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1 Tuesday, 1 November 2022 2 (1.45 pm) 3 LADY HALLETT: Good afternoon, everyone. 4 May I first apologise, given this is Module 2B, the 5 first preliminary hearing into decision-making in Wales, 6 for the fact that I don't speak Welsh. I had a Welsh mother-in-law and several Welsh-speaking friends, but 7 8 I'm sorry, I've never picked up the language, although 9 I think I'm going to have to start trying. 10 Thank you all very much for attending and in 11 a moment I'm going to hand over to Mr Tom Poole 11 12 King's Counsel, who will outline how this module is 12 13 going to work, and the focus of the module. 13 14 Can I just say this before I do hand over to him. 14 15 I know there have been calls for a separate Welsh 16 Inquiry, and I understand the strength of feeling that 17 there is around both Wales, and indeed in 17 18 18 Northern Ireland, asking for separate Inquiries. 19 It's not a decision for me, and I am completely 20 neutral on the question, but what I will promise you is 20 21 21 this: if a Wales Inquiry is set up, I will work with 22 22 them and co-operate to the best of my ability to ensure 23 that, between us, we cover all the issues that 23 24 24 the people of Wales would wish to see covered. If there 25 isn't a separate inquiry established, then I will do my 25 1 Inquiry worthwhile and, I hope, be able to reduce 2 the suffering in any future pandemic, and possibly 3 reduce the grave suffering from those who lose loved 4 ones. 5 So that is my aim, so I make no apologies for 6 the ambitious timetable, but it will mean that, as 7 Mr Poole will explain, we are going to have to target 8 our approach very carefully. 9 Mr Poole. 10 Statement by LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY FOR MODULE 2B 10 11 MR POOLE: Prynhawn da, good afternoon. 11 12 12 My Lady, by way of brief introduction, what 13 I propose to do is start by setting out the arrangements 13 14 for this afternoon's hearing. I will then introduce 14 15 the core participants before saying something about 15 16 the background to and the commencement of the Inquiry. 16 17 I will then introduce this module. Module 2B. 17 18 the focus of which is Wales. 18 19 I will then address some of the issues that arise 19 for consideration, and which, my Lady, you have prefaced 20 20 21 in your opening remarks. 21 22 Some of what I say will repeat what others have said 22 23 in earlier preliminary hearings, but because this is 23 24 a different module, with different issues to be 24

addressed, and because there are a number of new core

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very best to ensure, and I know my Inquiry team will do their very best to ensure, that again we cover all the issues that the people of Wales would wish to see covered

I know from -- my first visit on the consultation exercise was in fact to Cardiff. I know the strength of feeling there on a number of different issues, because I heard them directly from members of bereaved families.

So whatever happens, we will try to ensure that we cover all the most significant and important issues. I have to emphasise we can't cover every issue. We cannot cover or call every witness. We are going to have to focus on the most significant and the most important decisions.

The reason for that is that we have to get on with this Inquiry, because if we are going to make a difference, and make all this work -- and I've no doubt the distress that these kind of proceedings will cause to the bereaved and others who have suffered -then we have to be able to get recommendations to the UK Government, the Government of Wales, the government in Northern Ireland, and the Government in Scotland, and get any recommendations implemented before another pandemic strikes.

Only in that way can we make our work in this

participants, it is necessary to set out the matters again.

Turning then to the practical arrangements for this afternoon's hearing.

The proceedings are being recorded and livestreamed to other locations. This allows the hearing to be followed by a greater number of people than would be able to be accommodated within this hearing room.

My Lady, it also goes a considerable way to satisfying the obligation set out in section 18 of the Inquiries Act to take such steps as you consider reasonable to ensure that members of the public are able to attend or see and hear a simultaneous transmission of the proceedings.

Also, as it routine in public inquiries, the broadcasting of this hearing will be conducted with a three minute delay. This provides the opportunity for the feed to be paused if anything unexpected is aired which should not be. We do not expect any such matters to arise over the course of this afternoon.

Let me next turn to representation. Present today, whether in person or remotely, excluding myself and the Inquiry legal team who are here, are counsel and solicitor teams representing the eight core participants for Module 2B. All of the core participants are

therefore legally represented. I don't propose to read the names of the representatives. My Lady has the names in your bundle.

Turning next, though, to the core participants.

The core participants are all entities, organisations or persons with a significant legal interest in Module 2B, and who therefore have enhanced rights to participate in the process.

My Lady, each of them were granted core participant status by you for the purposes of this module, Module 2B, under Rule 5 of The Inquiry Rules.

Seven core participants are present in person, one core participant is attending remotely.

My Lady, again, the list of core participants is in your bundle, but I intend to read them out so that everyone knows who they are. There is no significance in the order of names that I shall read.

Children's Commissioner for Wales; Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru; National Police Chiefs' Council; Public Health Wales; Relatives & Residents Association and John's Campaign; Trades Union Congress and the Wales Trades Union Congress; the Welsh Government; the Welsh Local Government Association

Now, core participant status brings significant

a core participant in this module. My Lady has referred to and will recall visiting Cardiff earlier in the year and meeting a number of bereaved families and their representatives, and I know that you are extremely grateful for their co-operation and assistance.

I should also say that the Inquiry team has had a number of extremely useful discussions with the Welsh Government, and I wish to make clear that the Inquiry team is genuinely grateful for this collaborative approach which we hope to foster and grow as the Inquiry progresses.

In this unprecedented, vast and difficult undertaking, the Inquiry team needs the insightful and sensible assistance of all core participants.

Finally, I should repeat what you have said already, my Lady: not being a core participant in this module in no way precludes any person or entity or group from applying for core participant status in later modules, bringing any matter to the attention of the Inquiry, providing evidence and information, or taking part in the Listening Exercise.

Turning then to the written arguments produced for this hearing.

My Lady, as you know, you have had a note from myself, assisted by my very able counsel and solicitor

procedural advantages: core participants get access to the disclosed documents, they will get to make submissions on the course and the mechanics of your Inquiry, they will get to raise specific questions and assist you, my Lady, in ensuring that the Inquiry can discharge the duties imposed upon it.

May I say something straightaway about those duties so there is no doubt: the core duty, as you have explained it, is to get to the truth, to ensure that the full facts are revealed, that culpable and discreditable conduct is exposed and brought to public notice, that plainly wrongful decision-making and significant errors of judgement are identified, and that lessons can be properly learned.

The bereaved and those who have suffered hardship in Wales are absolutely entitled to no less.

To this end, effective collaboration between the Inquiry and the core participants is of vital importance. May I therefore say something straightaway about the extent of the engagement that the Inquiry has already had.

Even before the terms of reference were finalised, the Inquiry team was working closely with all the Bereaved Families for Justice organisations, including Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru, who are

team. You have also received four written submissions in response which have all been circulated around the core participants.

I don't propose to answer at this stage all of the points made in those written submissions. I'll reserve my response in respect of some of them until they have been developed in oral submissions. I understand in that regard that five of the core participants want to make oral submissions this afternoon. So, after my opening remarks you will be hearing from them, following a speaking order that we have drawn up. As I say, I will then respond to such extent as is necessary.

May I then say something about the background to the Inquiry, focusing in particular on the impact of the pandemic in Wales.

On 28 February 2020 the first positive case of Covid-19 was confirmed in Wales. On 11 March, the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 to be the first coronavirus pandemic. And, as everyone here and listening will recall, on Monday, 23 March 2020, the then Prime Minister announced severe restrictions across the entirety of the UK in what became known as the first national lockdown.

