

Witness Name: Stuart Nicolson

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: SN

Dated: 18 October 2023

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF STUART NICOLSON

In relation to the issues raised by the Rule 9 request dated 16 June 2023 in connection with Module 2A, I, Stuart Nicolson, will say as follows: -

1. I am Stuart Nicolson of Personal Data.
2. I have prepared this statement myself, with assistance from the Scottish Government Covid Inquiry Information Governance Division.
3. Unless stated otherwise, the facts stated in this witness statement are within my own knowledge and are true. Where they are not within my own knowledge, they are derived from sources to which I refer and are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.
4. You have requested a personal statement in relation to decision-making by the Scottish Government during the pandemic, and I am happy to provide this contribution, although it is necessarily brief given the nature of my role within government at the time.
5. By way of background, I joined the Scottish Government in 2008 as a communications special adviser, becoming the First Minister's head of communications and senior political spokesperson in 2012, a role in which I continued to work for Nicola Sturgeon after she became First Minister in 2014. I

left the Scottish Government at the end of March this year, following Nicola Sturgeon's decision to stand down.

6. In summary, I was not involved in any of the decision-making around the response to Covid-19, nor was I involved in the provision of information, data or analysis in relation to the Scottish Government's response to the pandemic.
7. The response to the pandemic in Scotland in terms of the decision-making process was, from the outset, led by Ministers and ultimately by the then First Minister, in consultation with leading clinicians and others who provided informed, expert advice.
8. As such, my role did not afford me scope to become involved in policy decisions around the Scottish response to Covid-19.
9. My job did involve a degree of oversight of communications material issued by the Scottish Government, but only once decisions had been taken which were then to be communicated.
10. I attended Scottish Government cabinet meetings during the period concerned. My role was essentially in an observer capacity rather than a participatory one, in order to ensure that I was as fully informed as possible when helping to deal with media queries, whilst still respecting the confidentiality of cabinet discussions.
11. I can confirm that I am not in possession of any documents or internal communications relating to the response to Covid-19.

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.

Sign:

Personal Data

Dated: 18/10/2023