

UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Gender & LGBTQIA+ discussion

15 March 2022

Cardiff and online

[The Inquiry held an equalities roundtable. This was one of three breakout discussions and focussed on gender and LGBTQIA issues.]

Participants

Lizzie Kumaria, UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Samantha Edwards, UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Katie Westoll, Yorkshire MESMAC

Jemima Olchawski, Fawcett Society

[There was a technical issue at the start of the meeting and some people were assigned to the wrong breakout rooms.]

Samantha Edwards: [00:02:03] I'm your facilitator for this session. My name is Samantha Edwards. I am part of the Covid-19 Public Inquiry setup team. So, I've been in just a couple of weeks actually. And Lizzie, whose picture you'll see on screen, Lizzie works with me and we work in the Communications and Engagement Directorate.

So, we will be very interested in your views in particular on some of the questions around how we engage with people throughout the Inquiry. So, this is very much to get your thoughts on the consultation questions that we have posed and the Terms of Reference that are a draft at the moment.

This is, obviously, a really tiny group so I suggest we keep this really informal and kind of, you know, raise points and ask questions as much as you like. I've got four questions that we'll talk around but we will be very happy to talk

about other areas as well if we can. But as Ben said, this is not about, kind of, gathering evidence at this point. This is about the Terms of Reference and to consult on those. So, we'll just need to kind of keep that in mind.

Before we kind of jump right in though, a couple things. So, I'm suggesting that so that we get as much time as possible, I know on your agenda, we were going to have a break and then come back to questions, are you happy that we skip that break so that we use the time and get your views as much as possible? That's great. Lovely.

And I'm just going to invite you both to just introduce yourselves briefly before we get started. I've got Lizzie with me as well. She's going to be taking a note of the meeting as we go. And we are, just to remind you, we are doing a recording. So, if there's anything that you want us to make sure that we do redact when it comes to transcripts, just let us know either now or kind of at a later point. That's totally fine. Katie, do you want to go first?

Katie Westoll: [00:04:42] Yeah, that's fine. So, my name is Katie Westoll. I am in Leeds. I'm with Yorkshire MESMAC. My job here is I'm the mental health and wellbeing coordinator in the organisation.

Samantha Edwards: [00:04:55] Great. Thank you, Katie. And Jemima.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:04:59] Hi, I'm Jemima Olchawski. I'm the chief executive of the Fawcett Society. We're a women's rights and gender equality charity.

Samantha Edwards: [00:05:07] Great. Thank you very much, both of you. Lovely. And we've got Lizzie in the room. I think Lizzie would just quite like to say hello.

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:05:17] My name is Lizzie Kumaria. I work with Sam on the Covid-19 Inquiry setup team and I've been working on setting up the consultation on the event, the first one of which is today. So, thank you for bearing with us through the teething issues with the technology.

Samantha Edwards: [00:05:37] I think we've all got used to teething issues with technology. I'm sure at some point during this meeting, one of us will say, 'You're still on mute.' After the last two years, we've become quite used

to it. So, hopefully, you've had a chance to read the draft Terms of Reference and have a kind of think about some of the areas that we might want to explore today.

The first area that I would just want to kind of talk through is whether or not you feel that the draft Terms of Reference cover all the areas that you think should be addressed by the UK's public inquiry. And just feel free just to kind of unmute yourselves and jump in with anything that you think should be included or perhaps even actually excluded if you felt that way.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:06:31] Well, I guess, well, Katie, sorry, before I dive in, do you want to say anything first? Maybe if I just say a few things and then you, you know, hopefully that would be...

Katie Westoll: [00:06:42] No, go ahead. That's okay. Thank you for asking.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:06:46] Hopefully, that'd be in the right kind of space. So, I'm thinking really about, well, what are the issues that Fawcett and some of the other women's organisations we work with were kind of talking about during that time and then so backward into, well, what does that mean for the Terms of Reference.

Samantha Edwards: [00:07:05] Yeah.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:07:05] So, I'm not trying to give evidence but I am trying to kind of find ways to, you know, make sure these issues get represented. So, I guess, first of all, something that specifically talks about the response to domestic abuse and the risk to women and children during that time. And the sort of scale of the response to that, as proportionate to the risk and other areas of support that were offered. And I'd be interested to see some consideration of the funding that was issued for domestic abuse support and around the speed of that getting out to those organisations at times of real urgency.

Overall, how far gender and the impacts on women were taken into account in decision-making and sort of secure that actually, you know, that needs to be intersectional. So, what Fawcett found, you know, women, it was having an impact on women financially during the lockdown. They were more likely

to be furloughed and less likely to have their salary topped up but that disabled women and black and minority women were more likely to have concerns about debt and making ends meet. So, how far were those considerations taken into account.