This was followed by the First Minister

Mark Drakeford addressing the people of Wales and confirming a national lockdown across the whole country. The pandemic has led to financial and economic turmoil. It has disrupted the economy and education system and put unprecedented pressure on the health system. Jobs and businesses have been destroyed, and livelihoods taken away.

Communities, especially the poor and the vulnerable, have been devastated, and existing inequalities have been widened and exacerbated.

The disease has caused widespread and long-term physical and mental illness, grief and untold misery. Its impact will be felt for decades to come.

My Lady, I don't propose to say any more about the events leading up to that defining moment, as for the purposes of this afternoon it is not required, and their detail in any event is a matter for you in due course.

It is, however, right to note that vast swathes of human and social activity were ordered to be drastically curtailed and much of public life halted. People were instructed to stay at home except for certain very limited purposes. Almost every aspect of public life, including schools, the transport system, the justice system and the majority of public services were

inequalities exacerbated and access to opportunities significantly weakened.

So, my Lady, this Inquiry has been constituted to investigate on behalf of the bereaved and those who have otherwise suffered, as well as the wider public, whether anything could have been done to prevent their loss or reduce their suffering.

More specifically, in this module, Module 2B, the people of Wales are entitled to have the Welsh Government's key decision-making in response to the pandemic fully scrutinised and their experiences and their voices properly heard and represented. Only in this way, as you have said, can proper and effective recommendations be drawn up to better protect Wales in the future from pandemics and other comparable civil emergencies.

Given the sheer extent of the impact of the pandemic and the government decision-making that was required across such a very wide range of areas, it is perhaps little surprise that this Inquiry will be no less complex and multifaceted.

May I therefore turn to say something about the commencement of the Inquiry.

On 12 May 2021 the then Prime Minister made a statement in the House of Commons in which he

adversely affected. The hospitality, retail, travel and tourism, arts and culture and the sport and leisure sectors effectively ceased to operate. Even places of worship closed.

While the number of deaths rose, the health service, the police and emergency services, and other key workers continued in their places of work. Almost everyone else was forced to work or be educated from home. The months and years that followed saw death and illness on an unprecedented scale.

Beyond the individual tragedy of each and every death it is clear that the pandemic placed extraordinary levels of strain on the health, care, financial and educational systems as well as on jobs and businesses.

It affected the health and well-being of vast numbers of people, particularly vulnerable groups. The cost in human and financial terms of bringing Covid-19 under control has, my Lady, been immense.

Concern has been expressed that poor health and existing inequalities have left parts of the UK, including Wales, more vulnerable to the disease and that the restrictions imposed on the country have led to unmet health needs, damaged educational prospects and financial insecurity.

Societal damage has been widespread, with existing

announced that there would be a public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005.

On 15 December 2021 the Prime Minister appointed you, my Lady, as Chair of the Inquiry. In the written appointment letter, the Prime Minister confirmed that he would be consulting with ministers from the devolved administrations, as is required by section 27 of the Inquiries Act.

Draft terms of reference were drawn up, making clear that the Inquiry would consider and report on the UK's preparations and response to the pandemic, and would consider reserved and devolved matters in all four nations.

On 10 January this year, you wrote to the Prime Minister recommending certain amendments to ensure greater clarity in the Inquiry's remit, and to enable you to conduct the Inquiry at an appropriate pace.

You also sought an express mandate permitting the publication of interim reports.

In addition, importantly, given your view that the Inquiry would gain greater public confidence and help the UK to come to terms with the pandemic if it was open to the accounts that many people would wish to give, you suggested adding explicit acknowledgement of

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the need to hear about people's experiences and to consider any disparities in the impact of the pandemic.

On 4 February the Prime Minister responded accepting the detailed changes that you had proposed. On 10 March, having consulted with ministers from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister wrote to you to inform you of certain further changes to the draft terms of reference which had been made in response to comments from the devolved administrations. The same day, the draft terms of reference were published.

My Lady, you then wrote an open letter to the public in which you announced the launch of a public consultation process on the draft terms of reference. The consultation document sought the public's views on whether the draft terms of reference covered all the areas that they thought should be addressed, and on whether the Inquiry should set a planned end date. The consultation was open to everyone, and the public could contribute on the Inquiry's website, by email or by writing.

You consulted widely across all four nations, visiting towns and cities across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and speaking in particular to a number of the bereaved.

Module 2's provisional scope was published on 31 August, and Module 2 will look at essentially core political and administrative decision-making in the UK concerning the high level response to the pandemic from January 2020 onwards, paying particular scrutiny to the decisions taken by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

As I've already mentioned, this Inquiry is obliged to consider both reserved and devolved matters in respect of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. So, having looked at the picture in Module 2 from a UK-wide and also English perspective, Modules 2A, 2B and 2C will then address the same overarching and strategic issues but from the perspectives of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Module 3 will come next and will examine the impact of Covid on healthcare systems generally across the UK. It is what we are calling a UK system module, and will look across all four nations.

Later modules, details of which will be published in the coming months, will address, very broadly, system and impact across the UK.

The systems modules will include vaccines, therapeutics, and antiviral treatment, the care sector, government procurement and PPE, Test and Trace, and

In parallel, your team met with representatives of more than 150 organisations in round table discussions covering themes such as equality and diversity, healthcare, business and education.

In total, the Inquiry received over 20,000 responses to the consultation, and so in light of that process, you recommended a number of changes to the draft terms of reference which were accepted in full, and on 21 July this year the Inquiry was formally opened and you announced the decision to conduct the Inquiry in modules.

Before turning to look at the scope of this module, I intend to outline in broad terms where Module 2B sits within the overall structure of the Inquiry's modular system. This is intended to allow the detail of what is covered within Module 2B to be understood in the context of what will come before and after it. Greater detail on other modules and the modular structure of the Inquiry as a whole can be found in the CTI notes for Modules 1 and 2, copies of which are available on the Inquiry's website.

Module 1, which concerns resilience and preparedness prior to the pandemic, was opened on 21 July 2022 and the document outlining its provisional scope was published that day.

government business and financial responses across the UK.

The impact modules will include health inequalities, the impact of Covid on education, children and young persons, and the impact of the pandemic on business and public service sectors.

May I therefore turn to say something about the scope of this module, Module 2B.

The provisional scope of Module 2B was published on 31 August, when the module was formally opened. It will look at and make recommendations about the Welsh Government's core political and administrative decision-making in relation to the pandemic between early January 2020 and May 2022, when the then remaining Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in Wales.

My Lady, as you well appreciate, Wales is its own country, with a devolved government. Although Wales receiving funding from the UK Government, responsibility for matters such as health and social care is devolved to the Welsh Government. As such, Wales has its own healthcare system, NHS Wales, comprising local health boards, NHS Trusts and Public Health Wales. Relevant offices and agencies such as the Office of the Chief Medical Officer and Care Inspectorate are specific to Wales.

As a consequence, a number of key decisions made in Wales were separate and, in some important instances, different from those taken by the UK Government.

As to this, the people of Wales can rest assured that the Inquiry will be looking at the degree of and the rationale behind the differences in approach between the Welsh Government and other governments in the UK.

In this module, we will also be examining Welsh Government structures and bodies concerned with Wales' response to the pandemic and the Welsh Government's initial understanding of and response to the nature and spread of Covid in Wales. This will include looking at the extent to which there was a sharing of knowledge between Wales and the UK Government, in particular scientific, medical and other expert knowledge.

We will look at the Welsh Government's initial strategies. That will involve looking at the rationale for actions taken or actions not taken by the Welsh Government and whether decisions were supported by expert opinion.

