

2023-08-31 Equalities Forum Transcript

Attendees (Organisations)

Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (Scotland)
Disability Action Northern Ireland
Disability Rights UK
Disability Wales
Diverse Cymru
Equally Ours
Federation of Ethnic Minority Healthcare Organisations
Friends, Families and Travellers
Mencap
Mind
NHS Race and Health Observatory
Race Alliance Wales
The Runnymede Trust

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): [Welcomed attendees and set the scene for the meeting]

Our Head of External Affairs, will start with an update on our listening exercise, Every Story Matters.

Update on Every Story Matters

Member of the Inquiry Team: I am Head of External Affairs at the Inquiry. I have met several of you on this call before. Hello to those of you I have not met.

I will give a brief overview of Every Story Matters. The public campaign to raise awareness of Every Story Matters officially launched in June. Hopefully you have seen it at your local bus stop, in the press on social media or heard it on the radio. More than 12,000 experiences have already been shared with the Inquiry, which is fantastic. Every single one of those is helping to give us a fuller picture of the impact of the pandemic on people's lives.

61 Organisations and charities have also agreed to support Every Story Matters, and help to drive participation. That includes a number of disability charities that are promoting Every Story Matters, including a number of you on this call. Thank you to those of you that signed up to support, we are very grateful.

You may have all also seen that we have provided more accessible ways for people to share their experience. An Easy Read form is now available on our website to download in PDF formats (which is something I know some of you have asked us for).

We will also shortly be running a British Sign Language relay pilot, which means we will be able to accept people's stories through British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language video relay options. Again, we know this is something that you have asked for. This will be an opportunity for 15 BSL and Irish sign language users to join a relay call with someone from the Inquiry along with an interpreter. The session will run through the format of the Every Story Matters form and a person from the Inquiry will transcribe the participant's experience in English. That will then be submitted on their behalf.

This is an appeal: if your organisation is interested in participating, please get in touch via our engagement team inbox. If you have any questions about the pilot, please do put them in the chat.

(I can see the Mencap have some questions. We will come to those in the Q&A section)

Update on Partners

I will now provide an update on partners. Following our launch, we are now entering a new phase of Every Story Matters. We will be working with some new and old partners to support us during this phase. You may have seen that M&C Saatchi have been reappointed to deliver the next phase of communications. Their work will focus on engaging the public and encouraging them to share their experiences with the Inquiry. M&C Saatchi will not be collecting or have access to any experiences shared. It is purely about promoting participation. The Inquiry is also no longer working with partnerships agency 23Red. A new research supplier will be appointed soon. In the next month we will also be appointing a supplier to help us deliver our program of UK-wide and community listening events.

Update on Community Listening Events

I will now speak about the events. We have talked about these a little bit before. These are a part of Every Story Matters and a way for the Inquiry to raise awareness

in the community and listen to people's experiences in people's communities where they live, so we are coming to them.

We will have a test and learn pilot of the events in the autumn. There will be around 15 events, a mix of targeted events and public events, some online and some virtual events. We will use that pilot to inform our longer-term approach.

We have had some questions in advance about the community listening events. I will go through how we envisage the pilot working and hopefully that will address some of those questions.

In terms of how the events will be conducted, the way we see the pilot working, is that we will have some larger drop in style events that are open to the general public, where people will come along and share their experiences via the online form through tablets. We can provide assistance if needed and there will be people from the Inquiry there.

We will also have smaller and much more targeted events with specific communities that were impacted by the pandemic. These will feel much more like a facilitated discussion and will be a lot smaller, probably with around 15 people. It might feel more like a focus group or guided discussion and the communities that we will initially be targeting, will be people bereaved during the pandemic, healthcare workers, people living in care homes, disabled people, ethnic minority groups and people living with Long Covid and clinically vulnerable families.

For the targeted events and the facilitated discussions, we will capture the key themes that were discussed, and they will then be fed into Every Story Matters and to our research partner. They will go into the main body of research. People attending the events will receive a brief summary of the key themes and they will be told what will happen with that information.

We are also looking at some direct community outreach where we will visit spaces and events where people and communities are already gathering. In terms of identifying those events, we will be working closely with the supplier and taking a very localised approach, considering what works best in those geographies.

All the staff present at the events, both the Inquiry staff and the supplier staff (who will be representing the Inquiry) will be fully trained in safeguarding, and we will also be working really closely with our emotional support provider to make sure that support is available to people that need it. We will also be working with organisations to go along to events that they are holding. In the next few weeks, we are actually going along to some of the events that have been highlighted to us by organisations. We are going along to raise awareness of Every Story Matters.

We are going to a TUC event, we are going to a Royal College of Midwives event and we are also going to a Bereaved Families event in Northern Ireland.