And then an overarching point around diversity in the decision-making roles around that time. So, women were much less likely to be leading the briefings, the daily briefings or underrepresented on scientific advisory groups, I mean, the senior political decision-making roles. But that connects to a broader question about diversity there and who kind of was in the room and raising issues.

And then another one that is in there that I think would benefit from a bit more specificity is that it talks about prisons but I think it's really important that within that, focus on women in prisons is included because they are a minority in the prison population. Often, they're not really taken into account but the impacts were very serious for women in prison, for instance, being separated from children for whom they're a primary carer for weeks or months at a time without being able to have contact. We saw increases in the rates of self-harm among women in prison with a population that already had very severe and high levels of mental health needs, pre-existing trauma and particularly around – a high proportion of that population have experienced domestic abuse and trauma. And then obviously, this is a situation that replicates some of those elements of control albeit for a different set of purposes. So, yeah, I think it's important that this is [inaudible] of women in the prison population are kind of really drawn out and given that. So, just a few things.

Samantha Edwards: [00:10:20] Thanks, Jemima. Katie, anything you'd like to add or expand on in that?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:10:30] I'm sorry. I can't hear now. Is that –

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:10:33] You're on mute, I think.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:10:36] [00:10:35] – anyone else here?

Samantha Edwards: [00:10:36] That's because I've put myself on mute because I didn't want the – I didn't want us typing and making notes to be distracting for you. I think a point for me, for the first person to not take themselves off mute. Great. Thank you so much, Jemima. That is a really, really thorough and interesting list of areas. Katie, is there anything that you want to add to or expand on any of Jemima's points?

Katie Westoll: [00:11:10] I don't – not necessarily. I think, you know, speaking with some of my colleagues prior to coming on to this call, you know, one of the things that we feel very strongly is that for LGBT people and in particular LGB people, less so T, that many of them, the issues that were experienced during lockdown were very intersectional for people. So, you know, if it's somebody who is LGBT-identifying and also has a disability or is and also experiencing domestic violence. So, there's a lot of intersectional issues that are happening.

And perhaps when looking at the greater group of LGBT people, possibly T people, so trans people might have been more impacted with things like use of their name, you know, their birth name versus their chosen name if they haven't legally been able to change it, things like that so, around their identity.

And then a small, you know, not a small factor but a point of saying, if there, you know, if there was somebody who was having to shelter with people who didn't know that they were LGBT-identifying. And so then, having to be closeted or maybe perhaps having that dynamic particularly during lockdown or during the lockdowns and not being able to have communities in which they were able to physically access. I think that's all that I would add at the moment.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:12:56] I think, Katie, that sort of speaks to when I went – during lockdown, I was working on Agenda, which is a charity that campaigns for women's most complex needs and one of the issues that came out for women that we're in touch with, the organisations working with them, was having to be in an environment that may be the source of their trauma and may not be safe or welcoming and that being a trigger for

declines in their mental health. And I think there is also – it's worth exploring the balance in decision making about services that continue to be over telephone and/or remote that people with really, really high levels of need are experiencing really, really challenging circumstances whether the right balance was struck in terms of when it was appropriate to see those people face-to-face where, for instance, they might have been seeing a therapist face-to-face regularly and now being over telephone support. That, in some cases, telephone support is great for people and it makes it easier but in others, it means they can't get the support, have the conversations that they need and in fact, might be, as Katie's saying, in an environment where they can't talk freely about the issues that they're facing.

Another kind of question around balance is women's antenatal and maternal care, which I have spoken to colleagues at the charity Birthrights. One of their concerns is around what was the balance, how far were human rights taken into account in decisions about women's care during that time, and in particular, being accompanied to appointments, which remained restricted for quite a long time after other restrictions were lifted. And were women's human rights and needs in that environment actually taken into account? Was it kind of a purist, I suppose, a narrow understanding of their medical need or the medical risk around the spread of Covid that dominated that decision and in practice?

Samantha Edwards: [00:15:22] Yeah, excellent points, both of you. Thank you. Anything else in terms of the scope of the Terms of Reference and on what we should be looking at?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:15:39] I think there's something about reactivity of feedback. So, obviously, things needed to be implemented very quickly and, you know, that was important. But when there was feedback that said, 'actually, there's a gap here or there's an issue here', how effectively was that listened to and responded to? So, the thing that's in my mind, but I'm sure there'd be lots of examples, was women who'd been on maternity leave have not – that having an impact on their entitlement to support for the self-employed. And that [inaudible] of women and that was something that

was shared but was that kind of information, that evidence about the unforeseen consequences taken seriously and responded to really.

