

**Witness Name: Gregor Irwin**

**Statement No.: 3**

**Exhibits: GI3**

**Dated: 19 June 2023**

## **UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

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### **STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL ECONOMY**

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**In relation to the issues raised by the Rule 9 notice dated 13 December 2022 served on the Scottish Government, in connection with Module 2A, the Director General Economy will say as follows:**

#### **Introduction**

1. This statement is one of a suite provided for Module 2A of the UK Covid Inquiry and these should be considered collectively.

#### **Role, Function and Responsibilities of the CSA Scotland**

2. The Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland (CSA Scotland) is seconded to the Scottish Government for three days a week for a three-year term. They remain an employee of their existing employer for their term, rather than being a member of staff of the Scottish Government.
3. During the time period 21 January 2020 to 30 April 2022 the two people in this role were:
  - Professor Sheila Rowan (CSA Scotland June 2016-June 2021 – initial term extended by two years by agreement)
  - Professor Julie Fitzpatrick (June 2021 onwards).

4. At the time of her appointment as CSA Scotland in 2016, Sheila Rowan was Director of the Institute for Gravitational Research at the University of Glasgow. Further information on her academic background as a physicist can be found on the University of Glasgow website.
5. At the time of her appointment as CSA Scotland in 2021, Julie Fitzpatrick was Director of the Moredun Research Institute. She is a veterinary scientist by original training, with further post-graduate qualifications in immunology and epidemiology.
6. The CSA Scotland is seconded at Director-level, through an external recruitment process involving a Civil Service Commissioner. Unlike the portfolio-based Chief Scientist for Health (CS Health) and the CSA for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture (CSA ENRA), there is no expectation that the CSA Scotland has a background linked to a particular academic discipline. They are expected to be a leading scientist, recognised at a national level, well-networked, and with experience of working across academic disciplines.
7. The CSA Scotland is responsible for ensuring Ministers and officials have access to science advice and evidence, to inform policy development. They are expected to provide independent science advice and challenge to Ministers and officials. They work closely with the Scottish Science Advisory Council (SSAC), of which they are an ex-officio member, to advise the Scottish Government across all areas of its work. This includes elements of resilience planning, including ensuring officials and Ministers have access to science advice in an emergency.
8. The CSA Scotland does not lead on issues of public health or clinical advice, including in an emergency, and had no role in this area immediately before the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic (from late March 2020), the CSA Scotland contributed to collective advice in this area as a result of their membership of the Scottish Government Covid-19 Advisory Group (C19AG). In keeping with their role, the CSA Scotland was not personally asked to contribute to policy decisions in connection with the Covid-19 response, other than through the collective advice given by the Scottish Government's Covid-19 Advisory Group.
9. The CSA Scotland is routinely informed when the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is being stood up, but attendance for these may be taken up by other senior advisers, depending on the issue; there are also occasions when more than

one Scottish Government adviser attends SAGE, again this depends on the issue. The CSA Scotland attended a 'table top' SAGE exercise in January 2020 involving a scenario that was not pandemic-related.

10. The CSA Scotland has no formal reporting line to Director General (DG) Health and Social Care or the Cabinet Secretary and Ministers for Health. Rather, for the time period of this request (2020-22) the CSA Scotland reported to DG Education, Communities and Justice and then DG Education and Justice. Over the same period the CSA Scotland had regular meetings with the Minister(s) for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, and subsequently the Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, for whom science is one of their portfolio responsibilities. This statement is supplied by the Director General Economy, as the CSA Scotland and her support team now sit in one of the divisions that falls within the Director General Economy portfolio.
11. The CSA Scotland is supported by the Scottish Government's Science Advice and Engagement Team. For the period of this request, the team mainly comprised six posts. As well as supporting the CSA Scotland in terms of meetings, visits and briefings, the team acts as the Secretariat for the Scottish Science Advisory Council and is also responsible for supporting Scottish Government funding and policy for public science engagement (including supporting science centres and festivals).
12. The CSA Scotland is the most senior of three seconded Chief Scientific Advisers. As well as the CSA Scotland, the 'Scottish Government Chief Scientific Advisory Network' comprises the CSA ENRA, currently Professor Mathew Williams from January 2022 (predecessor was Professor Andrew Millar from October 2018 to December 2021), and the CS Health, Professor David Crossman for the time period of this request. Both these posts are seconded part time at Deputy Director level. They both have regular joint meetings with CSA Scotland, who maintains secondary supervisory management of the posts.
13. In response to Covid-19, the CSA Scotland took on additional responsibilities. These included:
  - Attending SAGE from April 2020 (the Chief Medical Officer (CMO)/Deputy CMO (DCMO) having been the lead Scottish Government attendee since January 2020)

- Being appointed a member of the Scottish Government's C19AG from its first meeting on 26 March 2020
- Being a member of the C19AG sub-group on Education and Children's Issues from its first meeting on 23 June 2020
- Being a member of the C19AG sub-group on Universities and Colleges from its first meeting on 19 May 2020.

14. These additional responsibilities were taken on by Julie Fitzpatrick when she succeeded Sheila Rowan as CSA Scotland in June 2021. Neither the change in personnel, nor the additional responsibilities, impacted the CSA Scotland's ability to respond to the pandemic.