Hopefully that gives you an overview of where we are with Every Story Matters.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): Thanks very much. I can see we have had a few questions already added to the chat. Thanks very much. Feel free to add any questions to chat if you can.

We have had the update on Every Story Matters, which is our approach to hearing the experiences of as many people in the country as we can, who are over the age of 18. We will now give an update on our work to hear from children and young people.

I will hand over to a colleague from the research team to provide an update to the Forum.

Update on Listening to Children and Young People's Experiences

Member of the Inquiry Team: I am a Senior Researcher on the research team. I will be giving an update on the Inquiry's research with children and young people.

The Chair of the Inquiry, Baroness Hallett, is really committed to making sure that the Inquiry hears the voices of children and young people. We need to do this in a way that is safe and does not cause harm to those children and young people who will be participating.

For that reason, we have taken the decision not to widen access to the Every Story Matters web form to those who are under 18. This is because of the additional safeguarding and support measures that are required. We feel that it is not possible to build in sufficient safeguarding and support requirements into Every Story Matters and make sure that children and young people can be heard safely. Instead, we are going to adopt a different approach.

We think that children and young people are better served by a bespoke research project. Through this, we will be able to provide extra emotional support and safeguarding and we can ensure that it is trauma informed by design and meets those additional needs. This also means that we can make sure that children and young people have a full understanding of their involvement in the research and all kinds of complexities around confidentiality and how that might be affected by disclosures and things like that.

As a result, we have been developing an approach in collaboration with experts and specialist organisations who conduct research with children and young people. As part of this, we have already instructed an independent expert: Professor David Taylor-Robinson, who is Professor of Public Health and Policy at the University of Liverpool. He is going to be providing expertise to the Inquiry on pre-pandemic childhood inequalities. This means that all the evidence that the Inquiry hears about the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, will be viewed within that context of these pre-existing inequalities. We are also designing an approach to listening directly to children and young people and the insights from this research project will be summarised and then fed into the Inquiry as legal evidence to directly inform lines of questioning and ultimately the recommendations.

There are three main strands to this approach. The first is making the best use of the existing evidence. There is a wealth of administrative and survey data detailing the impact on children and young people. We have already conducted a targeted review and found 41 Studies involving direct research with these children and young people. This is really useful because it is conducted at the time. However, we have decided that this is not fully adequate for meeting the Inquiry's needs. There are some gaps in terms of different age groups' experience and it does not provide a comprehensive look across lots of different domains of experience that we want to systematically investigate. To help fill those gaps, we are going to commission qualitative research that lets us hear about the range of children and young people's experiences in depth and in their own voices. That will include a particular focus on those who are most affected and those with particular experiences that we want to capture.

For this research project, we are hoping to procure via the research and insights framework. As a standard practice with procurement, we cannot divulge specific details of what we intend to procure at this point. We should be able to give an update very shortly when this is released. A few weeks ago, we launched a request for information, where we were asking potential suppliers about the feasibility of our approach and making sure that there would be interest in bidding for this.

After collecting these first-hand experiences through this research, the findings will feed into the Inquiry's investigation and then help inform recommendations. Once we have done this research, and we have fully assessed all the different evidence gaps, we have the option of doing potential quantitative research and analysis as well. This might be commissioned or it might be conducted in-house.

Through all of these three different strands, we are going to be building up a much much stronger picture of the experiences of children and young people.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): Thanks very much. Although you did not talk for long, there was quite a lot in there, and this is new news.

We are letting this forum know before we have gone public on this, partly because of the importance of making sure that we fully understand the pros and cons.

If people have got opinions or views about the approach, you can let us know either now or in the next few days.

I am going to hand over to our Head of Research and Analysis, who is going to give an update on expert witnesses. I said at the start that we have heard from a few witnesses in Module One. I am sure that we will in Module 2 as well. Each module is going to require different expertise and will be investigating different issues. Therefore, we thought it would be good to give an overview of expert witnesses.

Update on Expert Witnesses

Member of the Inquiry Team: I am the Head of the Research and Analysis team at the Inquiry. This is my first Equalities Forum and it is delightful to meet all of you. I am sure we will be meeting again in future.

I am going to outline how the Inquiry uses expert witnesses, what their role is and what the characteristics of an expert witness are: What are we looking for from an individual in order to help us? I will then give a quick run through of the expert witnesses that Counsel to the Inquiry have instructed to help us gather evidence, to inform the hearings.