Samantha Edwards: [00:16:32] Yeah, very, yeah, very good point. I remember. I remember a lot about that particularly, women on maternity leave and their earnings and how it would be looked at. And similarly with friends who were going through kind of either, kind of maternal care, pregnancy, etc., alone. So, yeah, that was incredibly challenging for people that I knew, certainly. Okay.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:17:01] I think overall, there's a kind of a question about, well, I think this goes back to sort of the first thing I said really but was the impact on women kind of thought about? So, in those decisions about the risk and the cost-benefit analysis and the appropriate support needed, was the impact those things were having on women taken into account in a meaningful way? As we know, women ended up being the ones that were likely to undertake home schooling, doing greater amounts of childcare whilst trying to remain in work.

Samantha Edwards: [00:17:33] Yeah.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:17:34] And was that in the picture of decision making about what support might be appropriate or necessary.

Samantha Edwards: [00:17:41] Yeah, great. Thank you. Katie, anything further from you in terms of scope at this point?

Katie Westoll: [00:17:50] No, I'm okay. Thank you.

Samantha Edwards: [00:17:52] Yeah, okay. If you don't mind then, I will move to the second question. And I think this is one of those big thorny ones and your answer might be how long is a piece of string. But we need to obviously start thinking about, you know, what do we deal with first because this is the biggest public inquiry that has ever, ever happened, hopefully, will ever happen. And the scale and scope of the impact on the UK is so massive and we obviously need to make some decisions on what do we do first. And if you kind of look at the Terms of Reference, there is already a very long list of things that, you know, you could happily spend months or

even years looking at each of those areas. So, do you have any views on, kind of, what we should perhaps try to prioritise? Obviously, there'll be an awful lot of different views of people who think certain areas should be prioritised but anything that you think stands out as ideally what should be looked at first? I can see you're both scanning already, the long list. I know. I've got one of those amazing copies of a printed thing next to me and, yeah, it is already, you know, it's a really tough one about what, you know, how do you kind of prioritise? How do you say one thing is more important than other? It's very, very difficult.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:19:44] Yeah, I'm not sure I do feel able to say what should come first. I think throughout, I would say, it's important to take an equalities lens to whatever comes first. There isn't an equalities section. It should be thought about at every stage. I guess, I think, fundamentally, there is something important about who was making the decisions and how diverse that group of people were, what they did to ensure they were reflecting on those kind of intersectional needs and experiences because my sense is that that will underpin how lots of things play out.

Samantha Edwards: [00:20:37] Yeah.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:20:39] But, yeah, not necessarily feel placed to say this is the order it should be in.

Katie Westoll: [00:20:48] I would agree. I mean, I have no idea how to say, how do you tackle which priority first and that because it is a piece where it's massive.

Samantha Edwards: [00:20:58] Yeah.

Katie Westoll: [00:20:59] But I do think looking at who is making those decisions and where the representation of diverse communities were during those decision-making periods or if there were emphases put on, you know, examining human rights whilst making those decisions, looking at those safeguarding complicated issues, you know, how did that play into decision-making processes. But I can't go, 'Here's your list from one to a hundred.'

Samantha Edwards: [00:21:33] That doesn't surprise me. I think it is an equally head-scratching one for those of us who've been working in it. Yeah. As you say, it's massive and, you know, that...

Katie Westoll: [00:21:46] Yeah. And I think, sorry, you know, sorry to – but it is also really easy in some ways to look at things in hindsight because we can go, 'Well, that was done wrong and this is the impact on this particular person or thing or group of people.' Whereas during, you know, the very early days or even in the early part of the pandemic, it was very much about trying to contain it. And there were so many unknown factors that were at play.

Samantha Edwards: [00:22:15] Yeah, I agree. Okay. So, the third question is one of the six million dollar questions for you. So, this is about do you think that the Inquiry should set a planned end date for the public hearings so that actually, we can demonstrably show that this is a timely and fast-moving inquiry and that recommendations can be brought together and then hopefully implemented? And this is one of those things where, you know, where you start to look at previous inquiries or even those that are currently running. And, you know, even small inquiries have got a real legacy of running for a very long time. So, and, you know, our Chair is very clear that she wants us to be fast yet thorough. But that obviously does become very problematic when you have a list that is already this long. So, kind of what do you think we should be striving for? Do you have any views?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:23:30] So, is the question should we set a limit by which we won't take any more evidence or hear any more public hearings in order – hear from the public in order to say that we will be [inaudible] by a particular date in the future. Is that the question, Samantha?

