



**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 2 - EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND**

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. On 23 September 2022 the Inquiry received an application from the Executive Office of Northern Ireland (“the Applicant”) for Core Participant status in Module 2. This Notice sets out my determination of the application.
3. The Inquiry has published the [Provisional Outline of Scope](#) for Module 2, which states 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.

Application

4. 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.

5. In accordance with the approach set out in my Opening Statement and the Inquiry's [Core Participant Protocol](#), I 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.

Summary of Application

6. The application states that the overall aim of the Executive Office (“TEO”) of the Northern Ireland Government, previously the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (“OFMDFM”), is to contribute to and oversee the coordination of executive policies and programmes to deliver a peaceful, fair, equal and prosperous society. The First Minister and Deputy First Minister acting jointly, supported by the Junior Ministers, have overall political responsibility and accountability for all the Department's activities. TEO supported the work of the Executive during the pandemic. The application is put on the basis that TEO played a direct and significant role in the matters which will be investigated in Module 2. In particular, TEO was engaged in respect of its role in Executive decision-making throughout the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The application states that it facilitated and attended frequent 4 nation meetings, and was directly involved in the communications between the UK Government and other devolved governments and with regional and local authorities in Northern Ireland. Further, TEO states that it was engaged in the initial understanding of, and response to, the nature and spread of Covid-19, and in relation to the development and imposition of NPIs as applicable to Northern Ireland.

Decision for the Applicant

7. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the application. Having done so, I have decided, in my discretion, to designate the Executive Office of Northern Ireland as a Core Participant in Module 2. I consider that the Applicant played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in relation to the core political and administrative decision-making in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and that it has a significant interest in Module 2 of the Inquiry.

Legal Representation

8. Applications for designation as the Recognised Legal Representative of a Core Participant are governed by Rules 6 and 7 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, which provide:

6.—(1) Where—

- (a) a core participant, other than a core participant referred to in rule 7; or*
- (b) any other person required or permitted to give evidence or produce documents during the course of the inquiry,*
has appointed a qualified lawyer to act on that person's behalf, the chairman must designate that lawyer as that person's recognised legal representative in respect of the inquiry proceedings.

7.—(1) This rule applies where there are two or more core participants, each of whom seeks to be legally represented, and the chairman considers that—

- (a) their interests in the outcome of the inquiry are similar;*
- (b) the facts they are likely to rely on in the course of the inquiry are similar; and*
- (c) it is fair and proper for them to be jointly represented.*

(2) The chairman must direct that those core participants shall be represented by a single recognised legal representative, and the chairman may designate a qualified lawyer for that purpose.

(3) Subject to paragraph (4), any designation must be agreed by the core participants in question.

(4) If no agreement on a designation is forthcoming within a reasonable period, the chairman may designate an appropriate lawyer who, in his opinion, has sufficient knowledge and experience to act in this capacity.

9. I am satisfied that the Executive Office of Northern Ireland has appointed Joan MacElhatton of the Departmental Solicitor's Office (*Oifig Aturnae na Ranna*) as its

qualified lawyer in relation to this Module. I therefore designate Joan MacElhatton as the Applicant's recognised legal representative in accordance with Rule 6(1).

10. Directions will be given in relation to applications for an award under section 40(1)(b) of the Inquiries Act 2005 of expenses to be incurred in respect of legal representation, at the forthcoming preliminary hearing. I will determine any such applications in accordance with the provisions of section 40 of the Inquiries Act 2005, the Inquiry Rules 2006, the [Prime Minister's determination](#) under section 40(4) and the [Inquiry' Costs Protocol](#).

Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett DBE

Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

13 October 2022