First of all, the role of an expert witness is essentially to present evidence to a range of audiences on a topic, whereby they are instructed on each topic by the Counsel to the Inquiry. Those audiences are principally the Chair. She may consider their evidence when formulating recommendations. It is also to provide information to Counsel to the Inquiry to help guide their investigations. Additionally, it is for the general public as well to have an easily understandable overview of the evidence that is underpinning the Inquiry. Therefore, their key roles really are to summarise broad areas of research, knowledge or opinion or just general information about what is under investigation.

A principal part of that summary is to explain often dense or confusing areas that may not be easily understood by such a wide variety of audiences. They are also invited to provide opinion on any contentious topics - to provide a balanced opinion. They may also be asked to provide opinion on evidence that has already been heard by the Inquiry within the hearings.

The characteristics and the attributes and what qualifies someone to be an expert witness to the Inquiry are numerous. That is why it is very difficult to find suitable expert witnesses. The overriding characteristic we look for is that they are

independent, which is very difficult to achieve when many experts were involved in the pandemic response. Because they are experts, they were inevitably involved in the response. We cannot easily find those who were completely untouched by the pandemic response and who have not ventured an opinion.

Secondly, the expert needs to be credible, so we will look into their public profile and this runs a bit into whether they are independent: do they have the necessary expertise? Have they spoken out in one particular way or another that may compromise or essentially present a conflict of interest?

Thirdly, they must possess the requisite expertise to be able to author an expert report that is going to be useful to the Inquiry. To have the expertise, you also need to be very well networked, have a broad view of the literature, as well as understand and have good networks with other people who they may be able to draw upon, to ensure that their report is well- balanced and rounded as well as independent.

Fourthly, they need to be interested in helping the Inquiry because some experts we have approached are not. They are busy people and helping the Inquiry is a considerable burden upon their time and they are under pressure at work. It should not be underestimated just how much of a burden writing a report for a public inquiry can be, so we need their buy-in from a very early stage in order to work with us in the long term. Related to that, they need to be available. We are working at a very fast pace on the Inquiry. It may be that they have other commitments, which means they are unable to work with us, even though they may be, in our view, some of the best qualified people to help us.

Lastly, on a more personable note, the expert needs to be engaged. They are going to be an expert witness and they need to be able to present their information at a hearing and before the hearing to Counsel in an articulate way. They need to be as useful as possible to the Inquiry. To convey their information, they need to be able to communicate well and be a good witness.

In no particular order, I will run through the expert witnesses that have currently been instructed by Counsel to the Inquiry, to each produce a report, documenting (this is a descriptive report, there is no analysis) on pre pandemic inequalities as they existed in January 2020 and to consider to what extent these inequalities should or could reasonably have been considered within the decision making process. To cover the topic of structural racism and the dynamics around ethnicity, we have instructed Professor James Nazroo from the University of Manchester. Professor Nazroo has over 30 years of experience working in the fields of inequality, social justice and health, particularly around ethnicity, race, ageing, gender, and the interrelationships and the interactions between these domains.

To cover the topic of disability, we have appointed Professor Tom Shakespeare and Nick Watson from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the University of Glasgow respectively. Together they are world leaders in disability rights research. During the pandemic, they conducted a very large qualitative research project with disabled people in England and Scotland to document the experiences of those people during the pandemic.

Dr. Clare Wenham at the London School of Economics is an Associate Professor in Global Health Policy and in the gendered impact of pandemic or epidemic response policy.

She is particularly well suited to help the Inquiry. She set up a gender and Covid-19 research group during the pandemic to explore the gender dynamics of the response.

Professor Laia Becares will report on the topic of how the LGBTQ+ community were disproportionately impacted by the response to the pandemic. Professor Becares is also an expert in minoritized health groups, and particularly in health impacts and has been assisting Professor James Nazroo with his report.

Lastly, Professor David Taylor-Robinson, as mentioned by my colleague earlier, is Professor of Public Health Policy at Liverpool. He is the leader of the Child of the North initiative, which explored the impact of Covid on children and young people. He is also a co-director of Health Equity North.

Looking at how those in later life may have been disproportionately impacted by structural factors during the pandemic will be Professor Nazroo. He has experience as principal investigator to the English longitudinal study of ageing and is perfectly well suited to look into the disproportionate impacts among older people.

I appreciate that I have conveyed a lot of information and I am sure there will be a lot of questions - I am happy to take those.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): Thank you very much. Yes, I feel like we have transmitted quite a lot to you so far.

We will now go to the question and answer section of this forum. We will address the questions that were submitted in advance first. We have got a few from Mind. I think all but one of Mind's questions were answered in the update earlier on Every Story Matters. Therefore, we will start with Mind's fifth question.

