



## **IN THE UK COVID-19 PUBLIC INQUIRY**

### **MODULE 4**

#### **SUBMISSIONS FOR SCOTTISH COVID BEREAVED FOR THE FIRST PRELIMINARY HEARING**

1. We are grateful to Counsel to the Inquiry for the detailed note setting out the matters which are to be addressed at the first Preliminary Hearing for Module 4. This Module, which will consider and make recommendation on a range of issues relating to the development of Covid-19 vaccines, the implementation of the vaccine rollout programme across the four nations of the UK, and the development and use of new therapeutics is of the utmost importance to Scottish Covid Bereaved. Scottish Covid Bereaved look forward to the commencement of the hearings for this Module in Autumn 2024 and to obtaining the important answers to the matters raised in due course.
2. It is understood from Counsel to the Inquiry's note that disclosure of materials for this Module is anticipated to begin in late Autumn of this year. While the Inquiry's eagerness to commence Module 4 is to be commended, Scottish Covid Bereaved are somewhat limited in the submissions that can be made in the absence of this disclosure. While the submissions below are made in an attempt to assist the Inquiry, it may be that Scottish Covid Bereaved require to make submissions on the matters contained in Counsel to the Inquiry's note once their representatives have had the opportunity to consider the disclosed material for this Module. Should Scottish Covid Bereaved consider that the disclosed material raises any issues which require to be addressed by the Inquiry, we will endeavour to raise this with the Inquiry as soon as possible.

### Listening Exercise – Every Story Matters

3. The Scottish Covid Bereaved note that, in relation to Module 4, the Inquiry intends to carry out qualitative research in relation to the submissions made by members of the public to the Every Story Matters listening exercise and that the results of this research will be collated into themed reports. This approach is to be welcomed. It is submitted that it will allow the Inquiry to hear directly from those affected by the pandemic and allow their stories to inform the Inquiry's work.
4. The proposed Key Lines of Enquiry are noted, as are the proposed audience groups. The Scottish Covid Bereaved consider that the Inquiry has identified important KLOEs and potential audience groups. The Scottish Covid Bereaved submit, however that the Inquiry may wish to explore whether the manner in which vaccine delivery was rolled out may have resulted in reduced uptake of the vaccines. In particular, the Scottish Covid Bereaved submit that the Inquiry may wish to consider whether having couples within one household being vaccinated at different times may have resulted in some hesitancy to receive the vaccine, where the first member of the household suffered side effects from the vaccine and the other member of the household has subsequently elected not to receive the vaccine. The Inquiry may further wish to consider whether requiring individuals to travel some distance to receive the vaccine, as those in rural areas were required to do, impacted on vaccine uptake rates.
5. It is further submitted that the Inquiry may wish to consider the role played by social media in public messaging on vaccines. Over the past decade there has been an increased reliance by members of the public on social media platforms as a source of news and information and not necessarily from official sources. The Scottish Covid Bereaved are aware of considerable misinformation in relation to vaccines and therapeutics having been spread on social media. The Inquiry has heard evidence of the impact of the UK Government's austerity policies on public health funding. It may wish to consider whether this resulted in fewer resources being available to provide public health messaging and, when coupled with the increased reliance on social media platforms as a source of news and information, whether it led to an increase in the

number of those unwilling to receive the vaccine. The Inquiry may further wish to consider whether online misinformation may have clouded concerns from suitably qualified persons who were challenging or raising concerns with orthodox views. Scottish Covid Bereaved consider that the internet is the most powerful source of public information. It is submitted that the Inquiry ought to consider how a protected or verified public health message can be sent online and what steps can be taken to gain the trust of those who may have concerns about receiving vaccines.

6. The Scottish Covid Bereaved look forward to having the opportunity to have their voice heard in respect of Module 4. We will endeavour to continue to assist the Inquiry in any way we can and look forward to receiving the disclosure materials in due course.

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