

IN THE MATTER OF

THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

SUBMISSIONS MADE ON BEHALF OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF NURSING IN ADVANCE OF THE MODULE 3 PRELIMINARY HEARING ON 10 APRIL 2024

1. The Royal College of Nursing ("**RCN**") has been designated as a Core Participant in Module 3 of the Inquiry and the RCN is grateful to the Chair for her decision.
2. With a membership of more than half a million registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the RCN is the voice of nursing across the different jurisdictions of the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world.
3. The RCN is both the professional body for nursing and a trade union. It campaigns on issues of concern to nursing staff and patients, including pay and terms and conditions; it influences health policies; and promotes excellence in nursing practice. The RCN's members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the UK government and governments of the Devolved Administrations and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.
4. Nursing is the largest safety-critical profession in health care: it is vital to patient safety that there are the right nurses (and other members of the nursing family), with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time. The pandemic highlighted the critical role that nursing plays in protecting, improving, and sustaining health. Working in hospitals, schools, care homes, GP surgeries, prisons and homes throughout the pandemic, the RCN has supported its members and campaigned in the interests of the profession and its patients.
5. **Infection Prevention and Control ("IPC")** – IPC is of vital significance to the Inquiry's work in this module. The guidance changed frequently and at pace. The RCN has searched amongst its own materials and in the National Archive for a full suite but has

not been able to compose a complete set of guidance documents. The RCN has previously requested a copy of the below documents and again invites the Inquiry to seek from the relevant bodies:

- a) a full suite of all the iterations of the IPC guidance for the whole period with which the module is concerned;
 - b) a clear chronology of when, by whom, and how, the guidance was varied, and then disseminated.
6. It may be that the above request is being actioned by the Inquiry's instructed IPC experts for this Module. However, given the difficulties acknowledged at paragraphs 31-33 of Counsel to the Inquiry's note, it would assist if this request could be handled independently to the production of an expert report. This would enable Core Participants to cross reference the IPC guidance and a clear chronology of its implementation when reviewing the recently disclosed witness statements from organisations and departments such as NHSE, DHSC, OCMO, UKHSA, HSE, Public Health Scotland and NHS National Services Scotland.
7. **Long Covid** – The RCN notes the Chair's ruling dated 09 October 2023 regarding *“issues relating to the legal designation of long Covid as a disability and to the creation of a compensation scheme for workers in the healthcare sector who have long Covid are matters that do not relate to the ‘impact of the pandemic on health care systems’ or the response of the healthcare system to Covid-19.”* The RCN therefore wishes to clarify the extent to which Long Covid will be addressed by the Inquiry in both Module 3 and future Modules. It would be helpful to understand whether a standalone Module to explore Long Covid will be established given its significance and its ongoing impact on nurses and other healthcare staff working on the frontline of healthcare.
8. **Evidence from frontline workers** – The RCN welcomes the approach of the Inquiry to seeking evidence from individuals who worked on the frontline in a range of healthcare settings throughout the pandemic. The RCN hopes that this will enable the experiences of healthcare workers, including the sacrifices they made to protect their patients and to uphold their profession, to be acknowledged and understood. Furthermore, such evidence will help to inform future pandemic planning, particularly with regard to establishing what is required to sustain a sufficient healthcare workforce to meet the needs of our country.

9. **Disclosure to Core Participants** – The RCN notes that on the afternoon of 21 March 2024 the Inquiry made further significant tranches of disclosure. The RCN respectfully reserves its position on this further disclosure until it has had the opportunity to review the same. Should there be any issues which the RCN wish to raise following consideration of this material, the RCN will notify the Inquiry.

25 MARCH 2024