Questions and Answers

Member of the Inquiry Team:

Mind - with regards to the fifth question you submitted, do let me know if you want to add anything else. The question was, “Can we get more information on what the intersectional analysis they’ve said they’re doing to target “harder to” communities is going to entail? It would also be good to know whether they’ll publish the analysis once available?”.

We can deal with that second question very quickly: Yes, we will publish an Every Story Matters report for every module. Those will be published and publicly available on our website once ready.

On intersectionality, I think this question is really the rationale behind why we have the many different means of contributing to Every Story Matters that we spoke through earlier. We expect that the Web form and its accessible versions will be the main way that people contribute. Within this, we will be very closely monitoring and reviewing the diversity data which is disclosed to us. This will enable us to look across demographic data to see who we are hearing from and also who we are not hearing from at the intersections of different demographic groups.

I won't go through all of the information that we ask people for within the form, but you are welcome to go and have a look on everystorymatters.co.uk at the ‘tell us more about yourself’ webpage.

After that, we will then be able to do some targeted research. What this looks like is reviewing the diversity data, looking at this across intersections and seeing who we are missing and where the evidence gaps are. We will look to fill in those gaps, with targeted research. In practice, that looks like interviews and focus groups with specific groups. We are going to be using a purposive sampling approach for this, which will be multi-layered. We will have primary, secondary and tertiary sampling criteria to ensure that we are not just looking at one demographic group by one demographic criteria but we are layering those so that we are looking at people at the intersections of different demographic groups. As part of that review of who we are hearing from, we will also be looking at how we can make best use of the community listening events, because we understand that, in many cases meeting people in community spaces where they already are, via organisations that they already know and trust, might be the best way to enable their participation in Every Story Matters as opposed to targeted research.

I hope that answers that intersectionality question.

Mind has also put another question in the chat about metrics and how we will know when we have reached saturation.

I am not close enough to the research to answer that specific question. I will take that question back and provide a response by correspondence, if that is okay with you for the time being.

I am going to go onto Mencap's question now. Did you want to speak to your questions about disabled children and young people and their families?

Mencap: We have an organisation that sits within Mencap, called Disabled Children's Partnership. We are a member of it and we provide Secretariat to it. I reached out to them to ask if they had any questions regarding the approach to children and young people and their question was "how are you going to hear from disabled children and young people? And are you approaching organisations that represent them to help you, like you did with us and people with learning disabilities?"

Member of the Inquiry Team: That is a really important question and I am going to hand it over to my colleague to answer that.

Member of the Inquiry Team: Thank you for your question and I completely agree that it is critically important that we hear from disabled children, young people and their families. Hopefully, I partly addressed that by talking about the qualitative research that we are going to be running.

Given that we are yet to launch the procurement, we cannot give exact details about exactly which groups we are going to be speaking to, but I can reassure you that the purpose of this qualitative research is to have that substantial focus on the most affected and we will also be exploring the impacts through the impacts on families through Every Story Matters: targeted research with families and with adults. It is definitely a priority to ensure that these voices, and these stories are heard.

Member of the Inquiry Team: Thanks very much for that. I am now going to move on to the next set of questions and comments from FEMHO. Do you want to speak to the points that you raised?

FEMHO: I have four areas of concern or matters that I wanted to raise with you from The Federation of Ethnic Minority Healthcare Organisations. I am also the previous chair of the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin. As you know, we have done a huge amount of work on this throughout Covid.

The first question was specificity on ethnicity and race because we know that during Covid race and ethnicity (including our own research) showed that all protected characteristics are important, don't get me wrong.

But when you look at the sheer numbers, race in ethnicity cuts across all of them. So, we were just wondering about that as being a really crucial area for you to look into.

The second bit is intersectionality. Of course you do mention intersectionality but how do they combine and how do they overlap? It is quite a complex area and we wondered whether that created some unique challenges and experiences of harm to the public and patients and healthcare workers.

The third bit was about cultural awareness and cultural competency. Sometimes, a lot of lip service is paid to this. We thought that this is really important and I could see that at least one person on the chat box agreed with me on this area.

The final area is what is really crucial. What let us down during the course of covid was data collection and disaggregation. Of course, we know that race and ethnicity were not really data collected in the earlier parts of covid. I wondered if we have got accurate and meaningful data that will highlight disparities in this area. Thank you very much.

Member of the Inquiry Team: Thank you very much, FEMHO. I am going to pass over to my colleague to address some of the points that you made there.

Member of the Inquiry Team: Can I first just confirm. In your question you asked about the statements - are you referring to some of the points we talked about specifically today or are you referring to the statement about the approach to Inquiry as a whole?

FEMHO: I think the Inquiry as a whole but this is the place where I thought I might bring it up so that you can look at these areas of concern to us.