Samantha Edwards: [00:23:49] That is, more or less, the question in there but, of course, I'm very interested in your views on, you know, whether or not that is a sensible thing to do or bearing in mind the kind of scale of what we are tasked with whether or not, you know, you feel that actually, a longer time period with more interjections of perhaps kind of recommendations and kind

of this is where we've got to might be more appropriate. So, I'm slightly kind of leading you into kind of a wider topic area.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:24:25] I don't think I can sort of answer that or I'm, you know, I don't think I would be able to offer a kind of an informed view on it. I suppose I do support the importance of it not going on – I can understand [inaudible] for accountability and relevance. I also, I suppose, would say lots of organisations have been gathering evidence, gathering testimony and, I suppose, I think, that regardless of whether you set a limit, working really effectively with those people at the beginning to scope what there is already might help, which I'm sure you will be doing.

But I think in terms of how to run a sharp, a super effective inquiry, I don't think I would be able to offer a definitive view on that, I'm afraid.

Katie Westoll: [00:25:38] I have to say I'm not sure as well. I've not run an inquiry myself before but certainly have followed many. And I think as a person who has a vested interest as maybe a stakeholder or whatnot, when an inquiry goes on so long, that can be a detriment, I believe, in actually coming up with recommendations or fact-finding. But if it's too short, then you are risking limiting your – So, I guess, what I'm saying is I think a term, a period of time but making sure that it's not too short – what that is, I don't know – and that it is not too long and driving and going so far that it becomes irrelevant, and Covid-19 still is existing and it's still making impact.

Samantha Edwards: [00:26:38] So, some form of kind of reasonable end date but something that isn't going to suggest that, you know, for instance, you know, some people might think that two years is too short; some people might think two years is too long. And, you know, and actually being really – do you think we should be quite clear upfront about this is the scale, this is the scope, this is how we think it should run? However, you know, there is kind of more evidence than we thought or, for instance, actually, you know, if the pandemic continues to go up and down, we kind of reserve the right that it may go on for longer.

Katie Westoll: [00:27:22] Yeah. I think that you need – yes, definitely. I think that there needs to be a term of – and timeline and it be well defined.

But as we've seen in many inquiries in the past, there have been extensions for various reasons because the situation has continued or that people have not been able to contribute as needed. But having – and that, yeah, so, yes, basically. I think that that is what I mean.

Samantha Edwards: [00:27:51] Yeah.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:27:52] I also think, to pick up on that, there's something – I think it is important that the stages are really transparent to people who are not super involved in the details of it so that anyone looking at it can understand where we're at in the journey, what's happened so far and what the sort of stages are and opportunities to participate, feed in evidence so that, you know, if it does go on – well, I'm sure it will go on over a significant period – other organisations are able to continue to follow it, you know? For an organisation, for small organisations that want to kind of follow and support it or influence the Inquiry, you know, if it goes on for three or four years, there will be significant changes in the people involved to working on that for an organisation. And so, just having some transparency and legibility in that process so that people can comprehend it, sort of where would they get involved. And that's as much, you know, for the public as it is for campaigning organisations.

Samantha Edwards: [00:29:01] Yeah. Great. Thank you. And that links us really, really neatly and you alluded to it kind of previously, Jemima. So, the big question that we would really value your inputs and I think Lizzie and I have probably got more vested interest than perhaps other people who work on facilitating groups is so, one of the big things that we've brought in to do is to design something that will enable as much as the UK population in its entirety but all of the interested parties, groups, stakeholders to be able to share their experiences, to have their say, to make sure their voices are heard. So, we were just really interested in kind of talking to you a little bit around, you know, how might we actually design something so that we could actually get those voices heard and kind of collect information? The idea being is that it would be translated into a form of evidence but it is as much about listening and helping people through kind of, you know, those

experiences that they've had as well as being complementary to the legal process and inquiry. Does that make sense?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:30:18] And is that open to anyone in the UK population could contribute their –

Samantha Edwards: [00:30:27] Yeah. And that's –

Jemima Olchawski: [00:30:28] – experience and evidence?

Samantha Edwards: [00:30:29] – yeah. So, I think, on principle, you would say yes. But I suppose, I think, one of the challenges is how do you actually make that available, you know, and how do you make sure that people can have their say but in different formats because obviously, with a relatively small public inquiry, you probably can't enable every single person to go and talk to someone in person as an example. But, you know, are there people who've suffered most and how do we actually engage with them, facilitate their sharing of experiences?

So, you know, you mentioned it just earlier, Jemima, around organisations and all the evidence that they're already gathering. Are there other things that we should be bearing in mind?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:31:16] I think it would be worth thinking about, if you haven't already, training some peer researchers to go and speak to people in particular kind of [inaudible] with experiences as a way to broaden reach and to hear like, you know, I think you'll get a different quality and type of evidence when people are speaking with peers.