The decision-making in respect of non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as national lockdowns, local restrictions within Wales, working from home, the reduction of person-to-person contact, social

neither practical nor advisable to identify now all of the granular issues that will be addressed at the Module 2B public hearing, let alone the questions that will arise forensically.

Much will depend on the evidence and materials obtained under the Rule 9 process, to which I shall shortly turn, which has been designed, of course, to obtain documentation from which the issues can be further distilled.

The Inquiry believes that the provisional scope provides a proper framework in which to include the issues and matters that the Inquiry is likely to enquire into, and a sufficient indication for persons and organisations who have relevant information and evidence, as well as core participants, to be able to commence their preparations.

A number of helpful suggestions have been made by the core participants concerning the scope of Module 2B, and I know, my Lady, that you and the team would wish to reflect on all of them, but may I just make a number of points as to how we would propose to do so.

First, we will of course approach the suggestions with an open, indeed eager frame of mind. It serves absolutely no purpose whatsoever to expend time, energy and cost in designing and holding a Module 2B hearing

distancing and so on.

We will also be looking at the timeliness and the reasonableness of such interventions, including the likely effect had decisions to intervene been taken earlier or differently.

Importantly, we will be looking at the degree to which the Welsh Government considered the impact of key decisions on those experiencing inequalities.

We will examine the extent to which the Welsh Government had access to and used medical and scientific expertise, data collection and modelling in their decision-making.

We will look at public health communications in Wales in relation to the steps being taken to control the spread of the virus, the transparency of messaging, the use of behavioural management and the maintenance of public confidence.

Finally, we will look at the public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations that were proposed and enacted, their proportionality and their enforcement across Wales.

All of this is for this module, Module 2B. This scope, my Lady, whilst ambitious, is necessarily provisional. Although it introduces a wide range of areas relating to core government decision-making, it is

only for issues of real importance not to be explored.

Second, this is only the second module. It is designed to investigate the Welsh Government's core decision-making in response to the pandemic. It cannot be used as a vehicle to front load other issues better suited for scrutiny later in the Inquiry.

Third, the scope document is meant only to be a generic guide to the Module 2B investigation. As already prefaced, the actual scope of Module 2B and the issues and questions that will be arising for scrutiny will be far better addressed by reference to the forensic trawl that is the Rule 9 process. That process is designed to sweep up a significant body of documents and statements from which the issues and questions can then be identified and developed.

Lastly, as you said in your opening statement, my Lady, with such a wide scope, the Inquiry needs to be ruthless in its selection of issues and relentless in its focus on matters of real importance. It is simply not possible to examine every issue, even if thematically within the reach of Module 2B, or to call every witness relating to every event, issue or major decision.

What is instead required is a carefully judged assessment of what really matters.

My Lady, may I now say something about the Rule 9 process.

Since this module got up and running, a huge amount of work has been done already in respect of preparing and issuing formal requests for evidence pursuant to Rule 9 of the Inquiry rules. To date, eleven Rule 9 requests have been issued in Module 2B.

My Lady, the list of organisations and individuals that have so far received Rule 9 requests is in your bundle, and if I may just list those nine recipients.

They are: the Welsh Government; the Chief Medical Officer for Wales; the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales; the Technical Advisory Group; the Technical Advisory Cell; the Welsh Local Government Association, Wales Trades Union Congress; Public Health Wales; Children's Commissioner for Wales; Health and Social Services Group; and the Welsh Treasury.

Now, these Rule 9 requests are lengthy, complex and wide-ranging. They request information and documents as well as identifying key figures and decision-makers relating to relevant responsive decision-making within the Welsh Government between January 2020 and May 2022.

My Lady, a principal aim of the Inquiry is to understand the way that individuals and organisations which were instrumental in Wales' response to

helpful engagement, we have already started to receive initial disclosure of documentation from the Welsh Government and the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, and more is due in stages over the next month or so.

Turning then to disclosure of Rule 9 requests, which I know is an issue raised by some of the core participants.

In our submission, disclosure of the Rule 9 requests themselves, as opposed to the relevant documents and material generated by them, is neither required by the rules nor generally established by past practice.

Furthermore, it would serve little practical purpose, given that the core participants will get and see the vast majority of what the Rule 9 requests reveal. And, after all, it is that documentary material that matters, not, in our submission, how it was asked for.

Moreover, given that almost all the Rule 9 requests will be superseded by and built upon further requests from the Inquiry team, disclosure of preceding requests serve, we submit, no purpose.

Now, a suggestion has been made by one of the core participants that those providing written statements following a Rule 9 request should be asked to include

the pandemic operated and made decisions. This goes to a fundamental aim of the Inquiry, which, as my Lady, you have made clear, is to identify what might be improved in the event of a future pandemic.

As such, the Rule 9 requests that have been made seek a detailed understanding of the role, function and responsibilities of key decision-makers and advisers within the Welsh Government, as well as the information and expertise to which they had access.

They also seek disclosure of key actions, activities, initiatives, policies, operational strategies, and publications in response to the pandemic.

The Rule 9 requests are being issued on an iterative basis, as part of which further requests will be made as issues come into greater focus. We will then issue further Rule 9 requests to other organisations on a rolling basis.

I should add that the recipients of the Rule 9 requests that have been issued to date have been extremely helpful and extremely co-operative with the Inquiry legal team. They have welcomed the opportunity to discuss the scope of the requests, to ensure that the Inquiry is obtaining the documentation and information it requires. As a result of this

the question within the witness statement, it being suggested that this will prevent the need for disclosure applications being made for Rule 9 requests.

Now, in our submission, this suggestion proceeds on the basis that Rule 9 requests are based around a single or even a handful of questions. This is simply not the case. The request for a witness statement is framed around a detailed and complex identification of relevant issues; it therefore makes no sense, in our submission, to disclose the question or questions.

Such an approach would also, in our submission, risk witness statements simply becoming a series of questions and answers, as opposed to a statement covering the ground in a narrative style, with free-flowing text that makes much more sense to the reader.

Having said that, to ensure that the core participants are kept properly informed, the Inquiry will ensure that the Module 2B lead solicitor provides monthly updates to core participants on the progress of all Rule 9 work.

I propose to say something next about position statements, which is again a point raised by one of the core participants.

My Lady, for the purposes of Module 1 you declined to order that position statements ought to be made by

the state or organisational core participants and material providers. In Module 2B the Inquiry will similarly examine a wide range of policies and decisions over a number of years by a significant number of departments, bodies and entities.

In our submission, this subject matter does not lend itself readily to the preparation of position statements until a core participant or document provider is sufficiently confident of their knowledge of all of the relevant issues and documents.

That will take time, given the large number of

That will take time, given the large number of matters to be addressed and the voluminous documentation. The making of an order for position statements would therefore likely lead to delay.

In any event, the Inquiry is requesting key Rule 9 recipients to provide a corporate statement setting out a narrative of relevant events and of lessons learned. These, in our submission, will serve a similar purpose to position statements.

As with Module 1, in our submission, position statements ought not to be ordered for the purposes of this module, Module 2B.

I next turn to disclosure.

My Lady, as you have made clear, this Inquiry will be as open as possible with the core participants and

with the public in relation to the disclosure of documents. The Inquiry's approach is to request document providers, through the Rule 9 process, to provide information and documents that are likely to be relevant to the issues and matters identified in a particular module.

The information and documents received will be assessed for relevance and then redacted in line with a redactions protocol that has been prepared and published on the Inquiry website, so as to remove sensitive material such as personal data.

