have raised, thank you.

**Jabeer Butt:** Can I come in? I think Christina's quite right to say that the Inquiry does need to move at speed, particularly if we're thinking about being prepared for the next pandemic. What I would suggest however is that for what I understand from the communities that we work with is that actually a lot of people feel they're not going to be heard by this Inquiry, and therefore it does raise questions in my mind as to what resources you've got available to actually listen to people. And therefore and also how much time you're going

to be able to give them. Because then as Chris made the point much earlier on about the need for this Inquiry to generate deep trust. Part of that's going to be done by actually ensuring people have an opportunity to tell you about their experiences and the consequences, the impact of those experiences. So that in a little way pushes us to perhaps a longer timetable. So I wonder whether then there's a sort of halfway house where we actually start publishing interim findings or reports on particular issues as the Inquiry progresses, because it will be important that we don't wait for something to appear in three years' time but maybe add stepping stones to getting there.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. I hear you, Jabeer. Having the interim reports.

**Chris Dunn:** Yes, and I think that's really important as well that understanding that prepared readiness for any future variant. I'd echo that is actually how we are preparing for any future variants having that interim stage, understanding that to build trust within communities to respond and to talk but equally for organisations as well, for us to build trust in the Inquiry itself, will take time.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes.

**Chris Dunn:** I think someone mentioned it earlier in the break – around the child sexual abuse inquiry and having the Truth Project as well. Because that's been a long-term piece of work going side by side with the Inquiry. And I think it's important that it's not just seen that public involvement and that voice of communities isn't just seen but truly is side by side with the systems approach. You've got the human side of it and you've got the systems approach and reflection. They've got to be parallel. But I would echo as well having those early reports or early findings.

**Sabah Kaiser:** I think that was something you were mentioning, wasn't it, Jabeer? Something along those lines?

**Jabeer Butt:** No, no, no. It's really important and the Truth Project is a really interesting idea and one that's been invaluable in giving an opportunity for those who've experienced child sexual abuse to share their views. The thing I will raise with you is that one of the things that has come through the project is that it's not been used by all communities in a similar way. So for a

long while we were on that, for the Truth Project, a very small number of black, Asian and ethnic minority people actually sharing their stories through the Truth Project and there had to be specific work done to try and make up for that. So I think it is a viable part but it has to be accompanied by specific work as well.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yeah, absolutely. Thank you for that, Jabeer. Does anybody else want to come in or raise anything further?

**Claudia Mendoza:** I would just echo everything Christina said right at the start. I think she made some very salient points around the fact that we need to be prepared for a potential outbreak again and it means putting a date on recommendations and findings, but that you know, as I mentioned in my earlier remarks, the scope of the Inquiry is so broad, this could go on for four or five years if they want it to. I think it's important to have a date that we can aim for in order to stay kind of focused and make sure that we're prepared for the potential next outbreak.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. So I think what I'm hearing in the room is that we – if the Inquiry didn't give a proposed end date, perhaps that's not something that would be openly welcomed. Is that what I'm getting? Yeah. Okay. Any further points?

**Jabeer Butt:** Can I raise a slightly sort of related subpoint? There are a lot of issues around the availability of ethnicity data and finding limitations on that in doing analysis such as looking at disproportionate death rates and so on as a result of the pandemic. And there was a lot of effort put in to try to link various data sets so that we could do that analysis. Equally, the Care Quality Commission for example in their registration of deaths of people in residential care settings weren't able to record ethnicity and it was only through pressure from organisations like ours that they put in place a specific form all people registering deaths had to complete as well as the normal information that they provide CQC. So there were solutions found.

But I can't help but point out that many of those only came to the fore because of what was happening around Black Lives Matter at the time.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes.

**Jabeer Butt:** And it's important to recognise that the attention to issues to do with ethnicity was very closely tied to what was happening on the streets of our nations, that young people were objecting to the current state of play. So yes, the pandemic was important. Perhaps it was also then influenced by what else was happening in the world at the time.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Thank you for that Jabeer. Yes, absolutely, brilliant points you've raised there. Thank you. Does anybody else want to add anything to that question? Does somebody want me to repeat the question? Okay. So I did say at the start that I wanted to actually allocate quite a significant time to the final question and so unless there's anything further for question three – and please do remember, if you think of something afterwards, don't feel, you know, 'I didn't get a chance to say this or that,' please feel free to respond to the email that you've been communicating with or indeed the submissions form that we sent in your pack. Okay?

