

Questionnaire

UK COVID-19 Inquiry: Module 2 - Rule 9 Request to Professor Sir Michael Ferguson -
Reference: M2/SAGE/01/MF

Please provide the following information:

1. A brief overview of your qualifications, career history, professional expertise and major publications.

Qualifications: BSc, Manchester (1979) and PhD, London (1982) in Biochemistry

Career history: Postdoctoral Fellow at the Rockefeller University, New York, (1982-1985) and the University of Oxford (1985-1988). Lectureship at The University of Dundee (1988), personal chair (1994), the first Regius Professor of Life Sciences (2013-present). Dean of Research, Life Sciences (2007-2014). Board of Directors Medicines for Malaria Venture (2012-present). Board of Governors, Wellcome Trust (2012-2021).

Expertise: Molecular parasitology, glycobiology, drug discovery, antibody diagnostics.

Major (relevant) Publications:

Sullivan, L., Wall, S., Carrington, M. and Ferguson, MAJ (2013) Proteomic selection of immunodiagnostic antigens for human African trypanosomiasis and generation of a prototype lateral flow immunodiagnostic device. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases* 7, e2087

Fleming, J.R., Sastry, L., Crozier, T.W.M., Napier, G.B., Sullivan, L. and Ferguson, M.A.J. (2014) Proteomic selection of immunodiagnostic antigens for *Trypanosoma congolense*. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Disease* 8, e2936

Sullivan, L., Fleming, J. Sastry, L. Mehlert, A., Wall, S.J. and Ferguson, M.A.J. (2014) Identification of sVSG117 as an immunodiagnostic antigen and evaluation of a dual-antigen lateral flow test for the diagnosis of human African trypanosomiasis. *PLoS Neglected Tropical Disease* 8, e2976

2. A list of the groups (i.e. SAGE and/or any of its sub-groups) in which you have been a participant, and the relevant time periods.

- **SAGE** (member). However, I only attended one SAGE meeting in 2020 (when one of the topics was serology/antibody testing).
- **Scientific Advisory Group for Antibody Testing** (Chair) for DHSC/UKHSA. 2020 to 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/scientific-advisory-group-for-antibody-testing> . The SAG reported to DHSC/UKHSA Antibody Testing Working Group.
- **Oversight Committee** (member) **for the COVID-19 National Core Studies (NCS) programme** 2021 to 2022. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-core-studies-programme>

3. An overview of your involvement with those groups between January 2020 and February 2022, including:

When and how you came to be a participant;

b. The number of meetings you attended, and your contributions to those meetings;

c. Your role in providing research, information and advice.

SAGE: I was invited to attend one SAGE meeting. My contribution was minor, to provide information of antibody testing for COVID-19 infections.

Scientific Advisory Group for Antibody Testing: This started out in April 2020 as a UKRI "COVID-19 Serology Taskforce" set up at the request of Sir Mark Walport. Duplications were identified (eg. with PHEs Serology Working Group, Horizon Scanning Group) and by August 2020 the consolidated Scientific Advisory Group for Antibody Testing emerged. This group responded to questions asked of it by DHSC/UKHSA Antibody Testing Working Group. I chaired the SAG and agreed the draft minutes. The SAG met approximately every 2 months.

Questions were varied but there was a core theme on “correlates of immunity”; i.e., was it possible to measure an individual’s level of protection from (re)infection?

NCS Oversight Committee: I was invited to join by Patrick Vallance. This group looked at the proposals by, and progress of, the six core national studies (Epidemiology & Surveillance, Transmission & Environment, Clinical Trials Infrastructure, Immunity, Longitudinal Health & Wellbeing, Data & Connectivity) for COVID-19. I took part from October 2020 until March 2022, it met approximately every 3 months. My role was to offer comment and advice on the six core national studies.

4. A summary of any documents to which you contributed for the purpose of advising SAGE and/or its related subgroups on the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

The minutes of the **Scientific Advisory Group for Antibody Testing** committee/group meetings are held by DHSC/UKHSA, and the NCS oversight minutes are held by Go-Science. I did not contribute to any other documents.

5. A summary of any articles you have written, interviews and/or evidence you have given regarding the work of the above-mentioned groups and/or the UK’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Please include links to those documents where possible.

None.

6. Your views as to whether the work of the above-mentioned groups in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic (or the UK’s response more generally) succeeded in its aims.

This may include, but is not limited to, your views on (*response in italics*):

- a. The composition of the groups and/or their diversity of expertise; *appropriate*
- b. The way in which the groups were commissioned to work on the relevant issues; *appropriate*
- c. The resources and support that were available; *sufficient*
- d. The advice given and/or recommendations that were made; *high-quality and genuine*
- e. The extent to which the groups worked effectively together; *very good*
- f. The extent to which applicable structures and policies were utilised and/or complied with and their effectiveness. *Groups were set up in a hurry in early 2020 (for obvious reasons) but gaps/diversity/duplication were resolved quickly, in my experience.*

7. Your views as to any lessons that can be learned from the UK’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular relating to the work of the above-mentioned groups.

Please describe any changes that have already been made, and set out any recommendations for further changes that you think the Inquiry should consider making.

The National Core Studies are a good case. There were some research activities that needed to be set up in real-time to be sure to capture what was deemed to be essential data. The (sound) mechanisms of research funders (UKRI, NIHR, Wellcome, others) did a great job but, even so, there were national core studies that might have fallen through cracks. The NCS defined and funded these through a separate scheme (with the research funding agencies represented and fully aware) so they were not lost. The NCS oversight committee has international representatives who were impressed that the UK could set up and fund the NCS studies in this way. A lesson learned would be not to forget (in another emergency) that this approach can be taken be appropriately accountable.

8. A brief description of documentation relating to these matters that you hold (including soft copy material held electronically). Please retain all such material. I am not asking for you to provide us with this material at this stage, but I may request that you do so in due course.

Agenda materials, pre-reads and minutes.