Thereafter, it would neither be necessary nor proportionate for the Inquiry to disclose every document that it receives, or every request that it makes, or every piece of correspondence. That is not required and, in our submission, would hinder the Inquiry in the performance of its functions.

It would also be a derogation of the Inquiry's functions were it to pass to core participants all of the material that it receives.

Each document provider will be asked to provide an account setting out the details of the nature of the review carried out, how the documents were originally stored, and the search terms or other processes used to locate documents. Where the Inquiry

has any queries or concerns about a document provider's processes for locating relevant documents, it will raise and pursue them, and of course, as documents are reviewed and gaps identified, further documents will be sought.

The disclosure of the relevant and redacted documentation to core participants will be in tranches. All core participants in the same module will receive all the disclosable documents for that module.

My Lady, in light of this approach, you made a determination to this effect in Module 1, that you do not consider it appropriate for the Inquiry to publish either a disclosure protocol or a schedule setting out an itemised list of documents and other material that is not intended to be disclosed to core participants.

It has been suggested in written submissions from one of the core participants this afternoon that you might, my Lady, want to consider asking those providing documents to do so under cover of a detailed index, so that the Inquiry team can then decide which documents are to be disclosed, but also provide a copy of the indices to core participants, clearly marked, so that it's clear which are available and which are not.

Whilst this is, of course, a matter for you, we ask rhetorically: to what end? It is for the Inquiry to

determine whether proper disclosure has been made, whether further areas ought to be explored, and whether further documents ought to be provided. The production of indices setting out everything that has been disclosed would serve no utility.

It would also not obviate the cost and time that would be expended marking up the indices in the manner suggested, which was an important consideration in your Module 1 determination.

Some practical disclosure matters.

The electronic disclosure system which will be used to provide documents to core participants will be Relativity. Details of how to access and use the system will be provided to core participants shortly before disclosure commences, and the Inquiry team is working to begin the process of disclosing materials to core participants as soon as possible.

My Lady, it is likely that this process will begin early next year.

I propose to next say something about expert material and expert witnesses.

A number of qualified experts and persons with recognised expertise are likely to be giving evidence at the public hearing as witnesses of fact. However, the Inquiry will also appoint qualified experts in

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particular fields of expertise as experts to the Inquiry. They will assist the Inquiry, either individually or as part of a group of such persons, by way of the provision of written reports and opinions, and, where appropriate, the giving of oral evidence at the public hearing.

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My Lady, such reports and evidence will inform and support the Inquiry's work during the public hearings as well as your recommendations by ensuring that your factual conclusions are soundly based and supported by the weight of the best possible expert opinion.

Such experts will have the appropriate expertise and experience for the particular instruction. They will be independent and objective, and subject to an overriding duty to assist the Inquiry on matters within their expertise.

The identity of the expert witnesses and the questions and issues that they will be asked to address will be disclosed to core participants before the expert reports are finalised. Core participants will therefore be provided with an opportunity to provide their observations. Where there are significant differences of view or emphasis among members of a group, these will be made clear on the face of the reports, and of course these can be tested during oral

Details of this Listening Exercise are set out in the note from Mr Martin Smith, a copy of which is on the Inquiry website.

The Inquiry is designing the Listening Exercise to obtain broad and representative information from anyone who wishes to contribute, ie both the bereaved and anyone else who has been impacted by the pandemic.

It is being used and designed bearing in mind the potential for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people to contribute if they wish. These experiences will be anonymised and reviewed by research specialists and will be collated into summary reports. The resulting reports, rather than the individual accounts, will be aligned with and fed into the Inquiry's later modules, particularly those dealing with the direct and indirect consequences of the pandemic on the health and care systems, the vulnerable, the elderly, children, the disabled, the public sector, businesses, and other sectors of the economy.

The summary reports will be disclosed to core participants and will then be formally adduced in evidence so they form part of the Inquiry's record.

May I then turn to commemoration.

Given the scale of the loss and hardship brought

hearings.

The Inquiry has provisionally identified a number of specialist areas in relation to which lay and expert witnesses are likely to be giving evidence in Module 2, and potentially also in Module 2B. These areas are: public policy and governance, systems for measuring and estimation of infections and deaths, statistical methods in infectious disease epidemiology, government and public communications, and behavioural science. We welcome, though, identification of any other suitable areas by the core participants.

That said, my Lady, the guiding principle must remain that it is for the Inquiry to appoint experts, and the final decision of who they will be is absolutely a matter for you.

My Lady, may I then turn to the Listening Exercise, which is a vital part of your Inquiry.

As foreshadowed in the terms of reference, the Inquiry is designing and setting up a process by which the experiences of bereaved families and others that have suffered hardship and loss as a result of the pandemic will be submitted and listened to or read and then analysed and summarised before being provided to the Inquiry team and the core participants for use in the public hearings.

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about by the pandemic and the grief and loss suffered by the bereaved, the Inquiry wishes to provide opportunities for this to be commemorated as part of the Inquiry's process.

My Lady, as your opening statement made clear, it is appropriate to recognise the human suffering arising from the pandemic, including the loss of loved ones, by ensuring that it is reflected throughout the Inquiry's work. The Inquiry is exploring ways in which this can be done, including by way of commemorative memorial in the future hearing centre, through the Inquiry's public hearings and through the Inquiry website.

Before you hear from those legal representatives of the core participants who wish to make oral submissions, may I conclude by saying that there will be a further preliminary hearing for Module 2B early next year in London on a specific date and at a venue to be confirmed, and the public hearing in this module, Module 2B, will take place in Wales in the autumn of next year.

20 My Lady, that concludes my opening remarks. 22 **LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much indeed, Mr Poole. 23 Right, I think it's Mr Lloyd Williams KC, first of 24

Submissions on behalf of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for

Justice Cymru by MR WILLIAMS 1 1 MR WILLIAMS: Good afternoon, my Lady. 2 2 LADY HALLETT: Mr Williams. 3 3 4 MR WILLIAMS: My Lady, Covid-19 Bereaved Families for 4 5 Justice Cymru, which I am going to call CG, standing for 5 6 Cymru group, is a group for campaigning for and giving 6 7 a voice to those bereaved by Covid-19 in Wales. 7 8 CG is comprised of a group of individuals who 8 9 represent the full spectrum of families in Wales, those 9 10 who are bereaved by Covid-19. 10 11 CG developed under the umbrella of Covid-19 Bereaved 11 12 Families for Justice, a campaign group of family members 12 13 bereaved by Covid-19 across the UK. 13 14 On 15 July 2021 the Welsh members of that group 14 15 established CG with a purpose of ensuring that there is 15 16 proper scrutiny of all government decision-making 16 17 relevant to Wales, including those made in Westminster, 17 18 in the devolved administration in Wales and in the 18 19 regional and local government bodies in Wales. 19 20 From the outset, the group has worked extremely hard 20 21 21 to establish an immediate Welsh-specific public inquiry. 22 22 They've also played a prominent role in engagement with 23 the Welsh Government. Further, it has forged strong 23 24 24 links with other interested groups based in Wales who 25 are not themselves CP, thus giving them a voice in this 25

> will give confidence to the other members of CG, and hopefully Wales as a whole, that this Inquiry takes the interests of Wales seriously and intends to thoroughly examine all those matters which touch upon the interests of Wales

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CG welcomes the Chair's commitment to looking at the actions of the devolved administrations. As the Chair appreciates, Wales is a separate country with a devolved government. And as your counsel correctly noted, although Wales receives funding from the UK Government, responsibility for health and social care is devolved to the Welsh Government. Wales has its own healthcare system. To put it shortly, the UK provides the money, and the Assembly gets to decide where it's

This means that the key decisions made in Wales in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic were largely separate to and quite different from those taken by the UK Government. Clearly, Wales has strong links with the UK Government and the other devolved governments, and it will obviously be necessary in Module 2B to unravel the links between those governments and the extent to which they influence the Welsh Government, whether for good or ill.