I think it would be, you know, perhaps it's possible for people to share or submit a contribution either recording something or written, which could be analysed at scale. I think it's really important kind of – I'm sure you will, based on how these meetings have been run – to sort of think about what the impact might be of that for the person sharing that story and making sure that there is support available. And, yeah, just to bear in mind that telling it may not be a positive experience for that person or may be traumatising and there needs to be safeguards in place around that.

But, yeah, I think there's already lots of individual stories that have been collected. You know, Fawcett ran corona diaries and had over a hundred women regularly sharing their experiences over the period of – they stopped the lockdown. Agenda did something over a year where they gathered women's stories but also the stories of those organisations working directly with women. So, there's lots of important qualitative evidence that already exists that are individual stories speaking to the thing that is most relevant to them. So, I think that would be really valuable as well.

Samantha Edwards: [00:33:15] Thank you, Jemima. Katie, any thoughts from you on how do we bring those voices into this Inquiry? And, you know, for me, I think, that existing research is really important. But also, I do think fresh voices and people who've not had a chance to tell that story will be as equally important. And I think you're absolutely right, we've been talking about safeguarding and kind of support for people because I agree, it will not – it may not be cathartic for everybody. It may be incredibly painful. It may be, you know, just kind of opening wounds that people wish they'd put to bed.

Katie Westoll: [00:33:55] I think thinking about the LGBTQ community, all of the things that were already mentioned would absolutely be relevant, you know, things like peer researchers. That is always a positive thing and having safeguards in place for people who have disclosure or share their stories.

But I think if you're looking to collect LGBT or LGBTQ voices to specifically use LGBTQ language around, you know, asking as an LGBTQ person, what were your experiences. And then even further than the group of LGBTQ but looking specifically at trans people and their experiences as, you know, throughout the pandemic.

And I think that there's something to that because, you know, there's lots of opportunity of, you know, we've had lots of – lots of people like to do research and get LGBTQ voices and things like that. So, we see that a lot in our line of work of surveys that come through or focus groups and things. And there can be an exhaustion of that kind of work, looking for the

experiences. But particularly in terms of there, in relation to corona, I think that might be a bit more well received.

Samantha Edwards: [00:35:30] Yeah.

Katie Westoll: [00:35:31] And then I think, you know, providing support for organisations like ours, if the, you know, or having the safeguards, the resources available for organisations like ours or tips and tricks of, you know, how do you support somebody post disclosing their stories. That would be very helpful for, you know, having that in our toolbox because we do lots and lots of support. But if there is something that is in – that is specifically related to coronavirus and support, that would be, you know, that's not our area of expertise. It's our area of expertise because we've lived through it but –

Samantha Edwards: [00:36:15] Yeah.

Katie Westoll: [00:36:16] – that would be helpful.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:36:20] I think what Katie is saying there as well, yeah, that explicitly asking people about that experience that they've had as a part of the group, that was speaking to them [inaudible] and also recognising expertise and resourcing expertise at those often small, often local organisations that would be working with people who already have those contacts, who have the systems of support, you know, how to have conversations with people.

And also, just thinking about making sure, you know, I suppose it will be good to see a commitment to the Inquiry being trauma-informed and as a part of that, having the support in place for all the people undertaking the work because addressing this evidence, listening to those experiences and stories, you know, is going to be difficult. And there's going to be a lot of very distressing material and it's really important that people who are doing that are supported, both for their wellbeing but also so that we're going to get people kind of distancing themselves or becoming kind of numb to what will be some really, really difficult, upsetting experiences. So, yeah, I bring that over to you to think about that as well as a practice for the overall team for your own wellbeing and for the kind of output.

Samantha Edwards: [00:37:51] Yeah. Thank you, Jemima. That is – it's a point that we talk about frequently.

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:37:56] You're mute, sorry, Sam...

Samantha Edwards: [00:37:57] I put myself off mute and then it went back on to mute, my second point of the day, I think. No, it is something that we talk about frequently around making sure that we give ourselves that support. And I think, you know, certainly lessons from other inquiries are absolutely needed for people who work on inquiries.

This is a slightly different question, I suppose, I just want to add in. So, this is my first inquiry. I know lots of people have done more in inquiries but I do wonder whether or not particularly as the Inquiry gets more into that kind of formal legal stages, is there anything you think that we should be doing to help people kind of understand and also perhaps not feel intimidated by kind of what could feel like a really intimidating legal environment, that kind of idea of, you know, sitting in front of, you know, a kind of retired judge, etc. Is there something that we need to think about there that makes it a bit more human and empathetic that would help people when we get to that legal stage?

Katie Westoll: [00:39:02] I think having a really clear set of explaining the process for people, you know, because there will have to be a legal stage, obviously, and that is intimidating and if you don't – if you've never been involved in the legal stage or if you have any legal processing and perhaps it has been very triggering for people or they've had very poor experiences in the past.