Member of the Inquiry Team: Absolutely. Just to your first point and I completely take your points in terms of the evidence around the differential impacts of the pandemic on ethnic minority groups. This is something we are really well aware of. As mentioned, our approach to equalities overall does talk about protected characteristics which we are very clear throughout all of our work, that certainly includes ethnic minority groups and that is one of our priorities that we will be looking at.

Hopefully the update from our Head of Research and Analysis and the fact that we have this specific expert who is providing evidence on the pre-existing inequalities faced by minority ethnic groups is reassuring to that point.

Certainly we are looking at ethnic minorities as one of the key priorities and groups that we are considering in our overarching approach to equalities. One thing to say is that we are really aware that when we are talking about unequal impact, protected characteristics do not go far enough because we know that protected characteristics

explain some of the differences in impact, but actually things like geography, socio economic background, immigration status, those all have a massive impact as well.

That is certainly part of what we have included in our overall approach to inequalities because we cannot particularly separate those points out. Therefore, it really is embedded in the way that we are going to be approaching those differential impacts and investigations.

To your point on intersectionality, we are very aware of this. Again, hopefully, some of the conversation around the experts we included, in fact, many of them do have a very intersectional approach in looking at multiple spheres of inequality or spheres of differential impact. This is reassuring.

We have not necessarily always used the phrase "intersectionality" because there are slightly different interpretations in the policy world versus the legal world versus academic world, but it certainly is something we are very aware of in the Inquiry. It certainly is something that is really embedded into how we want to approach these points.

On to your third point. I think that it is a really interesting point that you raise in terms of cultural awareness and competency. It certainly is something that in different areas of the modules people are aware of and are coming up against in investigations in the evidence being provided. We certainly can go away and have a think about if there are any specific other areas that we think to bring those in because you are right, it is a very crucial part. It is definitely something that is arising in the ways people are finding evidence and what we are hearing, so we are really aware of it on this side.

I will hand over to our Inquiry Secretary Ben about the data collection and disaggregation specifically.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): It is a great question from FEMHO and you are absolutely right. We would like to see a much clearer disaggregation of data, according to many characteristics, not least of which is ethnicity. Here, we are talking about Every Story Matters and the other ways in which we are going to collect information and collect experiences about the plight of living through covid from people.

This goes to another point that was raised later about demographic breakdowns for Every Story Matters. I do not think we have an immediate answer on that question, but given that the two of you have raised it here, I am really keen that we go and explore whether for each of our Every Story Matters reports (because we will be producing different reports as we go along) we can not only set out the methodology

that has been used, but also the demographic breakdown, including ethnicity, so that we can show how representative we are being.

I need to be clear: we are not going to turn people away from providing their stories to Every Story Matters if they do not meet a certain quota of one characteristic or another. So, I think it would be incredible if it turned out that we got a bang on sample that was proportionate. What we are going to do is make every effort to reach into communities that are not heard as often and whose voices were not heard not heard during the pandemic. That will include many ethnic minority communities to try and boost what we suspect will be relatively low numbers from those areas.

I think that is one for us to take away if we may and thank you very much for raising it.

Member of the Inquiry Team: It's worth mentioning that the children and young people's projects will specifically target a whole range of demographic groups and we will be able to target better than the whole range of minority groups.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): That is a really good point. I was only talking about over 18s of course, and we are going wider than that. Thank you.

Mind - is your question on this specific issue? If it is, I'll bring you in now.

Mind: Sorry if I've missed this, but I just think it is really key to say. It is really key that you guys really consider partnering with organisations who work on the ground with people from ethnic minority backgrounds. We know that black and brown people really struggled during the pandemic. We have got to think about why that is. Even just looking at this call now, it is predominantly white, probably middle class people on the call. We have just got to really bear that in mind, really think about 'How are we going to reach this community? How are they going to hear about their chance to give evidence and to share their lived experience? How do we do that well?' I would say by partnering with organisations already on the ground doing it. Probably it is something that you guys are already considering but I wanted to really say it in this group so that we are all hearing it.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): Thank you and you are absolutely right to flag it and we should never stop talking about it. If we have not said it clearly enough, then let us do that now. My colleague will come in here about the partnership working that we are trying to do.

Member of the Inquiry Team: With regards to the events, we will absolutely be working with local organisations to reach into those communities. We are just not at a stage to say who, because we are just getting ready for the pilot. However, we will

not be able to do it without organisations. We will definitely be working with organisations.

Member of the Inquiry Team: I think it might be helpful to just give an example because we are starting to do some of the work of scoping out who we might be delivering community events alongside. For example, (under the FEMHO umbrella) we are doing some work with the British Islamic Medical Association, and they work on the ground with, in particular, Muslim healthcare workers, as well as the Muslim community across England, and Wales, more generally.