We set out in our submissions for the preliminary

Inquiry.

CG thanks the Chair for designating it as a core participant in Module 2B, and for the Chair's recognition that CG is best placed to assist this public inquiry to achieve its aims by representing the collective interests of a broad spectrum of those bereaved by Covid-19 in Wales.

It's vitally important, my Lady, that the people of Wales can have full confidence that this public inquiry will fully scrutinise decision-making in Wales in respect of Covid-19, and that the experiences and voices of the Welsh people will be properly heard and represented.

CG welcomes the Chair's indication that this public inquiry will come and hear evidence in Wales on Module 2B and indeed on other parts of relevant modules.

We hope that it's possible to arrange simultaneous translation to enable those who wish to can follow it in Welsh and give evidence in Welsh.

As the Chair will be aware, there is no separate Inquiry being undertaken in Wales, which means that this Inquiry is of particular importance to the people of Wales. The Inquiry sitting in Wales and the comments made by you this afternoon, my Lady, and by your counsel, we find very reassuring, and we hope that it

hearings in Module 2 concerns we have regarding the scope of Module 2, which of course to an extent

overlaps with Module 2B. They were thoroughly aired by

the Inquiry yesterday afternoon, and we were reassured 5 by comments made by you and Mr Keith KC that, first of 6 all, the scope of Module 2 and Module 2B were not set in 7 stone and that both would be reviewed and subject to

8 further detailed discussion as and when the time arose. Secondly, that the specific items set out in the scopes 9

10 of Module 2A, B and C were merely examples of issues to 11 be considered; the differently worded scopes of A, B and 12 C intended to mean the same things but just slightly put

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My Lady, CG looks forward to making further submissions to the public inquiry after disclosure has been received and to assist the Chair in understanding how scope needs to be developed in respect of Module 2B for Wales. CG welcomes the Chair's indication that the Listening Exercise is still in development and that further details will be provided in due course. CG has offered its commitment to continue working with the Inquiry team to assist in the development of the Listening Exercise and more generally in the presentation of the material in this particular section of the Inquiry.

Finally, my Lady, we welcome the other groups 1 represents affiliated membership in Wales. The 1 2 2 present today who appear to us to bring specialist Welsh TUC, as it describes itself, exists to improve 3 knowledge which may shed light on various discrete 3 4 4 areas 5 My Lady, those are the submissions I seek to make. 5 6 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Williams, and 6 7 I do appreciate, as I said, as I said earlier today, the 7 8 offers of support and co-operation, and I'm going to 8 9 need it. So thank you very much indeed. 9 and this morning. 10 MR WILLIAMS: My Lady. 10 LADY HALLETT: I have also, I think -- maybe it was in your 11 11 written submissions, you mentioned about specific events 12 12 13 being included. They seemed to be included for Scotland 13 14 but not for Wales. I took that up immediately and I'm 14 15 sure that will be resolved. 15 instructions to experts. 16 MR WILLIAMS: Thank you very much. 16 17 LADY HALLETT: Thank you. 17 of evidence of impact on Module 2. 18 Third, to whom Rule 9 requests should be made. 18 Right, I think we now turn to Mr Jacobs. 19 Submissions on behalf of the Trades Union Congress by 19 20 **MR JACOBS** 20 MR JACOBS: Good afternoon, my Lady. I appear for 21 21 concluded 22 22 the Trades Union Congress, the TUC. 23 The TUC brings together 5.5 million working people 23 24 24 who make up its 48 member unions from all parts of 25 the UK. Part of the TUC is the Wales TUC, which 25 37 1 particular module, to re-state them briefly, and there 1 approach are, first, that a core participant may only 2 are also some points of nuance related to Wales. 2 3 In relation to the first issue, then, the provision 3 4 of early information to core participants on the focus 4 5 5 of the Inquiry's investigations. 6 The scope of each module has been set out in very 6 7 7 broad terms only. Mr Poole this afternoon described it 8 as no more than a generic guide. The Inquiry has been 8 9 perfectly frank that it simply cannot investigate every 9 participants. 10 issue and every event that might conceivably fall within 10 11 the identified scope, and indeed in your opening remarks 11 12 this afternoon you reiterated that the Inquiry cannot 12 13 cover every issue or call every witness and the Inquiry 13 its investigations and evidence gathering. 14 is going to have to focus on the most significant and 14 15 the most important decisions. 15 16 That is all undeniably correct but it begs 16 17 the question: what are the most significant and the most 17

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the economic and social conditions of workers in Wales, regardless of whether or not they are in employment, and the Welsh TUC is the voice of Wales at work. My Lady, as you are aware, the TUC has been designated as a core participant in Modules 1, 2 and

also 2A to C, and you have heard from the TUC yesterday

This morning, in Module 2A I, addressed you on four issues. First, the provision of early information to core participants on the focus of the Inquiry's investigations, including by way of disclosure of Rule 9 requests, the early provision of a list of issues, and

Second, issues of scope, and in particular the role

And, fourth, the suggestion of strand-tying closing submissions after the Module 2 and 2A to C hearings have

My Lady, those are procedural issues which apply, we say, with equal force across the modules. I'm not going to repeat them verbatim. What I propose to do is, really for the record and so there is visibility in this

learn that a particular issue has not been investigated when it is too late, when the substantive hearing is so close that the gap in evidence gathering cannot be filled without jeopardising the hearing date.

The second concern is that it is an opportunity lost for the Inquiry to benefit from the experience and expertise of those bodies and groups designated as core

The TUC and, it appears, many core participants, certainly, in other modules, believe that we can help the Inquiry to take an informed and robust approach to

My Lady, I addressed some of the points of nuance, and in particular what was said by Mr Keith King's Counsel yesterday, and I don't propose to do so again. But in short, within the identified scope there are crucially important and difficult questions about which issues the Inquiry is actually going to investigate, and we say that core participants need to have an opportunity to engage in that process, and it can be achieved by disclosure of Rule 9s and/or an early list of issues.

My Lady, turning to the second issue, issues of scope, and in particular the role of evidence of impact

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The two concerns I set out this morning with that

What appears to be envisaged by the Inquiry is

producing a list of issues and sharing that with core

gathering process. That appears to us to inevitably

mean it will be at a relatively late stage and close to

participants when it is nearing the end of the evidence

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important decisions?

substantive hearings.

on Module 2.

The impact of Covid and necessarily the impact of government decision-making is going to take place in significant part in later modules. The two issues of government decision-making and the impact of Covid are, it appears to us, inevitably entwined.

It does also appear to us that each of the Module 2 modules will need at least some evidence as to the impact of decision-making. That is because, firstly, it is necessary to have an understanding of what the relevant considerations and disparate foreseeable impacts were in order to assess whether they were adequately taken into account.

Second, one important issue in assessing the reasonableness and timeliness of government decision-making is whether and how the observable impacts of government decisions fed into the evolution of the government's response to the pandemic.

An assessment of the political and administrative decision-making cannot be divorced, we say, from its context, and neither should it be assumed that we know enough of the context to proceed without evidence.

My Lady, we do accept and recognise that you cannot hear all evidence as to the impact of decision-making in Module 2. What we say is that you must have enough

Older People for Northern Ireland is a core participant, whereas the same role in other devolved nations are not.