#### *Question four*

So, okay, I am going to move on to question four. So, question four. How should the Inquiry be designed and run to ensure that bereaved people and those who have suffered harm as a result of the pandemic have their voices heard? So one more time the question: how should the Inquiry be designed and run to ensure that bereaved people and those who have suffered harm as a result of the pandemic have their voices heard?

Anyone want to get started?

**Christina Marriott:** So I think coming from the point of view of refugees and displaced people, but I think the point will be applying across an awful number of groups, I think you're going to have to work with people who work with people's lived experience. You are not going to be able to access that directly. So the British Red Cross for example we work with an organisation, we work and support an organisation called Voices Network. This is a network of people who've obviously been through the asylum seeker system or refugee system. And we value that lived experience because it knows much more than we do about being in the asylum or refugee system. I think

to understand the impact of Covid on that experience, you need to speak with that group and not with us.

Going back to my previous points around timelines and that balance between making a case and building trust, you're going to have to do it well, which means good timelines, allowing support, recognising the work that other organisation puts in, to help you do your job, and therefore doing it respectfully in order to build trust and potentially thinking about how you support organisations whose business isn't running your Covid Inquiry, in order to participate.

**Chris Dunn:** Yeah. I'd completely echo that. And I think as well, again someone mentioned this earlier, but it's how this is resourced as well. And even more pertinent is the timescale of that is actually – if you really want to hear from communities on the ground, yes, go to individuals, yes, go to organisations, but that has to be funded and implemented properly.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes.

**Chris Dunn:** To ensure it's meaningful. And I think it's just going to be – yeah, having different options to, different opportunities to engage. I think definitely working with community groups, making sure that the timescales are appropriate. I mean, I'm sure everyone on the call has had opportunities where you have time to consult and that consulting timeframe someone comes to you and it's a matter of weeks or days even as opposed to significant and meaningful consultation. And I just think the amount of resource that is put in will help build that trust.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes. I hear you.

**Chris Dunn:** And feedback. Feedback is critical across anything. I – it's a real bugbear of mine is that when our communities are involved and our clients are involved in conversations, involved in things, and they don't get feedback. Even if it is, 'This is what you told us and this is what we're going to do.' Just simple participatory methods like that, but feedback to communities and organisations who help support communities, not just on the Inquiry but being open and honest about that, saying that some of this might take years to come out. But actually – because people will get

frustrated that they've given their views, given their opinions, and they're not going to have anything back till three or four years down the line or two years or eighteen months. Even a year is actually ensuring the feedback is appropriately given.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yeah. I think somebody said that in response to one of the previous questions, that interim reporting, so it's sort of a live feedback, I suppose –

**Chris Dunn:** Yeah.

**Sabah Kaiser:** – to everybody who's taken part, what the Inquiry has heard.

**Jabeer Butt:** I think there's some value in looking at what other inquiries have or haven't done. So, for example, the Timpson Inquiry looking into disproportionate exclusion from schools apparently claiming that they had been engaged with communities, including engaging with experts. For those of us who looked at the original remit and then looked at what was published in the report, couldn't help thinking that there was a complete disconnect there. The remit was meant to be around understanding why black, Asian and minority ethnic children were disproportionately excluded. The final report made, I think, 20 or so recommendations and only two of them referred to black, Asian and minority ethnic children. I thought, something's gone wrong here about who you've consulted and how you've consulted.

Equally as was mentioned by Chris, the Truth Project is again an interesting idea of having continuous engagement with communities and providing continuous opportunities to hear voices. I can well imagine that the Bereaved Families for Justice, and so on, are organisations that would be very keen to provide that kind of input. But I do think that plans for specific engagement with specific communities but also across communities need to happen.

For example, for us the earliest warning about the impact of the pandemic, the disproportionate impact of the pandemic, was actually discussions with those individuals involved in burials of Muslims and Jewish people. It was through them that we heard there was a backlog of people needing to be

buried quickly and the question was why was that. And it was just the sheer number in a very short space of time and that's what flashed up warnings.

And you can't help but think you need to be able to engage specific communities like that. But you also need to be able to communicate across communities because some of those experiences were actually shared across communities and finding ways of doing that will be difficult but particularly important. [Inaudible] and speak to voluntary and community organisations, but if you're going to do that without putting any resources into it, it's inevitably going to be difficult for them to ensure that people are able to respond.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes, absolutely. I hear what's being said. So, I suppose what we're talking about is about bringing the Inquiry closer to the community, the very people that it's meant to report to and hear from, right? It tends to be that inquiries usually are hard to reach, not the communities that are hard to reach. So we need to find ways in which we have a harmonious relationship. I absolutely hear you.

