



**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION**  
**CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION**  
**MODULE 2C - NORTHERN IRELAND COVID-19 BEREAVED FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE**

**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. On 23 September 2022 the Inquiry received an application from Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice (“**NICBFJ**”) for Core Participant status in Module 2C. This application is understood to be made on behalf of the organisation (insofar as it represents its collective membership (“the Applicant Group”) and seeks Core Participant status for individual members too (“the Applicant Individuals”). This Notice sets out my determination of the application.
3. The Inquiry has published the [Provisional Outline of Scope](#) for Module 2C, which states 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.

**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 2C.

### **Summary of Application**

6. NICBFJ is a branch of the wider UK group Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice. The Applicant Group is a collective organisation of bereaved relatives of individuals who died from Covid-19 in Northern Ireland. The application is also made on behalf of Applicant Individuals within that organisation that they be designated Core Participants in their own right. It is submitted, overall, in the application that the Northern Irish families should be awarded Core Participant status for this module given their direct and significant interest in the matters to be considered as part of Module 2C.

### **Decision for the Applicant Group**

7. I wish to reiterate my deep sympathy to each and every individual who has experienced the tragic loss of a loved one as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Core Participant Protocol provides that while 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 and I am also not obliged to designate a person or organisation that meets the criteria set out in Rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules as a Core Participant. It further explains that I

particularly invite applications from groups of individuals and organisations with similar interests, rather than from individual persons and organisations and that the designation of Core Participant status to groups representing the interests of more than one person would assist the fair and efficient running of the Inquiry. I additionally have regard to my duty to act with fairness, the need to avoid any unnecessary cost to public funds and to the need to manage the Inquiry effectively and efficiently.

8. I have considered with great care everything that is said in the application. Having done so, I am minded, in my discretion, to designate NICBFJ (the Applicant Group) as a Core Participant in Module 2C. For a number of reasons I consider that NICBFJ is well placed to assist the Inquiry to achieve its aims by representing the collective interests of a broad spectrum of those bereaved by Covid-19 in Northern Ireland, in relation to Module 2C. This is because NICBFJ can assist the Inquiry in understanding the perspective of the bereaved in Northern Ireland, without considering in detail any individual cases of harm or death.

### **Decision for the Applicant Individuals**

9. I wish to reiterate my deep sympathy to each of the Applicant Individuals of the NICBFJ regarding the deaths of their loved ones. 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.
10. As with the Applicant Group, I have considered with great care everything that is said in the application made on behalf of the individuals, alongside the factors I have set out above. Having done so, I am minded, in my discretion, not to designate the Applicant Individuals as Core Participants in Module 2C, for the following reasons.
11. It is not the purpose of the Inquiry, including Module 2C, to explore the circumstances of individual deaths. Having already designated the Applicant Group as a Core Participant for Module 2, I consider that the individual interests of the Applicant

Individuals are best represented by the Applicant Group, having regard to its ability to represent the collective interests of a broad spectrum of those bereaved by Covid-19 in Northern Ireland and also to the need to manage the Inquiry effectively and efficiently. For these reasons, I consider that the application does not meet the criteria set out in Rule 5(2)(a) or (b) for the Applicant Individuals to be designated Core Participants in Module 2C of the Inquiry.

12. It is not necessary for an individual or organisation to be a Core Participant in order to contribute to the Inquiry. The Applicant Individuals will all have an opportunity to make important contributions to the Inquiry without being designated as Core Participants in Module 2C, both through the listening exercise and the Applicant Group if they choose.
13. As I am minded to decline the application, I will offer the Applicant Individuals an opportunity to renew the application. If they wish to renew the application, they must do so in writing to the Solicitor to the Inquiry by **12pm on 20 October 2022**. Renewed applications should not repeat information provided in the original application but should provide any additional information that may assist me in considering the renewed application. I intend to determine any applications on paper without oral submissions, other than in exceptional circumstances. If the application is not renewed, I will confirm this Provisional Decision has become final.

## **Legal Representation**

14. 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.*

15. I am satisfied that NICBFJ has appointed Enda McGarrity of PA Duffy & Co. Solicitors as its qualified lawyer. I therefore designate Enda McGarrity as NICBFJ's recognised legal representative for Module 2C in accordance with Rule 6(1).

16. 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**