Whilst, of course, whether or not to apply for core participant status is a matter for individuals and organisations, and there is no difficulty with that at all, it does seem sensible to us to consider at an early stage whether at least to make Rule 9 requests of equivalent entities in other jurisdictions in order to maximise the opportunity for comparing and contrasting differing approaches across the UK.

Fourthly, and finally, we have already suggested utilising a sort of strand-tying closing submission in 2024, a short two-day hearing at which submissions can be made taking a coherent and informed view of the evidence across Modules 2, 2A, 2B and 2C.

My Lady, one challenge of the modular approach is how it is to form a coherent whole. Our suggestion, we think, will go some way to achieving that.

Given the daunting task of the Inquiry, it may feel early to consider these issues. There are many bridges to cross before a two-day hearing in 2024. But, we say the earlier this is considered, the better. The Inquiry and the core participants need to have a plan and think proactively as to how the comparisons and lessons between the UK and devolved nations are going to be

evidence as to impact so that the issues falling within Module 2 have some context. It can be achieved, we say, with carefully targeted Rule 9 requests. And perhaps, my Lady, targeted Rule 9 requests of representative and expert bodies such as the TUC but also many others can give the Inquiry sufficient understanding of the impact of government decision-making and public health messaging so as to give the context that I have described

My Lady, the third issue is to whom Rule 9 requests should be made. Wales TUC is grateful to have received a Rule 9 request and the opportunity to give evidence to this Inquiry. We also say that Rule 9 requests should be made of those professional bodies that played a significant role in cascading and adapting national public health communications into workplaces. And, as with Module 2A, we envisage writing to you in short order with some constructive suggestions to that effect.

The TUC also notes that there are certain entities which have core participant status in one of the devolved modules, but their equivalents do not. So one example is that the Children's Commissioner for Wales is a core participant in this module but her equivalents in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are not. Similarly, in Module 2C the Commissioner for

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achieved in practice.

My Lady, unless I can assist further.

LADY HALLETT: No, thank you very much, Mr Jacobs.

I mean, as you, I suspect, appreciated from what you have said, in relation to the core participants, I could only appoint core participants from those who applied, and I was trying very hard to make sure I had the right level of representation of various interest groups across the different modules, but I think your suggestion of the Rule 9 requests may be a way of coping with the problem in another way as well.

Thank you very much indeed.

13 MR JACOBS: Thank you.

LADY HALLETT: Right, now Mr Rhodri Williams KC.

Submissions on behalf of the Children's Commissioner for

## Wales by MR WILLIAMS

17 MR WILLIAMS: My Lady, prynhawn da.

I represent the Children's Commissioner for Wales, who welcomes your decision to designate her office as a core participant in Module 2B of the Covid-19 Inquiry.

The office of the Commissioner for Wales was established by the Children's Commissioner for Wales Act of 2001, which now applies a new part 5 to the Care Standards Act 2000 to children and young people in Wales.

The principal aim of the Commissioner is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. This must be the Commissioner's overriding objective indeed when undertaking her work, and in doing so she must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UNCRC, the international charter which sets out the minimum standards for children and young people wherever they live.

Indeed, the UNCRC underpins all of the Commissioner's work, for the Welsh Government has adopted it as the basis of all policy making for children and young people in devolved Welsh legislation. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure of 2011 places a duty indeed on Welsh ministers in exercising their functions to have due regard to the UNCRC. And the Commissioner's remit covers all areas of the devolved powers of the Senedd in Wales, insofar as they affect children's rights and welfare.

Throughout the pandemic, the Commissioner's office played a key role in influencing, scrutinising and holding to account the Welsh Government and public services devolved to Wales, in particular, as well as working with the Children's Commissioner's counterparts across the UK on certain issues. This included, for instance, producing a Covid-19 appendix to her joint

in terms both of their education and their mental health and wellbeing.

In addition, there were particular impact on particular groups of children and young people, including children with special educational needs, children resident in closed settings, such as children's homes, children at risk of or experiencing abuse, those held in youth justice settings and care experience children and young people.

For instance, children's education in general, including early years and childcare settings, and the system of school examinations in particular, were completely disrupted in Wales, as of course elsewhere in the United Kingdom during the pandemic.

Now, although this was mentioned by Counsel to the Inquiry in his opening, we do ask the question: is it the case that a future-specific module will focus more sharply on such issues? If so, we say that should be clarified now. If not, then it is vital that the current module expressly deals with them from an early stage.

Should, for instance, other organisations such as the local education authorities in Wales or the examination regulator, Qualifications Wales, be recipients of Rule 9 requests beyond those currently submission with the other UK Children's Commissioners to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in December 2020, as well as a children and young people's report relaying experiences to the UN committee which provided updates relevant to the pandemic alongside a list of issues.

Examples of other actions taken by the Children's Commissioner during the pandemic were set out in our written submissions and indeed in her application for core participant status, and I shan't reiterate those

In relation to the scope of the Inquiry, the Children's Commissioner for Wales notes what is said about Module 2B as set out in the note for the preliminary hearing and indeed repeated by counsel this afternoon.

Whilst we do bear in mind that the issues will be further developed once the responses to the Rule 9 requests for evidence have been received, the Children's Commissioner does have some initial concerns as to whether there will be sufficient focus on children and young people, such as, for instance, in relation to the decision-making by the Welsh Government in respect of non-pharmaceutical interventions, given that the impact on young people was undoubtedly significant

listed and set out in the note to the Inquiry?

Furthermore, what experts, such as education, mental health, safeguarding and child protection and social care professionals should be required to provide expert evidence and produce reports? As yet we have heard very little about that.

The Children's Commissioner would also request that the Inquiry examines in particular the protection of children's human rights, as laid out in the UNCRC, during the pandemic.

The Children's Commissioner would request that the Inquiry pays particular attention to the delivery of actions by the state to follow the advice of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which was published in April 2020, just after the first lockdown, and, there, a series of eleven key priorities for states to protect children's rights during the coronavirus pandemic.

Furthermore, in relation to the Listening Exercise, of which we have heard something today, the Commissioner would urge the Inquiry, first of all, to gather the views of children and young people directly, and the Commissioner would be willing to identify groups and advise on methodologies in that regard. And secondly, we request that the committee pays particular due regard

to the Welsh language, as of course, as we have heard, it has specific legal status in Wales, to ensure that the children's linguistic rights are upheld during this process.

The Children's Commissioner, however, does welcome any clarification on these issues which the Inquiry team is able to give during the course of this afternoon and will do everything to assist going forward.

My Lady, diolch yn fawr am eich cefnogaeth parhaol; thank you very much for your continued support.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much, Mr Williams.

I can assure you immediately and the Children's Commissioner for Wales immediately, this -- as I'm sure you know, this module is all about key decision-making, and I always acknowledge the impact on children being a relevant and significant, important part of that, hence my designation of the Children's Commissioner as a core participant. But there will be a later module, and as soon as we have the details of it, everyone -- which will deal specifically with the impact of the pandemic on children and young people.

So thank you very much too for your offers of support. I will need them. Thank you.

MR WILLIAMS: I'm grateful for that.

LADY HALLETT: Right, I have been asked to break now. Our

Core participant status was granted for Module 2B.
I'd like to, if I may, just take a couple of minutes
to introduce John's Campaign and the Relatives &
Residents Association to those who might not know of
them, to provide an overview of their work and highlight
the essential work that they played throughout
the pandemic.

John's Campaign was established in 2014 to advocate and campaign for the right of vulnerable people across the UK in health and social care settings to be supported by their family carers.