**Chris Dunn:** Don't expect people to come to the Inquiry. It's got to be –

**Claudia Mendoza:** Yes. I was – I was going to make a similar point to Jabeer around the kind of disproportionate effect that we saw, especially quite early on with a lot of deaths in the Jewish community. Similar to the Muslim community there's a requirement that burial takes place very soon after the death, so the backlog added to the distress of the high number of deaths.

Burials take place under kind of the auspices of synagogue bodies and there are different kind of denominations within the Jewish community, Orthodox, Liberal or Reform and others, and I think making sure that information – goes to those bodies for them to then disseminate to their congregants means that it'll be much more – there'll be a much wider reach. Obviously this is specific to the Jewish community and referring to what Jabeer said again, that's something that you need to be able to find across different communities. I can only speak for the experience that I have working in the Jewish community. And we would be happy to help with that dissemination process.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Okay. Brilliant. Absolutely, and I hear you. Thank you, thank you. So what further things could you – could we think of that could give your sector or your community confidence that the Inquiry is listening? So it's not hard to reach. So just as you said, Chris, that they will speak to the Inquiry. What could we be thinking of to make us not so hard to reach so we do hear from the Jewish community, we do hear from Muslim communities and all the other various diverse groups that have been unduly impacted, during the Inquiry? What could we be doing to make sure that they feel comfortable?

**Jabeer Butt:** The honest answer to that from us would be that it's an intermittent process in that you have to reach out, you have to provide opportunities for people to hear about. And then you also have to feed back and go back so that people actually get a sense that you're serious about their involvement and you're actually listening to what they're saying rather than extrapolating. So, for example, we were recently approached by the National Audit Office looking at the rollout of the vaccination programme. And we've highlighted how it didn't take racial equality into consideration because of [inaudible] insight at the beginning. If you prioritise over 80s, you end up with vaccinating old people in Surrey and those areas, you end up vaccinating less people in London and so on, and minority communities are less likely to be over 80 so you end up [inaudible].

So we made that point. If you actually go and look at the report that was mentioned two weeks ago, it doesn't make mention of it at all. It's not there in any sense. And you think to yourself, well, you know, is it that the evidence wasn't there? And we think that the evidence is. Or is it that actually they didn't take what we were saying seriously? And you can't help but think that they didn't take it seriously, perhaps, or whether there was something else going on there. And it's that sort of thing. Are you actually hearing what we're saying?

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes.

**Jabeer Butt:** And if you are hearing, how are you actually representing it in the conclusions that you're coming to?

**Christina Marriott:** I'd entirely agree with what Jabeer was saying there. And that iterative process will be so important to building trust in this. The other thing I would say, and I'm slightly speaking on behalf of a group that I'm not part of, so I would encourage you to check this with the relevant people with lived experience, I would suspect for people who are seeking asylum or are in the refugee system or who are recent migrants, you're going to struggle to set up trust to start with. So you are going to need to go in via groups. And I think you're going to need to be really clear about your independence and your status.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes, yes.

**Christina Marriott:** So you will understand given current debates that many people do not wish to have much to do with a Government that, you know, has created a hostile environment. So you need to make it very clear you are not that Government. So there are going to be specific trust issues around those in the asylum and refugee system and you're going to have to, I think quite clearly, announce your independence and your role and your separation from Government. In particular your separation from the Home Office and law enforcement and border enforcement.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely. Excellent points, thank you Christina. I absolutely hear you. So, it's being serious about our intent. It's hearing and listening and building that trust and of course very clear about our independence.

**Chris Dunn:** And I think that the other bit is – it goes on the front side of truly listening – is that people will vent their fury.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes.

**Chris Dunn:** And they'll vent their frustrations. And I think sometimes one of the worst possible things that could be said, although it might be true, is, 'That's not in our remit.' I think instantly as soon as you say something like that, defences will go straight back up and you will lose the will and I think it's being prepared as an inquiry to, yes, hearing things that might well not be in the Inquiry's remit but is going to not put a barrier straight up. So I think it's allowing people to vent their frustrations, which is going to have implications

on the Inquiry team and those who are running the sessions, but I just think it's so important. I just feel that for something that's been so life-changing for so many people, you've got to understand, you've got to hear that fury, for want of a better word.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yeah. I absolutely agree.