And I think, you know, you can even look to organisations that have that work with people who've experienced domestic violence where they try to demystify the legal process and some good tips there. But just demystifying it, simplicity, offering, you know, there would be the 'legalese' and then perhaps offering sort of a non-legal worded report, you know, layman's terms so that we can understand it. And by we, I mean the citizens of the UK.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:40:05] Yeah, I think that's really the point. And yeah, those examples of where survivors are already being supported to

participate and some of the things there around, for instance, being able to give video evidence.

And I guess thinking about what is actually – I don't know what's required in terms of that setting when you give evidence but stripping out as much of the formality and jargon as possible and setting the context, which emphasises that the people who have – are speaking are there because of their expertise and they're there as valued and important or more important than the kind of people that are there in a professional capacity if you do it all the time.

And yeah, again, just really making sure that that support is there, preparing in advance, arriving wherever you need to arrive, what you're going to be asked, you know? Things like am I expected to dress a certain way or address people in a certain way? And talking about what some of the challenges might be about retelling your story and then, you know, as you talked about, providing the spaces afterwards, both immediately afterwards but also kind of in the longer period afterwards where people are kind of, you know, will be reflecting on what's happened, what they've said.

And also again, when the report is published, that would be a moment for those people, again, where that experience would go back to mind, as well as the impact of whatever is found so, being really proactive in having support in place and acknowledging the impact of what those people are doing.

Katie Westoll: [00:42:08] One other thing that I would add – and I don't know how this is done but something, you know, something to think about and probably already been thought about but making sure that there is representation in the people who are speaking, you know, not the people who are telling their stories but the workers, the legal team, whoever, you know, whoever is leading this that there's representation of diverse groups so that we see women speaking and leading and that we see LGBTQ people leading and trans people leading and people of colour, you know, etc., etc., etc. And I think that that is helpful because for when you are giving testimony or giving your statements and you see yourself in that, there's power in there and it helps break down barriers.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:43:08] Yeah, I think it's a really good point, yeah.

Samantha Edwards: [00:43:10] Yeah.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:43:11] Who's there and who's working on the Inquiry and making sure that it includes those voices. And I mean, is it possible to do sort of specialist sessions so where you might have women-only sessions or LGBT sessions that pre-expects that says, you know, this is an environment where you don't need to start by justifying or explaining, you know, the reason that this is different in particular to you, come with an understanding of that and now you can kind of tell your story without necessarily worrying about that. Again, might not be possible with the kind of legal requirements but where it could be, I would really encourage that.

Samantha Edwards: [00:43:54] Yeah. That's a really good idea and, yeah, hadn't occurred to me as a question to ask from the legal perspective about whether we could, you know, you could create those sorts of hearings where actually, it is a representative and much safer space for certain groups. That's a really good point, yeah. Great.

Thinking about the longer term as well, do you think there is some merit in having kind of ongoing forums with perhaps public but probably more likely to be representatives like yourselves where actually, we kind of come together and we talk about where are we, you know, kind of what have we learned perhaps even to a point and like this is – I'm hugely caveating. I'm using kind of examples that I think have been used in other places like Iceland and kind of in America where, actually, people come together and they actually start to look at some of those draft reports and recommendations and start thinking about, well, what would that mean if it was implemented? Do you think that would be something that, you know, kind of, you know, we should be kind of pursuing as part of that process of evidence listening but also then start to think about, well, how do you actually start to, you know, bring in recommendations as they come?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:45:20] You go, Katie.

Katie Westoll: [00:45:22] No, I mean, yes. I think that it is helpful to work in collaboration with other organisations and groups where, you know, how do you fit those recommendations into the work that you're doing? How do you support? There's always an amazing opportunity for collaboration and learning.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:45:43] Yeah, I agree. I think it would be really helpful in terms of building an understanding more widely about what's happening and what the dynamics are. These sort of opportunities whether it's a feedback as we kind of progress through the process and, you know, if there would be decisions that have to be made about the process, then I think engaging other people and those underrepresented groups is important in making sure those decisions are made fairly.

And then also that other people externally understand how you've got to the place that you've got to on that journey. So, I think that would be really helpful and, you know, I think it would be very valuable.

Samantha Edwards: [00:46:26] Great. Thank you. I feel like I've probably ran out of my questions. But I'm conscious that we do have a little bit of time left before we rejoin the main forum. So, are there any – is there anything else that you'd like to talk about while we've got the time?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:46:49] I feel like I've made my points. Hesitant to say that. Is that appropriate?

Samantha Edwards: [00:46:55] It is appropriate.

Katie Westoll: [00:46:59] Yeah, I think, I mean, because we're a small group, it is kind of – I feel like I've had opportunities to say what I wanted to say and it's nice to hear, you know, yeah. I think I'm okay.