We are looking at specific ways, led by them, that they think will work to encourage participation amongst the communities that they represent, and that they work with, in Every Story Matters. I think that being led by them and having flexibility on our side is really, really important within that work. Then, as part of that, we are looking at how we can work with them to deliver some community events alongside them. When I say that, we are talking about going to places where they already are and where people that they represent already are.

So, that is one such example of how we might work with someone. As the community events go on (and this is not confirmed) but we may look to take a more local approach given that these will be across the UK. Of course, that will also mean working with organisations similar to Local Minds that are working with people in local areas on the ground, who understand the geography there.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): Mind, thanks for raising that. I am going to move this on because we have only got a few minutes left. I have tried to answer Mind's question about demographic breakdown but given that you do not therefore get to ask that one, I will go to a later one that you asked about experts. You said, 'it sounds like some areas have multiple experts, is there a reason there is only one expert witness for the area of racial and ethnic disparities?'

Just to answer that very quickly. Our Head of Research and Analysis was talking in his speech earlier about in the context of one very specific issue structural racism. It is a huge issue but it is a very specific issue and we have genuine world leading experts for that.

Over the course of the Inquiry, the chair has already said she will be looking at disparities generally and at ethnicity in particular, in many of the modules. I am anticipating that we will hear from other experts as we go along on specific issues, as we get to them.

I am going to suggest that we jump to the questions that we have had on the trauma-informed approach we are taking because that feels to me like a really important point that we ought to cover here before we come to an end. Then, as I

said, we will make sure that we answer every other question in correspondence and that everybody on this call sees our answers to every one of those questions.

Member of the Inquiry Team: We are doing so much work across the Inquiry on embedding a trauma informed approach into everything that we do. It is very difficult to answer the question within one minute..

What I want to do within the minute that I have, is to reassure you that we certainly are taking a trauma- informed approach. Within that, we follow the six trauma-informed principles, the sixth one being cultural considerations. That speaks to some of the points that have been raised on the call today.

There was a question about qualifications there as well and who our support provider is. Our current emotional support provider is Hestia and we also have an in-house team that is made up of psychologists, psychotherapists and therapeutic social workers. These are highly qualified people consulting us on everything that we do to make sure that safeguarding and support is designed into all of our work and particularly on Every Story Matters, from the very beginning.

Ben Connah (Inquiry Secretary): Thank you very much Race Alliance Wales, you have asked an extremely good and rather involved question about systemic theory which I am not even going to attempt to do justice to here, but we will make sure that you and everyone else gets a proper response.

FEMHO, you said you are being contacted by many parents about Long Covid in their children. I suspect that will not just be you, there will be others on the call in the same situation. Therefore, I just want to say, in the 30 seconds we have left: parents and adults are very, very welcome to provide their experiences. We are encouraging all adults to provide their story and if their story talks about the family environment and the experience of their kids, then great.

Please do us the favour of encouraging them to go on [Every Story Matters.co.uk](https://www.everystorymatters.co.uk) to provide their story. We will, of course, in module three be looking at Long Covid. Then, of course, when we get to the module on children and young people, we will be looking at all of the impacts there. However, if it is parents, then we want to hear from them now please, thank you.

We are going to need to draw this to a close. I am sorry that I overran and that meant that we did not have quite as long as we had hoped for to answer questions.

Thank you all so much for participating in a very proactive and engaging way, as you always do. I am really grateful to you for that.

I know that the rest of the team also appreciates your time. Engaging with you in this way really does make a difference and it improves our work and improves the way

that we engage with everyone, but particularly with the types of people that you represent. So, thank you very much.

Please get in contact with the engagement team. We have put their email address in the chat.

We will follow up with the transcript from today and the answers to the questions that we have not answered.

We have got some hearings coming up over the next month: two preliminary hearings on Module three on healthcare and Module 4 on vaccines (not in that order) are taking place on Wednesdays in September. From Tuesday, the 3rd of October, we begin the Module two public hearings. That is the module looking at Core Political Decision Making during the pandemic.

As a reminder, if you would like additional updates on the Inquiry's progress and you have not already done so, please sign up to receive our newsletter. We have got one coming out in the next few days.

We will also send out a one minute evaluation form. This really helps us to understand what is good and what is not so good about these sessions and hopefully improve every single one that we have, so that next time, it should be even better.

Thank you again as ever. I look forward to seeing you at the next forum.