**Kirsty:** Can I just come in? I think Claudia had her hand up there. I don't know if you want to go up first, Claudia?

**Claudia Mendoza:** It was from before, sorry. Go ahead, Kirsty.

**Kirsty:** This is just kind of a continuation of the point about trust and things like that, about the Inquiry. So if, for example, you want to talk about racism in relation to their employment in the NHS but also in other sectors, there's going to need to be assurances and maybe to give anonymity about that. So that people know there's not going to be a personal detriment to their career or future prospects or anything about that, if they're up front about racism they've suffered in their workplace.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yeah. That's a valid point.

**Chris Dunn:** I think very clear on what that confidentiality is from the off. Yeah.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Absolutely.

**Jabeer Butt:** Can I just add, that once we start thinking about how we ensure voices are heard, we do need to pay attention to particular groups, particularly children and young people. It's not always straightforward to ensure that their voices are heard, yet we know they're actually living with the impact of Covid-19 not only now but for most of their lives. And there really does need to be specific effort made to understand how that has impacted them not only in terms of education but in poorer comparative mental health as a result of the pandemic as well. That kind of making sure that that attention is there, I think would be [inaudible 1:29:28].

**Sabah Kaiser:** Thank you Jabeer. So I'm just thinking about time. We've got four minutes to conclude the question portion of today. Just as sort of feedback, we've heard about how we can make it easier for organisations

and groups to tell the Inquiry about their experiences. Anything further to add to that?

We've talked about reaching disproportionality affected communities and how the Inquiry shouldn't be hard to reach. Any further comments on that?

We've talked about confidence, listening, serious intent. Anything further to add? Okay.

I have to say thank you to everyone. Again, a rocky start, but we got started and what an excellent core group it's been. I've really loved hearing all the valuable insights that you've given to us today.

So, unless there's anything further – yes, Jabeer?

**Jabeer Butt:** I made a rather sort of silly point at the beginning about an intersectional approach, but I do think that is something that hopefully the Inquiry will pay a little bit of attention to. If you look at the experience of people with learning disabilities, it's quite clear that the death rates are shocking and shockingly high in comparison to the wider population. But if we also look further, we discover that black, Asian and minority ethnic people with learning disabilities, the death rates were even higher amongst those groups. So really the importance of an intersectional approach is going to be key here as well, if we can better understand who we need to protect in future.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes. Absolutely. Thank you Jabeer.

### *Final points*

Okay, just giving – so again remember if you think of something afterwards, you know, on the way home, tomorrow morning you wake up and you think, 'Darn it! You know, I needed to say that' or 'I wanted to say that and I forgot,' please use the online submission form or indeed just respond to the email that you've been communicating with.

So, I'm mindful of time. What I'm going to do now, so we're going to go back into the main room. So, you know, where we first started with Chair. It's going to be at 11.50 so we've actually got six minutes. So unless – I mean we can go back over the four questions. Was there something in the

previous questions that you might want to raise now? Or indeed actually you know if there's just something not part of the questions that you've thought about that you might like to add.

**Chris Dunn:** Not from me, no.

**Sabah Kaiser:** No.

**Kirsty:** This is – I'm not sure if it should be in the Terms of Reference as such but it's just a kind of question that I had maybe generally. I'm a bit unsure about how the two inquiries in Scotland and the UK are going to work together. When I looked at the UK Terms of Reference, it seems to be suggesting that they will be covering areas which I would've expected to have been covered in Scotland's inquiry, so I'm just curious about how the inquiries are going to work together and whether that should be more explicitly referenced in the Terms of Reference.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yeah, that's absolutely –

**Chris Dunn:** I'd agree actually, the devolution impact of actually the Welsh Government's approaches and actually how they're connecting, how the Welsh Government is supporting or not supporting – you know, I think it's just important to highlight. Otherwise we don't want to get to the stage where, you know, the Scottish Government's doing an inquiry, the Welsh Government's doing an inquiry, UK Government's doing an inquiry, Northern Ireland is, and they're not actually connecting up. And then it's just going to be a community overload. I think it's important that they are.

**Kirsty:** Yeah, that's a really useful question for us as well, to remember that people and organisations in countries like Scotland and that might be asked two times per issue.

**Sabah Kaiser:** That's actually a valid point. There'll be fatigue, won't there?

**Chris Dunn:** Yeah, yeah.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes. Okay, so unless there's anything further, what I'm going to suggest, keep your link active, obviously, so you're in this room. You will be automatically taken into the main room in four minutes. You might want

to take a quick bathroom break, get some water or something. Shall we do that?

**Chris Dunn:** Yes.

**Sabah Kaiser:** Yes. Okay, brilliant. Thank you everyone, thank you very much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]