



**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 2C - GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR SCIENCE**

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 2C 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 2C provides that this module will examine the decision-making by the government in Northern Ireland 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 Government Office for Science (the "**Applicant**") for Core Participant status in Module 2C.
4. I made a provisional decision not to designate the Applicant as a Core Participant in Module 2C, thereby declining the Applicant's application, on 13 October 2022. The Applicant 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 2C.
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 application stated that it provided data analysis to key policy makers in Northern Ireland on the numbers, characteristics, care and outcomes of all adult patients critically ill with COVID-19 (including data on ethnic group, pregnancy, vaccination status, etc.) throughout the pandemic. They were informed that their COVID-19 data reporting contributed to decision-making.

Decision for the Applicant

10. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the application on behalf of the Applicant. Having done so, I am minded, in my discretion, not to designate it as a Core Participant in Module 2C.
11. The focus of Module 2C is on the high-level decision-making by the government in Northern Ireland in response to Covid-19. This means that Module 2C will concentrate on the key decisions and those who made them, as opposed to those organisations which provided advice. The application is made on the basis that the Applicant acted as the secretariat for SAGE and for some (but not all) subgroups that fed into SAGE during the response to the pandemic in that it liaised, met and shared information with officials from Northern Ireland. This included the publication of SAGE minutes. The Applicant was not involved directly in decision-making in Northern Ireland. I therefore do not consider that the Applicant meets the criteria set out in Rule 5(2)(a) or 5(2)(b) for designation as a Core Participant in Module 2C.
12. 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 the 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 perspectives on the issues raised in the modules and, where appropriate, to ask for witness statements and documents.
13. 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 government in Northern Ireland 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.

14. It is also 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.
15. For all of those reasons, having considered all of the information provided by the Applicant, in light of the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 2C, I consider that the Applicant did not play a direct and significant role in relation to the matters sought to be investigated in Module 2C, nor does the Applicant have a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which Module 2C relates. I have therefore decided that the Applicant should not be designated as a Core Participant in Module 2C and I confirm that this is my final decision.
16. I will keep the scope of Module 2C under review. My decision not to designate the Applicant as a Core Participant in Module 2C does not preclude it from making any further applications in respect of any later modules. The Applicant 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 Applicant 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