2023-08-31 Equalities Forum: Questions

Mencap:

1. How will you be hearing from disabled children, young people and their families?

Answered in forum (see transcript)

2. Will you be reaching out to organisations like the Disabled Children Partnership or others like this.

Answered in forum (see transcript)

FEMHO:

3. Specificity on Ethnicity/Race: Although the statement does mention groups with protected characteristics, it does not specifically highlight ethnicity or race as a factor in disparities related to the impact of the pandemic. While this may be implied, explicitly stating this would strengthen and inspire confidence in the Inquiry's commitment to assessing the pandemic's impact on ethnic minority communities.

Answered in forum (see transcript)

4. Intersectionality: While the document does note that some people or groups may be affected by multiple characteristics (including social-economic status, ethnicity, and immigration status), it does not specifically mention the concept of intersectionality - how these characteristics can combine and overlap to create unique challenges, vulnerabilities and experiences of harm. FEMHO members were simultaneously healthcare workers and members of racial or ethnic communities

Answered in forum (see transcript)

5. Cultural Awareness and Cultural Competency: The document does not mention cultural awareness and cultural competency, which is important when dealing with health issues in ethnic minority communities. This includes ensuring that healthcare provision respects and integrates different cultural perspectives and needs. In the context of healthcare, it's about understanding and addressing the diverse needs of different populations to ensure equal access and quality of care for all.

Answered in forum (see transcript)

6. Data collection and disaggregation: It would be beneficial for the Inquiry

to explicitly commit to collecting data disaggregated by ethnicity, as this can highlight disparities that may otherwise be overlooked. Without accurate and meaningful data, preventive strategies will be rendered less meaningful particularly when the next pandemic comes round.

Findings from the open and targeted research will be analysed to provide a rich insight into the experiences of participants and also insight (but not statistically robust findings) into the relative frequency of these experiences both overall and by demographic group. The reports will contain a demographic analysis covering protected characteristics - such as age, ethnicity, gender, geography of people submitting responses.

7. Many parents have contacted me about long COVID in their children. Many are from ethnic minority communities. Is this issue being covered please?

Answered in forum (see transcript)

Mind:

8. What is the demographic breakdown of those submissions captured already? How will it be determined that a representative sample of communities most disproportionately impacted has been collected, is there a metric that you're seeking to meet?

Every Story Matters aims to produce reports that contain robust evidence of the pandemic experiences, with appropriate representation of seldom heard audiences and those who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic from across the UK. The reports will contain a demographic analysis covering protected characteristics - such as age, ethnicity, gender, geography of people submitting responses. It is worth noting that Every Story Matters is neither going to provide a representative sample nor is it intended to. However, the experiences shared with Every Story Matters will represent the views of the UK population.

9. You mentioned a trauma informed approach being taken with CYP, is a trauma informed approach also being taken with adults, particularly those with mental health problems who may need more than one off emotional support?

We try to ensure that everything we do is trauma-informed, and recognise the particular need to take a trauma-informed approach to Every Story Matters. Trauma-informed practice refers to behaving and working in ways that acknowledge that trauma can affect individuals, groups and communities, recognising the signs, symptoms and widespread impact of trauma, to prevent re-traumatisation. The Inquiry will provide free emotional support (face-to-face and virtual) at all in-person

events. People taking part in 1-2-1 interviews can also access before and after interview emotional support. Our online form signposts to a list of free emotional support services on our website.

10. Regarding expert witnesses, when you say that they may not meet one of the characteristics because they've spoken out one way or another previously, can you give an example of what you mean by this?

We aim to instruct independent witnesses whose public profile is unlikely to call into question the integrity of the Inquiry. The aim is to instruct individuals whose prior views are not a matter of public interest to ensure that the Inquiry is not seen to favour any one particular viewpoint prior to hearing their evidence or the evidence from other witnesses. Experts are asked, as a key part of their role, to provide opinion on the topic of their instruction.

11. It seems like many of the other areas have multiple experts, is there a reason why there is only one expert witness for the area of racial and ethnic disparities?

To clarify, the area of racial and ethnic disparities has two authors: Nazroo and Becares, as does disability - all others have a single author. Authorship has no relation to any weighting placed on relative importance of each topic to the Inquiry. Authorship is determined by logistical factors and the challenges faced by authors in producing a report at such short notice. For instance, Watson and Shakespeare and Becares and Nazroo are long-term collaborators respectively and it is more efficient for them to co-author a report than one or other to draft it as a single author.

12. What specific communities are being targeted for the listening exercises?(particularly the ones being targeted for the focus group type sessions.)

Every Story Matters exists for everyone in the UK to tell the Inquiry about their pandemic experiences - so anyone that wants to can have a voice in this Inquiry. The groups that our community events will change as the Inquiry moves through each of its module investigations, and also in response to data coming through the Every Story Matters webform about who we are and are not reaching. For the pilot of community events, we will hold targeted events with people bereaved during the pandemic, healthcare workers, people living in care homes, disabled people, ethnic minority groups and people living with Long Covid and the clinically vulnerable families.