### **Communication and Co-operation**

15. Within the Scottish Government, the CSA Scotland works closely with the CSA ENRA and the CS Health. The CSA Scotland was in regular contact with both about science-related issues connected to the pandemic. There was also contact with the CMO/office, e.g., about attendance at SAGE. This communication was facilitated by phone call, email and in person, for example at meetings including those of the Scottish Government's C19AG.

16. The CSA Scotland established and co-chaired (with the CMO) a regular meeting of 'Chief Advisers' across scientific and evidence-based disciplines, from summer 2020, to strengthen the co-ordination of commissioning and using science advice and evidence in connection with Covid-19. This was a way to share information and avoid duplication in terms of commissioning work, rather than a forum to discuss policy or that was part of the decision-making process. As well as the CSA Scotland and the CMO, members of this 'Chiefs Group' included the CS Health and CSA ENRA.

17. The CSA Scotland provided advice collectively, as a member of the C19AG and two of its sub-groups ('Education and Children's Issues' and 'Universities and Colleges'). Further information about the establishment and operation of these groups, as well as papers considered and produced by the groups, is a matter for the Secretariats of these groups. All agendas, minutes, papers and terms of reference for these groups have been made available to the Inquiry previously.

18. Between January and March 2020, the CSA Scotland had no role in public health advice. The CSA Scotland was therefore not involved in public health advice and did not feed into decisions around the response to 'super spreader' events, monitoring, contact tracing, large scale events or public communications on these issues. There were also no informal or private communications regarding significant decisions in this context.
19. The CSA Scotland had regular contact with CSAs across the UK Government and the Welsh Government (there was no CSA in Northern Ireland over this time period), as a member of the UK CSA Network, led by the UK Government CSA. This included attending weekly meetings of cross-UK CSAs, which moved online during this period. A regular call between CSA Scotland, CS Health and Welsh and UK equivalents (or their offices) was also established by the UK Government Office for Science during the pandemic period, to share information rather than make key decisions or instigate 'significant correspondence' as described in the request from the Inquiry.
20. The CSA Scotland was informed of SAGE meetings in advance and received minutes and papers. However, the lead attendee for the Scottish Government was the DCMO, given the public health emergency. This was confirmed with the CMO's office at the time. There was generally an expectation that the Scottish Government would have only one attendee at SAGE, whenever it was in operation, and a decision would be taken on a case-by-case basis as to the Scottish Government attendee, based on the nature of the emergency.
21. The CSA Scotland regularly attended Covid-19 SAGE meetings from 28 April 2020, in support of their membership (from late March 2020) of the C19AG, allowing appropriate exchange of information. Through the CSA Scotland and other Scottish Government attendees of SAGE, information and outputs from SAGE were able to be considered by Scottish Government advisors and the Scottish Government Covid-19 Advisory Groups in terms of a Scottish context.
22. Details of the SAGE meetings held during the specified time period, including details on those who attended, for the time period specified for Module 2A have also been made available to the Inquiry: [GI3/0001 – INQ000131019]. Attendance transferred from Sheila Rowan to Julie Fitzpatrick when the CSA Scotland role transferred from the former to the latter on 13 June 2021.

23. It is important to note that the CSA Scotland only provided advice through the various advisory groups they were part of. It was not part of the CSA Scotland's role to provide daily or weekly briefings of situation reports for Ministers or officials about the state of the pandemic in Scotland.

#### **Information and evidence available to the CSA regarding the nature and spread of Covid-19 in Scotland**

24. As well as sight of papers at meetings of SAGE, the CSA Scotland's membership of the C19AG and two of its sub-groups gave her access to additional information and evidence regarding Covid-19 in Scotland, with the aim of supporting the provision of collective advice from the advisory groups, for decision-making.

#### **Decision-making by the Scottish Government relating to the imposition or non-imposition of Non Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs)**

25. The CSA Scotland's involvement in providing advice for decision-making regarding NPIs was collectively, through her membership of the C19AG and two of its sub-groups.

26. The CSA Scotland gave evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee, alongside the CMO and Professor Andrew Morris (in his role as Chair of the C19AG), on 21 May 2020. This was an evidence session as part of its Inquiry into Covid-19 in Scotland, provided: [GI3/0002 – INQ000147324].

#### **Public health communications regarding Covid-19**

27. In keeping with her role, the CSA had no specific input on public health communications regarding Covid-19, beyond any collective advice of the C19AG and sub-groups on this subject. The CSA was also not involved in the commissioning of modelling.

#### **The Scottish Government's proposals for public health and coronavirus legislation and regulations**

28. In keeping with her role, the CSA had no specific input on public health and Covid-19 regulations and legislation, beyond any collective advice of the C19AG and sub-groups on this subject.

**Post-action reviews/lessons learned**

29. As noted at paragraph 16, the CSA Scotland led a new meeting of chief advisers from summer 2020 to help strengthen the science evidence and advice process around Covid-19. This 'Chiefs Group' has since widened its membership and from April 2022 it became the ScotSCIENCE-Network of chief advisers, convened by the CSA Scotland. It meets monthly to discuss strategic issues and priorities with a science/evidence element, and to agree action in this space, as appropriate.

30. In April 2022, the SSAC (of which the CSA Scotland, CSA ENRA and CS Health are members) published its report *Building on the Science Legacy of Covid-19 in Scotland*, provided: [GI3/0003 – INQ000147478]. It made a number of recommendations in connection with Scottish Government science advice processes, among other areas. It is published on the SSAC's website.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed:

**Personal Data**

**Dated:** 19 June 2023