The driving principle of John's Campaign is that people should not be separated from those they love at a time when they would most benefit from their support

The Relatives & Residents Association is the national charity for older people needing care, and the relatives and friends who help them to cope. It is the only organisation in England to provide independent expert advice about social care with that as its focus.

Neither organisation came about due to the pandemic, both have existed before the pandemic to ensure that the lives and rights of some of the most vulnerable in society are protected. Both organisations work with those who spent the pandemic in health or social care

wonderful stenographer, who does the most amazing job -anyone who is following the transcript will see just
what a fantastic job she does -- so we don't want her
fingers dropping off. We will break now and I shall
return at 3.10, please.

6 (2.53 pm)

(A short break)

8 (3.10 pm)

Submissions on behalf of the Relatives & Residents
Association and John's Campaign by MS JONES

11 LADY HALLETT: Right. Now, I've got on my list either12 Emma Jones or Beatrice Morgan. Which one?

13 MS JONES: Thank you, my Lady, it's Emma Jones.

14 LADY HALLETT: Thank you.

15 MS JONES: Good afternoon, my Lady.

Leigh Day, along with Adam Straw KC of Doughty Street Chambers and Jessica Jones of Matrix Chambers, act for the Relatives & Residents Association and John's Campaign, Ymgrych John. I apologise for my mispronunciation but I promised that I would try.

The organisations made a joint application for core participant status in respect of Modules 2 and 2B. The application was supported by the British Institute of Human Rights, Rights for Residents and the Patients Association.

settings, and with their families who struggled and fought to continue to try to provide the support required throughout the pandemic and to the present day.

In addition, they work with those who lost loved ones. And it's not just because of Covid, and we want to make that point as clearly as we can, it's not just because of Covid, but because of the failures of government and other public bodies to listen to the warnings from organisations such as John's Campaign and Relatives & Residents Association about the impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions on those in health and social care settings.

John's Campaign was one of the first voices to question the government's blanket policy of isolation in health and care settings. From the very beginning of the pandemic, and throughout, they campaigned tirelessly to question the blanket restrictions the government was mandating. And they were well placed to do so because John's Campaign had already secured pledges from every acute hospital trust in the country to recognise the special need for people with dementia or other cognitive impairments to have contact with their family carers.

In April 2020 their campaigning actually led to NHS England modifying their visitor ban to recognise

the needs of those with dementia to be supported by family carers.

From the outset of the pandemic, the Relatives & Residents Association helpline received multiple telephone calls on a daily basis from distressed families about the impact of the poor political decision-making in managing the virus and the impact that was having on the loved ones in care. And to ensure that these voices were heard, they fed insights from the helpline into their campaigning and lobbing work.

In March 2020 they worked with The Observer to break the story of the impact of isolation in care settings, sharing the acute distress of residents and the impact on health as their family members simply disappeared from their lives.

From September 2020 their End Isolation In Care campaign lobbied for changes to policy and guidance. Their active and significant work to challenge political decision-making led to them being invited to give oral evidence to parliamentary committees and to All-Party Parliamentary groups.

With a combined reach of over 100,000, comprising service users, their loved ones and some providers, they had direct knowledge of the health and social care

reinforce our position.

It is essential to ensure public confidence in the Inquiry that the Inquiry gives equal weight to non-governmental CPs as it does to government and other public bodies. And in addition, to ensure that the investigations are as thorough and as effective as possible, we submit that it is vital that the Inquiry gives as much weight to people using the services and their families as it does to service providers.

We say that, by way of example, the organisations assisting the Inquiry in Module 2 appear to be -- in relation to the care sector -- largely service provider led, and whilst would have had an interest in the decision-making from the provider point of view, this is likely to be very different from the interests of those using the services and the families that support them.

As a non-governmental CP, representing the interests of those in health and care settings and their loved ones, we will do our best to assist the Inquiry with its Herculean task. Although we do not have the same resources of some other core participants, we do consider we still have a vital role to play and we will demonstrate this through Module 2B.

The second issue, my Lady, relates to the scope of Module 2B. The current scope covers a period

landscape before the pandemic and were already representing and fighting for the rights and needs of those in health and home care settings, even before the first official lockdown. They continued to challenge, campaign and to lobby on behalf of those individuals throughout the pandemic, working tirelessly to scrutinise government guidance, to provide advice and support for individuals, and to make clear to government where the guidance was, at times, arguably unlawful.

Their work continues on all of these fronts. Their ongoing ability to reach and represent so many is of paramount importance, given the issues affecting those in health and social care settings, and that is why we are so grateful to be designated as a core participant in this module. We will ensure that we work tirelessly to assist the Inquiry now and, we very much hope, in future modules.

My Lady, we provided written submissions to the Inquiry and we have just three issues on which we would like to expand briefly.

The first relates to the designation of core participant CP status. We support the submission made on behalf of the TUC at the preliminary hearing of Module 1 and, as we dealt with this in our written submissions, we simply make the point orally to

January 2020 until May 2022, and whilst we recognise the importance of examining the policies of the past, in Wales many of the policy restrictions imposed during that period are still enforced and continue to make a misery of many people in care homes and those who love them. Even now, John's Campaign continues to hear of safeguarding issues in Wales caused by the pandemic and the restrictions imposed, involving medication, hydration, hygiene and basic care. In short, continued restrictions have made effective monitoring and effective review impossible.

Given this, we submit that families and loved ones must be allowed full access, with the same infection control procedures as staff, to support, protect and advocate for their loved ones in health and care settings.

As part of the job of the Inquiry is to ensure lessons are learnt and to make recommendations for the future, it is essential that consideration is given to what is happening now as well as what happened between January 2020 and May 2022, to ensure that the human rights of some of the most vulnerable in our society are protected.

Julia Jones, co-founder of John's Campaign, has drawn to my attention the following snippet of

a conversation and asks that I draw it to your attention too. She had this conversation with a care, quality and compliance governance director of a care home group, and we share this with you to demonstrate what is happening now and to urge you to consider extending the scope beyond May 2022:

"'What more do we have to do?' asked the care, quality, compliance and governance director of a care home group. 'Our residents are all quadruple vaccinated, but in an outbreak scenario some local authorities are insisting we have to confine all residents to their rooms. We have to cut back to two named visitors and all communal activities are stopped. It's stressful for our residents, for our team, and for the families. At what point are we going to say: enough? How long before people in care homes can have their lives back?"

A third and final issue which we'd like to touch on briefly, my Lady, relates to the Listening Exercise. In our written submissions we welcomed the Chair of the Inquiry ensuring that those affected by the pandemic would be at the heart of the Inquiry. We have one additional observation to make in this regard.

Some of the individuals affected are individuals who are non-verbal, who can only comment on policy and

trying to get a balance and make sure that the core participants in each module relate to the subject matter of that module, and it's not been an easy task. So I just wanted to reassure you that I really am trying to make the best use of resources in the best possible way. And of course, as I've said a thousand times, you don't have to be a core participant, and I'm hoping that the organisations you represent will be able to help in the other modules in other ways.

The only other thing I wanted to say was in relation to the scope of 2B and the time deadline. We will of course consider what you have said very carefully, because I think it's a very important issue. It may well be that I'll be advised that when we come -- there will be a module specifically dedicated to the care sector, both private and public. So it may be that that kind of issue may be better suited to that module. But I promise you we'll keep you fully informed when we know what's happening.

So thank you very much for your help.

21 MS JONES: Thank you, my Lady.

**LADY HALLETT:** Right, I think finally we have Mr Howells,

23 representing the Welsh Government.