13. What organisations will be involved to ensure reach into communities and to encourage and facilitate disclosure?

We would be keen to hear from any organisations that you know of that you think should be involved in reaching particular communities. Please get in touch with us at engagement@coronavirus.inquiry.gov.uk if you have suggestions for who we should speak to.

14. How will they be kept up to date and informed following the listening exercises, so this isn't a tokenistic exercise?

We are not collecting personal data from Every Story Matters participants as this would be a barrier to participation. This also means we cannot contact participants regarding the experiences they have submitted.

However, we encourage people who submit experiences to sign up to our newsletter to keep up to date with the progress of the Inquiry.

With regards to people that attend a targeted listening event (where we do collect personal information), we ask participants if they would like to hear back from us. If they consent, we will send a summary of the themes and the module report.

15. On the disaggregation point there's reference to racial and ethnic minoritised communities being disproportionately impacted which we know is true but we know that even within that there was disproportionate impact, so it would be good to know if an approach is being taken that breaks down groups within that quite wide categorisation. For example, how are you engaging specifically with Black African, Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani communities?

We recognise the importance of being specific when collecting data on ethnicity and race, and Every Story Matters collects information on ethnic background based on 2021 Census categories. This means we are well equipped for a granular breakdown of particular communities' shared experiences, or to do specific outreach with specific ethnic groups that are missing from our data. We are about to begin our programme of community engagement and would be very open to suggestions for how we specifically engage with those communities.

Race Alliance Wales:

16. Who the emotional support provider is and what their CC qualifications are

Answered in forum

17. As I understand stories are being collected from individuals, however, especially for CYP, their experience is based within the family system - how much is systemic theory going to be utilised to analyse the data and therefore

consider the experiences in an age (+other) disaggregated manner? (or to reframe, collected in an individualistic manner)

We will be looking for themes across individual experiences. Therefore, the more people contribute, the more we will be able to go beyond individual experiences and identify systemic problems and disaggregate data.

The legal investigations will investigate systems - i.e. what happened and the why.

Every Story Matters exists to understand the impact on people.

Equally Ours:

18. The expert witnesses are all from an academic background. This is valuable, and I'm very glad to see such a range of people able to bring in evidence on inequality, but have you also checked when recruiting that their advice will be able to include community experiences - for example that they have active involvement with relevant community organisations etc?

Academic researchers are commonly required under the terms of their funding awards to demonstrate pathways to impact which involves engagement with local actors and stakeholders. For example, Nazroo and Becares, as part of their leadership role at the Centre of Dynamics of Ethnicity, have partnerships including, but not limited to BHA for Health and Social Care, Jobcentre Plus, Northwards Housing, Wai Yin, Manchester BME Network, SEVA, Migrants Supporting Migrants, Reclaim, and the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre. All experts oversee research programmes which are subject to similar requirements.

19. Are you using the standard civil service research procurement system for the research into children and young people? If so you risk not being able to reach some smaller but highly expert providers who are not part of that system but may be able to deliver this work much more effectively. Have you considered a way to manage this risk?

Yes, the procurement for the bespoke qualitative research project with children and young people will be conducted through an open & fair competition via the 'RM6126 Research and Insights DPS' framework. The contract will be awarded to the supplier or suppliers who best meet our evaluation criteria. We are aware of the value that smaller specialist research providers and grassroots organisations can add to this research, particularly for reaching particular groups and those who don't usually participate in research. As part of our Request for Information, we tested whether it would be feasible for suppliers to partner with other organisations to deliver the

research. We will be welcoming bids from a range of suppliers and are open to suppliers subcontracting or partnering with other organisations if they are unable to meet all of our requirements on their own.

20. Could you do a periodic check on if any groups are not contributing to every story matters so that we can support you to reach out to those groups and encourage them to engage?

We are certainly monitoring the demographic information that comes from Every Story Matters. We really appreciate the offer of support with reaching groups that we are not hearing from and will be in touch if we have any specific requests. In general, we are keen for Every Story Matters to reach as many people as possible and would really appreciate any support that you can give by spreading the message about Every Story Matters on your channels. We have a [partner toolkit](#) here full of resources e.g. social media copy, newsletter copy, posters, leaflets etc., to make it as easy as possible for you to spread the work about Every Story Matters.

Questions submitted ahead:

Can we get more information on what the intersectional analysis they've said they're doing to target "harder to" communities is going to entail? It would also be good to know whether they'll publish the analysis once available?

Answered in forum (see transcript)