



NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 2 - NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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 the Northern Ireland Department of Health ('DOH') for Core Participant status in Module 2.
4. I made a provisional decision not to designate the Northern Ireland Department of Health ('DOH') as a Core Participant in Module 2, thereby declining the DOH's application ("the Provisional Decision"), on 13 October 2022. The DOH was provided with an opportunity to renew the application in writing by 12pm on 20 October 2022.
5. The Applicant did not renew the application by the prescribed deadline. Accordingly, this Notice sets out my final decision on the application.

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 application is made by the Northern Ireland Department of Health ("DOH"). It states that DOH played a key role in the discussions with scientific and public health advisors in the UK's core political and administrative decision-making process relevant to the Covid-19 pandemic, including the participation of the DOH Chief Scientific

Adviser in SAGE, and that the DOH was a critical point of contact between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK on health and social care matters. The application is put on the basis that it played a direct and significant role in relation to decision making, including in relation to communicating, maintaining relationships and responding to issues raised by scientific and public health advisers between counterparts in the UK Government and the devolved administrations. The application provides detail of the NPIs in respect of which the DOH provided input, and states the DOH also played a key role in accessing relevant scientific expertise, data collection and modelling and was involved in accessing and understanding the relationship and operation of data systems between the government and the Health and Social Care System in Northern Ireland.

Decision for the Applicant

10. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the Northern Ireland Department of Health's application. Having done so, in my discretion, I consider that the DOH does not meet the criteria set out in Rule 5 for designation as a Core Participant in Module 2 and, therefore, I have decided not to designate the DOH as a Core Participant in Module 2.
11. Whilst I recognise the role the Applicant played, it did not have a direct and significant role in core political and administrative decision making in the context of Module 2. This can be distinguished from the role it specifically played in Northern Ireland.
12. Furthermore, I do not consider, in any event, having regard in particular to the need to manage the Inquiry effectively and efficiently, that its interest in decision making by the UK Government is sufficiently significant as to grant it Core Participant status in this Module. I am determined to run the Inquiry as thoroughly and as efficiently as possible, 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 in this country could potentially have an interest in it and not everyone can be granted Core Participant status for the purposes of the Inquiry hearings.

13. Whilst I am bound to consider the factors set out in Rule 5(2), it is also open to me to take into account other relevant matters. It is relevant in this regard that the Northern Ireland Department of Health have sought and will be granted Core Participant status in Module 2C and will be able to examine those matters in which they had a significant interest during the course of that module.
14. It is also not necessary for an individual or organisation to be a Core Participant in order to provide evidence to the Inquiry. DOH 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.
15. For all of those reasons, having considered all of the information provided by the Northern Ireland Department of Health, in light of the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2, I consider that the DOH did not play a direct and significant role in relation to the matters sought to be investigated in Module 2, nor does the DOH have a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which Module 2 relates. I have therefore decided that the DOH should not be designated as a Core Participant in Module 2 and I confirm that this is my final decision.
16. I will keep the scope of Module 2 under review. My decision not to designate the DOH as Core Participants in Module 2 does not preclude it from making any further applications in respect of any later modules. The DOH may wish to consider applying for Core Participant status in relation to future modules likely to deal more directly with the matters which have been referred to in the application. I will consider any future applications the DOH may wish to make on their merits at the time they are made.

Rt Hon Baroness (Heather) Hallett DBE
Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry
26 October 2022