



NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 2 - LAW CENTRES NETWORK

Introduction

1. In my [Opening Statement](#) on 21 July 2022, I explained that Modules would be announced and opened in sequence, with those wishing to take a formal role in the Inquiry invited to apply to become Core Participants for each module. On 31 August 2022, the Inquiry opened Module 2 and invited anyone who wished to be considered as a Core Participant to that Module to submit an application in writing to the Solicitor to the Inquiry by 23 September 2022.
2. The Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2 provides that this module will examine the decision-making by the UK Government during the Coronavirus pandemic. Further modules will be announced and opened in due course, to address other aspects of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.
3. On 23 September 2022 the Inquiry received an application from Law Centres Network ("the Applicant") for Core Participant status in Module 2.
4. I made a provisional decision not to designate the Applicant as a Core Participant in Module 2, thereby declining the Applicant's application ("the Provisional Decision"), on 13 October 2022. The Applicant was provided with an opportunity to renew the application in writing by 12pm on 20 October 2022.
5. On 20 October 2022, the Applicant submitted a renewed application for Core Participant status in Module 2. This notice sets out my determination of the Applicant's application for Core Participant status in Module 2.

Application

6. Applications for Core Participant status are considered in accordance with Rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, which provides:

5.—(1) The chairman may designate a person as a core participant at any time during the course of the inquiry, provided that person consents to being so designated.

(2) In deciding whether to designate a person as a core participant, the chairman must in particular consider whether—

- (a) the person played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in relation to the matters to which the inquiry relates;*
- (b) the person has a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which the inquiry relates; or*
- (c) the person may be subject to explicit or significant criticism during the inquiry proceedings or in the report, or in any interim report.*

(3) A person ceases to be a core participant on—

- (a) the date specified by the chairman in writing; or*
- (b) the end of the inquiry.*

7. In accordance with the approach set out in my Opening Statement and the Inquiry's [Core Participant Protocol](#), I have considered whether the application fulfils the requirements set out in Rule 5(2) in relation to the issues set out in the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2.
8. I have taken into account all of the information which the Applicant has relied upon. The fact that I have not, in making this determination, referred to every matter which is set out in the application does not mean that I have not considered it. The summary below is intended to capture what appear to be the most important points made in support of the application.

Summary of Application

9. The Applicant's original application stated that they are the national organising body for 42 Law Centres in England, Wales and Northern Ireland established in 1978. It provides support to affiliated Law Centres and lobbies on their behalf through advocacy, policy and parliamentary work. The application is made on the basis that

the Law Centres Network played a direct and significant role in relation to matters to which the Inquiry relates, namely that Law Centres remained open throughout the pandemic to ensure that vital legal services were provided and that solicitors and caseworkers played a role in organising the voluntary sector. Law Centres Network asserts a significant interest in the matters to be examined in Module 2, stating that they will assist the Inquiry in understanding the impact of national government decisions and the impact on communities. Further, the application provides that the Law Centres Network generally and individual law centres have important questions to ask about key decisions and how they impacted many of the poorest communities.

10. In its renewed application, the Applicant states that through its work and the work of its constituent member Law Centres, it has a direct understanding of the aggregate impact of Government decisions during the pandemic on those whom the Equality Act is designed to protect. Furthermore, the Applicant is one of only three national organisations for free advice providers and represents people at all levels of the court system from the High Court to tribunals. The Applicant sets out the longstanding ethos of Law Centres and their national body is to serve as advocates not only for their clients but for the communities where they are based and whom they serve. Accordingly, they occupy a unique position at the intersection of continued access to justice for vulnerable groups, home loss prevention, and supporting communities through hardship during the pandemic. The Applicant concludes that it is well placed to assist the Inquiry into how those with protected characteristics and from the most marginalised communities were impacted during Covid-19.

Decision for the Applicants

11. I wish to repeat my ongoing commitment, as set out in the Terms of Reference and repeated in my Opening Statement, that inequalities will be at the forefront of the Inquiry's investigations. This will include a focus on the disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people. I also recognise the important work Law Centres undertook during the pandemic providing support to individuals and communities impacted by the pandemic.
12. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the Applicant's renewed application. I have also reminded myself of what was said in the original application to

enable me to assess the merits of the application for Core Participant status holistically. Having done so, I consider that the Applicant does not meet the criteria set out in Rule 5 for designation as a Core Participant in Module 2 and therefore, in my discretion, I have decided to not to designate the Applicant as a Core Participant in Module 2.

13. Whilst I appreciate that the Applicant has undertaken valuable and important work, I am satisfied that it played no role in core political and administrative decision-making. I do not therefore consider that the Applicant played a direct or significant role in core political and administrative decision-making (Rule 5(2)(a)). Furthermore, the interest the Applicant does have is not a sufficient interest in the matters for investigation in Module 2 (Rule 5(2)(b)) and the Applicant is unlikely to face explicit or significant criticism (Rule 5(2)(c)). For all of those reasons, I have therefore decided that the Applicant should not be designated as a Core Participant in Module 2 and I confirm that this is my final decision.
14. I am obliged to manage the Inquiry effectively and efficiently, bearing in mind the Inquiry's wide-ranging terms of reference and the need for the Inquiry process to be rigorous and fair. Given the vast numbers of people who were involved with, or adversely affected by, the Covid-19 pandemic, very many people and organisations in this country could potentially have an interest in it and a significant one at that, but not everyone can be granted Core Participant status for the purposes of the Inquiry hearings.
15. The Applicant should be aware however that I have sought to ensure that the interests of at risk and other vulnerable groups (including those with protected characteristics) are considered during Module 2 in accordance with the provisional outline of scope and the Terms of Reference. In furtherance of those aims, I have designated those I consider to be most representative or best placed to advance their interests as Core Participants.
16. My decision not to designate the Applicant as Core Participants in Module 2 does not preclude it from making any further applications in respect of any later modules. In my Opening Statement, I said that I will publish more information about the issues intended to be covered by later modules in the coming months. The Applicant may

wish to consider applying for Core Participant status in relation to future modules likely to deal directly with the impact on vulnerable sections of society, including those with protected characteristics and those in deprivation and poverty. I will consider any future applications the Applicant may wish to make on their merits at the time they are made.

17. I note the assistance the Applicant believes it can provide. It is not necessary for an individual or organisation to be a Core Participant in order to provide evidence to the Inquiry. The Applicant may have relevant information to give in relation to matters being examined in the Inquiry and the Inquiry will be reaching out in due course to a range of individuals, organisations and bodies to seek information, to gain their perspective on the issues raised in the modules and, where appropriate, to ask for witness statements and documents.
18. The Inquiry will also listen to and consider carefully the experiences of bereaved families and others who have suffered hardship or loss as a result of the pandemic, through the listening exercise. I made clear in my Opening Statement that this listening exercise is a significant and important task which will lead to summary reports of the impact of the pandemic on those who come forward to be used as evidence during the Inquiry's module hearings. The applicant and those it represents will have the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry, through the listening exercise if they choose.
19. Finally, may I take this opportunity to thank the Applicant for their helpful submissions and record my appreciation of the valuable role that they play in society.

Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett DBE

Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

25 October 2022