



UK Covid-19 Inquiry Newsletter

March 2023



The independent Public Inquiry to examine the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK

The independent Public Inquiry to examine the response to and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK

Welcome to our second newsletter. In this issue we will cover:

- Inquiry news and progress
- Key dates and timetables
- Updates on the listening exercise

Message from the Secretary to the Inquiry



I am Ben Connah, Secretary to the Inquiry. I am responsible for the administration of the Inquiry and building the team and infrastructure that supports Baroness Hallett, enabling her to fulfil her statutory responsibilities as Chair of the Inquiry. I work for her and a key part of my role is making sure our work is independent of the government.

23 March 2023 marks three years since the first UK lockdown, a date I am sure is etched into our memory. The country has been through an unprecedented collective experience. Many lives and livelihoods were lost or changed forever. The Inquiry team is committed to finding out what happened and why. We hope to make meaningful recommendations to ensure we are better prepared in the future. For some, the anniversary will be difficult; we have [support organisations](#) listed on the website if you need someone to talk to.

In the coming weeks, we will be sharing more information on how the public hearings, where we take evidence from witnesses, will work. We will send you everything you need to know to follow or attend our hearings in our next newsletter.

Every Story Matters - our national listening exercise

The Inquiry team is making good progress on creating our national listening exercise, which will be called Every Story Matters. We've used expertise from the Inquiry team and our suppliers Ipsos and M&C Saatchi to design what we will offer in the coming weeks and months. We have also taken on board feedback from 80 organisations we consulted during our roundtables last year. These included healthcare, equalities, social care, children and education organisations, faith groups, business, trade unions and those offering bereavement support. Thank you to all those organisations that provided invaluable feedback and the 5000 people who have shared their story with us online already.

In response to organisations' feedback, we have decided to:

- Provide different ways for people to share their story. There will be a webform with a 'save and come back' feature, enabling people to tell their stories at a pace and in a place that's right for them. For those who cannot go online, there will be alternative ways for people to share their story including a phone line and a paper form. We will provide information about how to respond in a range of formats. There will also be in-person sessions held to reach seldom heard or under-represented groups.
- Organisations told us we need to meet people, in person, where they are. In response, the Inquiry is looking to hold community listening events across the UK during the lifetime of Every Story Matters. This will include listening sessions attended by the Chair of the Inquiry and other Inquiry staff members. We will launch these later this year.
- We heard about the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach in all aspects of Every Story Matters. By providing an offer of emotional support for anyone sharing their story and trauma-informed training for anyone speaking to members of the public about their experiences, we hope to ensure all those who speak and share with us, and our staff, are safe and supported.

We will be hosting a webinar on Every Story Matters to give you an opportunity to ask further questions. To note, this webinar is open to organisations and individuals rather than legal representatives. To sign up and find out more about how organisations' feedback has influenced the development of Every Story Matters, please click through to our [UK Covid-19 Inquiry Every Story Matters feedback page](#).

As Every Story Matters progresses, we will need your continued support to encourage people to share their experiences. We will share more information on how your organisation can help, including a toolkit, in the coming months.

Shaping the logo for Every Story Matters - thank you!



Many organisations fed into the development of the name and logo at the end of last year. In our first newsletter, we asked for your help to nominate words and names for inclusion in the logo, to really help us to capture the ethos of the listening exercise and demonstrate that everyone's experience of the pandemic matters. There was a great response and we are delighted to showcase the new logo, which features both individual names and family labels that represent the diversity of the UK. A huge thank you to all those who got involved.

Ethical Advisory Group and Chair

The Inquiry is in the process of appointing an Ethical Advisory Group to provide an independent, ethical review of the research design and approach to Every Story Matters, chaired by Professor David Archard.

Update on the Inquiry's work

- A second preliminary hearing for the Inquiry's first investigation into the UK's pandemic preparedness and resilience (Module 1) took place on Tuesday 14 February. The public hearings for Module 1 will begin on Tuesday 13 June to allow more time for Core Participants and the Inquiry team to prepare. They will take place at Dorland House, Paddington, W2. Dorland House will have entrances on 121 Westbourne Terrace and 13 Bishop's Bridge Road. Click through to our [webpage about our preliminary hearings and hearing location](#) to find out more.
- The Inquiry held its first preliminary hearing for its third investigation (Module 3), looking at the impact of the pandemic on healthcare, on Tuesday 28 February. Click through to our [webpage about Module 3 and its first preliminary hearing](#) to find out more.
- A second preliminary hearing for Module 2: Core Political and administrative decision making in the UK took place on Wednesday 1 March. More preliminary hearings for Module 2A: Core political and administrative decision making in Scotland and Module 2B: Core political and administrative decision making in Wales and Module 2C: Core political and administrative decision making in Northern Ireland will take place later this month. We have a [news story on our website that details how you can follow the hearings](#).
- There has been a lot of speculation and commentary about the Inquiry's position on inequalities and structural racism. We want to reiterate what was said this week in the hearings, that the Chair has repeatedly stated her determination to ensure that the investigation into the unequal impacts of the pandemic will be at the forefront of every module. The Inquiry intends to:
 - investigate the impact of the pandemic on 'at risk', vulnerable or marginalised people, and on black and ethnic minority groups
 - consider whether the UK government and Devolved Administrations properly took into account the considerations and interests of black and ethnic minority groups and those who were at risk, vulnerable or marginalised.
- For the Inquiry's first investigation, into the UK's pandemic preparedness and resilience, the Inquiry has instructed two world leading inequalities experts, [Professor Sir Michael Marmot](#) and [Professor Clare Bambra](#). The investigation, which is already underway, will consider the extent to which the government took into account the needs of black and ethnic minority groups and others, when making civil emergency plans.
- The Chair, Baroness Hallett, is considering the submissions made at the two hearings on 28 February and 1 March on the issue of structural racism and will decide on the need to instruct an expert in the field when she has had the time to reflect properly.

New expertise on pandemic policy at the Inquiry

In addition to the experts mentioned above, the Inquiry has instructed five more independent specialists to provide expert opinion on pandemic planning and decision-making in government. [Professor David Alexander](#) and [Bruce Mann](#) will examine pandemic preparedness and emergency management. [Professor Jimmy Whitworth](#) and [Dr Charlotte Hammer](#) will report on biosecurity and surveillance of infectious disease and [Gavin Freeguard](#) will report on the use of data during the pandemic.

Working with the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry

In Scotland, there is a separate Inquiry investigating the response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland to learn lessons for future pandemics.

In February, the two Inquiry Chairs, Baroness Hallett and Lord Brailsford, met to agree a memorandum of understanding to minimise duplication of investigation, evidence gathering and reporting as set out in both Inquiries' Terms of Reference. You can read the [memorandum of understanding](#) on our website.

Further information

We understand updates from the Inquiry may have an emotional impact. We have provided a list of external organisations that can offer [support](#) if needed.

We have published a series of [FAQs](#) on our website to help explain the Inquiry's work.

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