Samantha Edwards: [00:47:12]

Katie Westoll: [00:47:12] Thank you.

Samantha Edwards: [00:47:15] Okay. Lizzie, do you think there's anything that we should cover while we've got the time?

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:47:23] So, because we have got you on the record, it'd be a bit tricky and this isn't part of the consultation questions per se but I guess is a subset of that last question we were asking around how do we ensure that people who've been most impacted are actually able to get their voices heard and we were delving a bit into the tactics of that and some I've outlined are, you know, the Inquiry, looking at doing some sort of outreach, some sort of listening exercise and connecting with people to hear their experiences. And I'm really interested in some of the tactical bits about that.

So, we talked about, Jemima, I think it might be you saying about videos and people submitting video accounts and written accounts. I wonder if it would be okay to just talk through what your thoughts are on those options and why you think they'd work for different groups. So, just to sort of paint a picture, you know, the kind of thing that we're thinking about is something a bit like – and Katie, I think you referenced working with other inquiries. There's some good stuff done by the Infected Blood Inquiry and the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, which is – they're listening projects where they've had the Inquiry team, all these intermediaries going out and sitting down with people and saying, you know, tell me what happened, really open discussions. And the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse eventually turned that into a bit more like online stuff rather than in person and started to do a bit more almost like traditional research just to help underpin where the Inquiry was heading in terms of its thinking and recommendations.

And that's the kind of thing that we're thinking about. So, yeah, love to talk about the ideas around, you know, videos, which groups are they most appropriate for? The peer research, I really like the idea of; have you got any other examples of that that I could take a look at? That would be really helpful. But yeah, any thoughts you've got on what would suit the kind of groups that you work with day-to-day?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:49:42] So Agenda worked with a charity called AVA and we did a report called Breaking Down the Barriers. And that worked with peer researchers, with women with experience of domestic abuse, sexual violence and multiple disadvantage. They did interviews. And that was a

really effective way of gathering stories from women who, I think, otherwise wouldn't have been heard from. So, yeah, that's – I'd suggest that as a good example and Agenda and AVA do really good stuff there.

And connected to that, I think, I'd suggest talking, I think, you know, organisations that are in a community with a group of people are kind of good starting points. So, women's centres for instance are a really useful and important part of the landscape here who've worked with women who've been at the sharpest end of some of these. And they will be working with groups of women who won't be regularly contributing to have their voices heard but who have really important experiences and they have – I think importantly, a starting point of a relationship, trust, and those organisations will be able to guide you as to what is needed to have a kind of effective engagement.

As I say, we did this sort of, at Fawcett, the diaries piece of work, which worked well for a group of people who wanted to put their story forward and felt able to speak about that regularly. So, I think, I suppose, I wouldn't say exactly one methodology but I think having that diversity allows people to kind of respond as it feels right for them.

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:51:36] What about you, Katie?

Katie Westoll: [00:51:42] I'm not sure I could draw on, yeah, to be honest, I don't have examples that I could provide for you right now. I'm sure there are people in this organisation that would be able to. But, you know, I think – when I think about using peer researchers or peers, we have, in the past, used – went for people living with HIV, peer support counsellor or they weren't counsellors – peer support is just what they were – through Project 100. And that was the overall project and that worked really, really well because, you know, people who are in the – who have lived experience with and who are at a different point in their journey have lots to offer and want to give back.

And so Project 100 was a really fantastic example of that, you know, sort of peers working who had been living with HIV for a number of years working with newly diagnosed people. And that was a really big success.

So, you know, when you can have that kind of community buy-in and participation that generally speaking, you know, in my experience, it's worked really well.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:53:02] Also just to add that once all that evidence has been kind of gathered and it's analysed, it's really important that someone does that who is a specialist in equalities, you know, gender, LGBT, class experiences because, you know, people obviously don't tell you their story in this kind of new kind of framework. And, you know, because I was a woman, this happened. That articulates something maybe in a really individualised way and it is important that someone makes that connection and overlays what's happening around how status in society, additional risks, you know, internalised feelings about your role or how you should be. So, yeah, I think that's just really important that that is taken into account when looking at the evidence gathered.

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:53:55] That's really, really helpful. Thank you. And I'd certainly thought about the equalities angle in the gathering of evidence. But you're absolutely right that it needs to be there in the analysis as well throughout the whole journey of what we're doing.

Could I ask then your thoughts on the idea of co-designs I think is what you were sort of suggesting? So, in thinking about our outreach programme, I had in mind a co-design approach which is where we would, you know, bring people in into – the kind of people who'd be giving us their experiences, bring them into the process so that we can hear first hand and test those ideas so that we're not, you know, setting up at a meeting room and rolling out something that's untested. And I wondered if, totally opportunistically right now, whether you'd be interested in helping us find those people or facilitating those connections so that we could get that co-design moving?

