

UK Covid-19 Inquiry
‘Every Story Matters’ Ethics Advisory Group

Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

The Covid-19 Inquiry is committed to ensuring that research and analysis activities carried out as part of its listening exercise (known as ‘Every Story Matters’ - ESM) are conducted in line with ethical good practice. In order to meet the needs of the targeted research in a timely way, a bespoke Ethics Advisory Group (EAG) has been established. Using a bespoke review group allows for an iterative approach to ensuring ESM’s primary research meets appropriate ethical principles¹.

2. Composition

The group will be led by an independent Chair, appointed by the Inquiry, and comprises four other independent members with relevant experience and knowledge in the field of social research ethics and practice. The group will remain constituted for as long as ESM is carrying out primary research with human participants.

The group also consists of additional experts from ESM’s research and analysis supplier(s) (currently one from each of Ipsos and NatCen Social Research, for as long as they are both part of the research consortium). If the research and analysis contract is awarded to another consortium then the group experts would change to reflect this. To mitigate conflict of interest, these experts will be excluded from meetings where potential or perceived conflicts may emerge.

The group will also be at liberty to co-opt additional experts as required to bolster expertise in certain specialist areas as required, subject to budget approval. The Chair of the EAG will make final decisions on the membership of the group.

3. Scope and remit

The EAG will be commissioned by the Inquiry to:

- a. Review the proposed research approach at key milestones during all primary research, providing advice on the approach; and
- b. Provide occasional ad-hoc ethical advice on all primary research, to ensure the research is robust and maintains the highest ethical standards.

More specifically, the EAG will provide advice in accordance with appropriate ethical guidelines. The Ethics Advisory Group has not been constituted to give ethical approval to primary research which involves human participants but is offering informed ethical advice throughout, to assure the ESM delivery team and decision makers that the research has been designed and delivered within the GSR ethical assurance framework.

¹ Set out in the Government Social Research (GSR) function’s Ethical Assurance for Social and Behavioural Research

The EAG will provide both oral and written feedback on the research approach and implementation in a timely fashion.

4. Timeframes

The EAG was first convened in March 2023 to comment on the first phase of the Module 3 Targeted Research and will remain active for as long the Inquiry is carrying out primary research.