



NOTICE OF DETERMINATION
CORE PARTICIPANT APPLICATION
MODULE 6 - NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Introduction

1. In my [Opening Statement](#) on 21 July 2022, I explained that Modules would be announced and opened in sequence, with those wishing to take a formal role in the Inquiry invited to apply to become Core Participants for each module. On 12 December 2023 the Inquiry opened Module 6 and invited anyone who wished to be considered as a Core Participant to that Module to submit an application in writing to the Solicitor to the Inquiry by 19 January 2024.
2. On 19 January 2024 the Inquiry received an application from the Northern Ireland Department of Health (“NI DOH”) (“the Applicant”) for Core Participant status in Module 6. This Notice sets out my determination of the application.
3. The Inquiry has published the [Provisional Outline of Scope](#) for Module 6, which states that this module will examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the publicly and privately funded adult social care sector (the “Care Sector”) in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Further modules will be announced and opened in due course, to address other aspects of the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference.

Application

4. Applications for Core Participant status are considered in accordance with Rule 5 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, which provides:

5.—(1) The chairman may designate a person as a core participant at any time during the course of the inquiry, provided that person consents to being so designated.

(2) In deciding whether to designate a person as a core participant, the chairman must in particular consider whether—

- (a) the person played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in relation to the matters to which the inquiry relates;*
- (b) the person has a significant interest in an important aspect of the matters to which the inquiry relates; or*
- (c) the person may be subject to explicit or significant criticism during the inquiry proceedings or in the report, or in any interim report.*

(3) A person ceases to be a core participant on—

- (a) the date specified by the chairman in writing; or*
- (b) the end of the inquiry.*

5. In accordance with the approach set out in my Opening Statement and the Inquiry's [Core Participant Protocol](#), I considered whether the application fulfils the requirements set out in Rule 5(2) in relation to the issues set out in the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 6.

Summary of Application

6. The Applicant is the Northern Ireland Department of Health. Unlike the rest of the UK, health and social care services in Northern Ireland have been integrated in 1973, as reinforced by The Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009. The application sets out how the Applicant utilised a collaborative multi-agency approach to meeting the significant challenges for care homes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, it sets out how the Applicant played an essential advisory role to the Northern Ireland Executive to enable them to make certain decisions and how the Applicant's Chief Medical Officers Group and Chief Nursing Officers Group played a direct and significant role in relation to the matters to which Module 6 relates. Specifically, the application states that the Applicant had the lead role on policies concerning visiting and discharge into care homes and procurement of PPE across the health and care sector.

Decision for the Applicant

7. I have considered carefully this application and having done so, I have decided to designate the Applicant as a Core Participant in Module 6.

8. The application is based on having played a direct and significant role in the matters to which Module 6 relates (Rule 5(2)(a)). Module 6 will consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the publicly and privately funded Adult Care Sector in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It will consider the impact on people's experiences of the Care Sector, the structure of same, the key decisions in respect of the Care Sector and the management of the pandemic in adult care and residential homes, including discharge, IPC, testing, availability of PPE, use of DNACPRs and changes to the regulatory regime. I am satisfied that the Applicant played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in developing Northern Irish guidance on the management of Covid-19 in the care setting and on visitation to care homes. Further, the Applicant contributed to decision making concerning procurement of PPE and regulatory inspection regimes.
9. I consider that the Applicant played, or may have played, a direct and significant role in the Northern Irish Care Sector's response to the pandemic, satisfying Rule 5(2)(a) of the Inquiry Rules 2006. I am also satisfied that it has a significant interest in important aspects of the matters to which Module 6 relates and thus also satisfies Rule 5(2)(b).

Legal Representation

10. Applications for designation as the Recognised Legal Representative of a Core Participant are governed by Rules 6 and 7 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, which provide:

6.—(1) Where—

- (a) a core participant, other than a core participant referred to in rule 7; or*
- (b) any other person required or permitted to give evidence or produce documents during the course of the inquiry,*
has appointed a qualified lawyer to act on that person's behalf, the chairman must designate that lawyer as that person's recognised legal representative in respect of the inquiry proceedings.

7.—(1) This rule applies where there are two or more core participants, each of whom seeks to be legally represented, and the chairman considers that—

- (a) their interests in the outcome of the inquiry are similar;*
- (b) the facts they are likely to rely on in the course of the inquiry are similar; and*
- (c) it is fair and proper for them to be jointly represented.*

(2) The chairman must direct that those core participants shall be represented by a single recognised legal representative, and the chairman may designate a qualified lawyer for that purpose.

(3) Subject to paragraph (4), any designation must be agreed by the core participants in question.

(4) If no agreement on a designation is forthcoming within a reasonable period, the chairman may designate an appropriate lawyer who, in his opinion, has sufficient knowledge and experience to act in this capacity.

11. I am satisfied that the Northern Ireland DOH has appointed Sara Erwin of the Departmental Solicitor's Office as its qualified lawyer in relation to this Module. I therefore designate Sara Erwin as the Northern Ireland DOH's recognised legal representative in accordance with Rule 6(1).

12. Directions will be given in relation to applications for an award under section 40(1)(b) of the Inquiries Act 2005 of expenses to be incurred in respect of legal representation, at the forthcoming preliminary hearing. I will determine any such applications in accordance with the provisions of section 40 of the Inquiries Act 2005, the Inquiry Rules 2006, the [Prime Minister's determination](#) under section 40(4) and the [Inquiry' Costs Protocol](#).

Rt Hon Baroness Heather Hallett DBE

Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

8 February 2024