Jemima Olchawski: [00:55:09] Yeah, definitely. And for Fawcett and for Agenda, it might be that we put you in touch with the organisation. You know, Fawcett is not a service organisation. So, we have relationships with people who'll be doing this research but it might be that we connect to some of those organisations or put you in touch but really, happy to support that.

One little sort of plea I would make though is if you're asking small organisations to play a kind of substantial role just to recognise the impact that will have on them as organisations and the resource implications and as far as possible to kind of remunerate and recognise that expertise because there's kind of endless really important things that organisations are asked to contribute to. And, you know, sometimes they just won't have someone who can go if it's not supported with those costs.

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:56:09] Understood. Thank you.

Samantha Edwards: [00:56:14] Katie, anything further from you on that?

Katie Westoll: [00:56:18] Yeah. I mean, I think that MESMAC would be happy to help with any, you know, in that regard and I would echo that as well. It depends on the level of involvement and, you know, balancing the – it's a balancing act, of course.

Lizzie Kumaria: [00:56:41] Yeah. Thank you.

Samantha Edwards: [00:56:43] Great. Is there anything, finally, that you want to add? I mean, we are due to go back to the main forum for about quarter to. So, I'm very happy just to kind of keep talking or equally give you ten minutes to go and stretch your legs and grab a cup of tea if you wish. I certainly don't want to curtail the discussion if we think there are things to kind of keep talking about.

Jemima Olchawski: [00:57:13] It will be good to know just a little bit where this fits within the overall process and what the other stages of it are.

Samantha Edwards: [00:57:21] Yeah. So, we are in a four-week consultation period. And this is to inform the Terms of Reference. And what will happen at the end of the consultation period is we take all of the thoughts and advice that we've been given in forums like this. We're also meeting with bereaved families around the country as well. We have an online consultation that we're inviting people to participate in.

So, we will pull all of that together and see if there are areas where actually we will make recommendations. And when I say we, this is where the Chair of the Inquiry comes in and she will make recommendations to the Prime

Minister on whether or not there are things that need to be added to or possibly taken away from the Terms of Reference.

You know, I think as a Terms of Reference document, it is very, very high level. It's deliberately high level actually because of the scale and scope. And, you know, lots of people are saying, well, what about this and what about that. And that's that balance to be struck about do you try and mention everything in an exhaustive list or do you try and keep it high level so that you don't basically confine yourself so then suddenly, you can't talk about something because you've left it off the list. So, there's kind of a – you've got to balance that.

We then would hope that the Prime Minister would come back fairly quickly on the Chair's recommendations. And then when there is a final Terms of Reference, that is when the Inquiry becomes official. So, we're still – it's in setup but that's when the public inquiry becomes official and that's when the Chair effectively gets her powers. And that's when you can start the kind of disclosure process for asking whoever we choose to be, kind of, the first areas to start disclosing documents to us in terms of areas we want to investigate and that we know that we'll be having hearings on.

And I think, you know, we're all going to have to figure out a way of chunking this up sensibly so that we're not trying to do everything all at once but also so that you've got almost kind of a themed way of looking at certain things and then have some hearings.

At the moment, the Chair feels that she would like to begin public hearings in 2023. You know, we've very deliberately not put a date on that. Something that we are considering is in terms of the outreach that we do, whether or not that is something that you do simply to kind of, first of all, inform the hearings or if it's something that you would run for the duration of the public inquiry. I think we're landing on the latter because, again, it comes back to the size and scale. I don't think this is a thing where, actually, you can say, 'boom, we've done it' and we've got a little – we've tied it up with a little bow and said, 'There's all that people have to say.'

I think all of that will come out over the duration of the Inquiry. So, we're probably thinking about something that is designed that enables kind of online, in-person, kind of with the right support and safeguarding in place to enable people to share those experiences.

But I think working in partnerships with perhaps organisations like yours but many others are going to be really, really important so that actually, we can get something that is deliverable but is also right for the UK.

And so, there'll be that, hopefully, twin-track of hearing what people want to share with us but also that legal process that is running alongside of it. And what we want to do is find the right balance of evidence gathering that will then be translated into, sorry, experience gathering that is translated into a legal form of evidence that can actually be provided to the hearings.

So, that's where it goes. The how long is a piece of string is how long does it actually go on for. And that's a really tricky one.

Jemima Olchawski: [01:01:14] Thank you. That's really helpful.

Samantha Edwards: [01:01:16] No worries. Okay. Shall I give you a couple of minutes to stretch your legs before we rejoin the Zoom.

[Exchange of thank yous and goodbyes]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]