
WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS OF THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

FOR THE MODULE 4 PRELIMINARY HEARING

ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2023

1. These are the written submissions on behalf of the Welsh Government for the preliminary hearing on 13 September. The Welsh Government is conscious of the limited time available at the preliminary hearing and the importance of ensuring that other Core Participants, including representatives of the bereaved, have the opportunity to make oral submissions. In these circumstances, the Welsh Government confirms it does not intend to make oral submissions at the first Module 4 preliminary hearing on 13 September 2023. The Welsh Government presently wishes to make opening and closing statements at the substantive Module 4 hearing.
2. We are grateful to the STI and CTI for their notes circulated in advance of the preliminary hearing. The Welsh Government is grateful for its designation as a Core Participant for Module 4 and re-affirms its full commitment to the Inquiry and will provide the fullest possible cooperation, so that the decisions it took in response to the pandemic are thoroughly scrutinised. It is actively working to ensure that the Inquiry is provided with all the information it needs in this regard. It has already begun engaging with the Inquiry legal team in relation to Module 4 and initial responses have been provided to requests for preliminary information. Work is also underway to prepare a response to more detailed questions submitted pursuant to Rule 9.
3. As with other areas examined to date by the Inquiry, the issues which form the subject matter of Module 4 are critical matters requiring careful consideration. Following the detailed consideration which will be given by the Inquiry, it is anticipated that important lessons will be learned about what was done well, in relation to vaccines and therapeutics, as well as what lessons can be learned by a close examination of the approach taken in the four nations.
4. The Welsh Government is a unified and integrated Government responsible for health and social care in Wales. The breadth of its functions relevant to the issues identified for consideration within Module 4 are therefore significant. The Welsh Government

wishes to provide evidence and input on all the issues identified for consideration within Module 4.

5. Module 4 provides a further opportunity for the Inquiry to look at how decisions were made by each of the four nations in a healthcare setting, either on a four nations basis or distinctly. In dealing with the issues raised by vaccines and therapeutics, there was a concern to maintain a four nations approach during the pandemic unless there was a good reason to depart from it, and a recognition that where circumstances justified it, sometimes a regional or local approach was required, having interpreted the JCVI advice. This sometimes meant a Welsh approach was required, but sometimes an approach at a regional or local level within Wales was considered appropriate. Evidence will deal with the relationship between the Vaccine Taskforce and the Welsh Government. It is recognised that equality issues (relating to vaccine uptake and access) will need to be carefully examined within Module 4. This is an area where regional and local issues sometimes required different approaches. By comparing and contrasting different approaches taken across the UK in dealing with common issues, it is hoped that valuable lessons will be learned for future preparedness for other public health challenges.
6. The issues identified as sub-issues within Module 4 also raise important issues of far-reaching concern for Governments, including the new communications challenges faced in dealing with the spread of information (including inaccurate information) through social media. This is an ambitious sub-topic on its own, and the scope of the issues in this area may require further delineation, so that the Inquiry may make recommendations as to how vaccine misinformation and disinformation, and the distinct, but related, area of vaccine hesitancy, can be addressed during a future public health challenge. We note from the CTI Note that the scope of the issues identified is necessarily provisional at this stage.
7. As the Welsh Government has explained in previous written submissions, accessibility is more than an issue about the appropriate venue; it is also about language. The Welsh and English languages have equal legal status in Wales. The Inquiry has previously recognised the importance of equal status of the Welsh and English languages in the Inquiry. It is important that submissions and evidence in Module 4 can be given in either language and appropriate arrangements made to facilitate this.
8. As the Inquiry progresses to the fourth module, it is important to underline the continuing importance of The Listening Exercise (“Every Story Matters”) and Commemoration. Paragraph 60 of the CTI note is noted. Those who suffered loss and hardship in the pandemic, or have otherwise been affected by the many tragic events about which we continue to hear, must remain at the forefront of our minds, as we strive

to learn lessons from the handling of the pandemic. Those who suffered loss deserve no less than complete and candid answers to their questions. The lessons learned will ensure that this Welsh Government, and future Welsh Governments, have the best possible information available to prepare for, and respond to, any future public health challenges.

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Dated 4 September 2023