



**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 2C - DISABILITY ACTION 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 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 8 November 2022 the Inquiry received an application from Disability Action Northern Ireland (the “**Applicant**”) for Core Participant status in Module 2C. 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 Module 2C 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. The Applicant is an organisation run for and by disabled people in Northern Ireland advocating for their rights. The term 'Disabled People' is used in the application to refer to people facing societal barriers due to their impairments or conditions (regardless of their age) which includes physical impairments, mental health conditions, hearing impairments, deaf people with BSL as their first language, visual impairments, learning difficulties and neurodiverse people. The Applicant has a membership of more than 300 organisations and delivers services (and continued to do so in Northern Ireland throughout the pandemic) developed for and by deaf and disabled people to the value of £6.5m.
7. The application is made on the basis that the Applicant played a direct and significant role in seeking to influence the decisions of the government in Northern Ireland in relation to non-pharmaceutical interventions and public health communications. It is further made on the basis that the Applicant has a significant interest in the matters which will be investigated by Module 2C, including the decisions made by the government in Northern Ireland in respect of non-pharmaceutical interventions and the impact these had on its members.

8. The Applicant maintains its earlier submissions in respect of its application to Module 2, particularly in respect of its rights to effective participation in the Inquiry arising from the European Convention on Human Rights and the Equality Act 2010.

Decision for the Applicant

9. As is acknowledged by the Applicant, the deadline for applications for Core Participant Status in Module 2C was 23 September 2022, meaning that this application was received 46 days after the deadline expired. The Applicant explains that the reason for its delay in applying for Core Participant status was as a result of a misapprehension that its application to Module 2 covered participation in Modules 2A, B and C. The Applicant had made an application for Core Participant status for Module 2 within the application window. The Applicant states that it has made this application as soon as reasonably possible having become aware that separate applications were required for Modules 2A, B and C. I find that the Applicants have provided an acceptable explanation for the delay and I have, therefore, decided, in my discretion, to consider the application despite the fact that it was made out of time.
10. I acknowledge the specific impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on deaf and disabled people. I wish to repeat my ongoing commitment, as set out in the Terms of Reference and repeated in my Opening Statement, that inequalities will be at the forefront of the Inquiry's investigations. This will include a focus on the disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people. Having considered with great care everything that is said in the application, I am minded, in my discretion, to designate Disability Action Northern Ireland as a Core Participant in Module 2C. I make this decision acknowledging that granting Core Participant status to groups representing the interests of more than one person will both assist the fair and efficient running of the Inquiry and avoid any unnecessary costs to public funds.
11. Whilst I do not consider that the Applicant satisfies Rule 5(2)(a), in that I am not satisfied that it played a direct or significant role in high-level core political or administrative decision making in Northern Ireland, I do accept that it has a significant interest in Module 2C. For a number of reasons, I consider that the Applicant is best placed to assist the Inquiry achieve its aims by representing the various interests of a wide number of deaf and disabled people in Northern Ireland in relation to Module 2C.

This is because the Applicant can assist the Inquiry in understanding the perspectives of different groups of deaf and disabled people in Northern Ireland when it examines the core political and administrative decisions taken in response to Covid-19, and whether the interests of deaf and disabled people were considered as part of this process, without considering in detail any individual cases.

Legal Representation

12. 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.

13. I am satisfied that the Applicant has appointed Shamik Dutta of Bhatt Murphy Solicitors as its qualified lawyer in relation to Module 2C. I therefore designate Shamik Dutta as the Applicant's recognised legal representative in accordance with Rule 6(1).

14. At the preliminary hearing for Module 2C on Wednesday 2 November 2022, I made directions regarding funding under section 40 of the Inquiries Act 2005. 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

16 November 2022