



UK Covid-19 Inquiry Newsletter

May 2023

UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry

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 May newsletter. In this issue we will cover:

- Inquiry news and progress
- Key dates and timetables

Message from the Inquiry's Chief Operating Officer and Programme Director



Hello, I am Anisha Worbs. I am responsible for a range of the Inquiry's operational functions, such as emotional support and safeguarding and estates.

Part of my role is to make sure we take a trauma informed approach to the Inquiry's activity. We recognise the unprecedented impact that Covid-19 had on individuals, groups and communities across the UK. We take very seriously our responsibility to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation for those who interact with the Inquiry. This includes having appropriate emotional support and safeguarding measures in place for participants in all of our work, including Every Story Matters and the hearings, as well as for the Inquiry team.

I have also been overseeing work to secure a hearing centre in London that can meet the Inquiry's needs. I am pleased to tell you that Dorland House,

Paddington will be the venue for our London-based hearings for the duration of the Inquiry. We want to make it welcoming and accessible for everyone attending the hearings from 13 June. We know the start of public hearings is something many of you have been waiting for. The Inquiry will also hear evidence about the response to and impact of the pandemic in each of the four nations and we will share more details on this shortly.

We will continue to provide updates on our work through this newsletter.

Every Story Matters

On 27 April, the Inquiry published a [summary of our listening exercise, Every Story Matters](#), alongside an [open letter from Ben Connah, Secretary to the Inquiry](#).

Every Story Matters will provide a route for everyone in the UK who wishes to share their experience with the Inquiry.

We have brought all the information on Every Story Matters together in one place to make it easier to understand and to reassure you of its importance to the Inquiry.

Thank you for getting involved

Many organisations and individuals have been generously supporting our work on commemoration and context-setting - including our impact films and tapestry installation. This work will help ensure that the human impact of the pandemic remains at the heart of proceedings. We are very grateful for your support and will be in touch with further opportunities for more organisations and individuals to contribute in future.

Thank you to everyone who attended our forums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as our webinar on Every Story Matters and specific conversations with equalities, accessibility, health and children and young people's organisations.

We had really helpful discussions with 56 organisations across a range of sectors. Your support and honest feedback is invaluable to us and we appreciate your engagement with the Inquiry - your ideas and challenges will make Every Story Matters better. For example, we heard how important it is to enable people to tell us about their experiences in British Sign Language (BSL), so we are currently exploring BSL video relay services. We also received important suggestions about how to design our community listening events to ensure that they are accessible for as many people as possible.

We will be adding to our [You Said We Did feedback page on our website](#) to make clear how we have addressed points made.

Dorland House - our new hearings centre

We are pleased to announce that the UK Covid-19 Inquiry will hold its London-based hearings at [Dorland House, Paddington, London, W2](#) for the duration of the Inquiry. The Inquiry will also hear evidence from locations across the four nations of the UK, initially as part of the Module 2A, 2B and 2C hearings in 2024, which will look into core UK decision-making and political governance in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We are committed to making the hearings as accessible as possible. For those attending in person, Dorland House is situated close to public transport links,

including Paddington station, with facilities such as public seating, hearing loops and accessible toilets. For those unable to attend in person, a publicly-available livestream of our hearings will be accessible via our [YouTube channel](#).

Update on the Inquiry's work

- A preliminary hearing for our first investigation examining the UK's pandemic preparedness (Module 1) took place on 25 April. Hugo Keith KC explained that the preparedness of hospitals would be covered in Module 3 (focusing on healthcare) rather than Module 1. Mr Keith also said that the Inquiry would publish [a comprehensive update on our listening exercise, Every Story Matters](#), which can be accessed via the Inquiry website as a downloadable PDF.
- Module 1 has instructed Dr Claas Kirchhelle from University College Dublin to provide expertise on the historical structures and functions of the UK's public health institutions. The Inquiry is in the process of appointing independent experts to consider the issue of structural discrimination in UK society prior to the pandemic.
- Module 1 is gearing up for the Inquiry's first full public hearing on 13 June. We will be publishing information about the witnesses who will give evidence, and how to follow proceedings, on the website shortly.
- Further preliminary hearings for the Inquiry's second investigation examining core political and administrative decision making in the UK, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland took place in March. The Module 2A (Scotland) hearing took place on Tuesday 21 March, while the Module 2B (Wales) and 2C (Northern Ireland) hearings took place on Wednesday 29 March. Counsel to the Inquiry in each of these modules confirmed that the public hearings will take place in those nations, not in London.
- In the Module 2A (Scotland) hearing, Jamie Dawson KC noted the ongoing cooperation between the UK and Scottish Inquiries and how operational arrangements were being developed to fulfil the commitments made in the memorandum of understanding agreed in February. [More detail about this can be found in the news story on our website](#).
- In the Module 2B (Wales) hearing, Tom Poole KC explained that this module's hearings will take place with simultaneous Welsh language translation as far as possible. The Welsh Government acknowledged some delay in providing disclosure documentation to the Inquiry and it was confirmed that these are now being provided and reviewed at pace. A third preliminary hearing is expected to take place in November 2023.
- In the Module 2C (Northern Ireland) preliminary hearing, Clair Dobbin KC stated that the Inquiry will examine whether and to what extent the power sharing model of government affected decision making during the pandemic. The Inquiry will also be investigating the extent of cooperation between the Northern Ireland government and the Republic of Ireland during the pandemic.

Commemoration

We have been working hard with Core Participants and organisations to keep the human impact of the pandemic at the heart of the Inquiry's proceedings.

A range of voices from those who suffered hardship or loss throughout the

pandemic will be heard through films that will be played at the start of the first public hearing of each module. Filming sessions with groups and individuals to create these films have been taking place across the UK and there will be more filming opportunities over the coming months.

A commemorative art installation in the form of a tapestry will capture the experiences and emotions of people across the UK during the pandemic. Each panel will be inspired by a different story, as told by those individuals and communities most impacted by the pandemic. The Inquiry is working with a range of organisations and individuals across the UK to identify these stories.

A number of tapestry panels will be unveiled at the hearing centre in June in time for the first public hearings.

Like the stories, the thread and linen making up the tapestry will be sourced from all four nations of the UK to help acknowledge the UK-wide remit of this inquiry.

How to follow our hearings

The Chair of the Inquiry, Baroness Heather Hallett, has ruled that the Inquiry will begin hearing evidence for its first investigation (Module 1), examining the UK's pandemic preparedness, on Tuesday 13 June. The hearings will run until 20 July and will sit between 10am and 4pm each day. The Inquiry will generally not sit on Fridays.

As previously mentioned, the hearings will be held at Dorland House, Paddington, London, W2 6BU ([map](#)). They will be open to the public to attend although space is limited. We would advise anyone who wants to attend the hearings in person to arrive early. The hearings centre will be open from 9am. Emotional support services will be available to those attending the hearings, with staff from Hestia, our emotional support partner, available daily. [Find out more about Hestia on their website.](#)

Our hearings will be live-streamed on our [YouTube channel](#), which can be found via the [UK Covid-19 Inquiry website](#) during the hearings and afterwards. Transcripts will also be placed on the Inquiry website at the end of each day, on our [documents page](#), where previous transcripts can also be accessed.

A witnesses timetable will be published before each set of hearings.

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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