24 Submissions on behalf of the Welsh Government by MR HOWELLS

25 MR HOWELLS: My Lady, Rwy'n croesawu'r cyfle i annerch yr

decisions through their behaviour and/or the way in which they present. So, for example, individuals in a hospital situation in which families have been excluded due to the restrictions, might suffer with increased anxiety or distress and, as a result of that, require additional medication such as additional anti-psychotics to enable them to tolerate the situation

This is just one example of how an individual's response to restrictions might manifest in different ways.

We therefore urge the Chair to take such evidence into account to ensure that the voices of individuals who are not able to communicate in conventional ways are also heard.

My Lady, unless there is anything further with which I can assist.

**LADY HALLETT:** No, thank you, Ms Jones, that's all extremely helpful.

Just a couple of points in response. I'll obviouslycome back to Mr Poole in a moment.

I personally needed no persuading about not having a government-heavy list of core participants, but as you will appreciate, and just so other people understand, and as I said to Mr Jacobs earlier, I've got to balance

ymchwiliad ar rhan Llywodraeth Cymru.

I welcome the opportunity to address the Inquiry on behalf of the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government would like to reaffirm the commitment that was made during the preliminary hearing for Module 1 that we will give you the fullest possible co-operation in investigating the response to the unprecedented challenges faced by the people of Wales, their communities, their businesses, and their public services, as a result of the pandemic.

The Welsh Government will wholeheartedly participate in this module, relating as it does to the core political and administrative decision-making of the Welsh Government in its response to the pandemic.

This Inquiry is the best means by which the interconnected decision-making between the UK Government and the devolved governments can be properly explored. In particular, this Inquiry can look at how distinct decisions were made by each of the four nations for their respective countries either on a four nations basis or separately.

We have been consistent in our determination that our actions and those of our public sector partners in Wales are fully and properly scrutinised as part of this Inquiry.

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The people of Wales deserve no less, particularly those who have lost loved ones, but also everyone else whose lives were affected by this devastating pandemic.

We cannot emphasise enough our commitment to this module and to the Inquiry as a whole, because we are determined that people's questions should be answered fully and transparently and that we all learn lessons for the future.

It is only right that the public hearings for this module will be held in Wales. Ac edrychwn ymlaen at eich croesawu chi a'ch tîm pan fydd y gwrandawiadau ar gyfer Modiwl 2b yn dechrau; and we look forward to welcoming your Ladyship and your Ladyship's team when the hearings for Module 2B commence.

LADY HALLETT: The sooner I get the simultaneous translation set up, Mr Howells, the better.

Thank you very much, indeed. I do appreciate the offers of support and co-operation, as I've said now many times. We really are going to need it. So thank you very much for what you said on behalf of the Welsh Government.

22 MR HOWELLS: My Lady.

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23 LADY HALLETT: Thank you.

> Right, I think that completes all the people who wish to speak.

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thematically within the scope of Module 2B.

Having said that, and in response to a specific point raised by Mr Lloyd Williams King's Counsel on behalf of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru, as part of our investigation the Inquiry team will be looking at what have become known as superspreader events in Wales. One such example being given as the Wales and Scotland Six Nations men's rugby match, due to take place on 14 March 2020 but cancelled the day before.

As to the point raised by Mr Williams about differences in wording between the scope documents for Module 2B and the scope documents for Modules 2, 2A and 2C. In my submission, nothing turns on any linguistic differences between those provisional outline of scope documents.

The short point is the modules are different, they are different because they are looking at different decision-makers and different decision-making processes. However, given the core subject under investigation, they are nevertheless fundamentally aligned. And whilst there might be slight differences in detail or emphasis, nothing more significant should be read into the differences in wording than that.

If I may then turn to the second point, namely

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Right. Mr Poole, any closing submissions?

## Response statement by LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY FOR **MODULE 2B**

MR POOLE: My Lady, I'm grateful.

There are obviously a number of issues to reflect upon, but may I start what I anticipate and hope to be a fairly brief response by just expressing my gratitude and the team's gratitude and your gratitude, my Lady, to all the core participants and their advocates for their helpful, succinct and thought provoking submissions. Diolch yn fawr.

My Lady, I have already dealt with some of the points raised by the core participants in my earlier address, which I don't propose to repeat. There are, however, three themes running through the submissions made by the core participants that we believe can be answered straightaway.

They relate to the scope of Module 2B, the scope of future modules, and the Rule 9 process and disclosure

As to the scope of Module 2B, as I submitted earlier, the Inquiry team will approach the suggestions that have been made by core participants with an open frame of mind. It is, however, simply not possible to examine every issue or call every witness, even if

the scope of later modules.

I have already given an overview of the topics that will likely be covered in later modules, namely the later system and impact modules, and although the provisional scope order of those later modules has not been determined, I would like to deal with a specific concern that's been expressed by Mr Rhodri Williams King's Counsel on behalf of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, which is essentially to question whether the Inquiry will be sufficiently focused on children and young people.

I would like to reassure the Children's Commissioner that the impact of Covid-19 on education, children and young people will be specifically examined in a later module. That is to say, whilst this module, Module 2B, will be looking at the extent to which the Welsh Government had regard to the particular interests of children and young persons, the focus of this module will be on the decision-making itself. The issues that flow from that decision-making, for example the detailed consideration of the impact of school closures in Wales on children and young persons, are not intended to fall within this module, Module 2B, and, as I say, will be addressed in a later module.

Similarly, Ms Jones raised a concern on behalf of

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John's Campaign and the Relatives & Residents Association, that the Inquiry should consider within this module whether the needs of people who require support from family or friends due to vulnerabilities such as dementia were properly taken into account in decision-making around the pandemic response. Again, I would like to reassure Ms Jones and those she represents that the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups, including the elderly and those living with dementia, will be examined in a later module. In Module 2B we simply cannot look at the specific

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impact of the pandemic on every sectoral group in the context of examining whether the Welsh Government failed to look at those issues. If the Welsh Government failed to look at a particular impact, or a particular area, or the likely consequences on a particular group within society, then that omission and failure will be absolutely apparent.

If I can then turn finally to Rule 9 requests and disclosure.

I have already addressed why we submit that the Rule 9 requests themselves ought not to be disclosed. I would, however, like to reassure the core participants that they will have full and proper

said before, this is an extraordinarily complex Inquiry with a huge range of various challenges, and I feel increasingly optimistic that with the kind of support and constructive suggestions that I have been receiving over the last couple of days from core participants, then we may be able to achieve the aims that I have set out before.

So thank you, everybody, for all that you have said. I will bear everything very much in mind and, I think I said yesterday, I do have an open mind and the team will be flexible, I can assure you of that.

Thank you very much indeed.

(3.35 pm)

(The hearing adjourned until 10 am on Wednesday, 2 November 2022)

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 67 opportunity to engage in the Rule 9 and disclosure processes.

As I submitted earlier and as, my Lady, you stated in your ruling in Module 1, the core participants will be provided with a monthly update of where the Inquiry team has got to in terms of the Rule 9 process and the disclosure process, and, my Lady, you might think that those monthly updates go a long way to meeting the concerns that have been expressed by the core participants this afternoon.

Those monthly updates will reflect a lot more about the way in which the Inquiry team has been asking for documents, the topics that we are interested in, the volume of material received, and what we expect to receive in future.

And of course, as the documents themselves are provided, the core participants will be able to see which of the issues in the provisional outline of scope those documents concern.

My Lady, that's all I say by way of response. LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Poole.

That concludes this afternoon's preliminary hearing. I would like to thank everyone who has attended and those who have watched online. And particularly I would like to thank those who have contributed. We have again

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