

IN THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

Before the Right Honourable Baroness Hallett

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS OF THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

FOR THE MODULE 7 PRELIMINARY HEARING

ON 27 JUNE 2024

1. These are the written submissions on behalf of the Welsh Government for the preliminary hearing on 27 June 2024.
2. The Welsh Government is grateful for its designation as a Core Participant for Module 7. It re-affirms its full commitment to the Inquiry and its determination to provide the fullest possible cooperation, so that the decisions it took in response to the pandemic are thoroughly scrutinised. It is actively working to ensure that the Inquiry is provided with all the information it needs in this regard.
3. The Welsh Government is a unified and integrated Government, the breadth of its functions relevant to the issues identified for consideration within Module 7 are therefore significant. The Welsh Government wishes to provide evidence and input on all the issues identified for consideration within Module 7.
4. Following the detailed consideration which will be given by the Inquiry, it is anticipated that important lessons will be learned by a close examination of the approach taken across all four nations in relation to the test, trace and isolate system (known as Test, Trace, Protect in Wales).
5. The Test, Trace, Protect ("TTP") programme in Wales was a bespoke programme developed through partnership arrangements with the local health boards, Public Health Wales, local authorities and the third sector in Wales. It formed a critical part of the wider response to the virus, set out in the Welsh Government's Coronavirus Control Plan for Wales.
6. Module 7 provides a further opportunity for the Inquiry to look at how decisions were made by each of the four nations, whether on a four nations basis or distinctly. While there was a concern to maintain a four nations approach during the pandemic unless

there was a good reason to depart from it, it was also recognised that where circumstances justified it, a regional or local approach may be required. In the case of Test Trace Protect in Wales the testing element was undertaken through a combination of the NHS in Wales and the UK National Testing Programme, which included the UK Lighthouse Labs and was a partnership led by the UK Government. Contact tracing was coordinated centrally by the Welsh Government and regionally by health boards and local authorities. The 'protect' element of the Test Trace Protect strategy in Wales provided the necessary support and information to those who needed to self-isolate. Local authorities in Wales generally maintained the day-to-day responsibility for making sure that support was offered to those identified as vulnerable, as well as others who were identified and assessed as needing help. This meant a Welsh approach was required, and sometimes an approach at a regional or local level within Wales was considered appropriate. By comparing and contrasting different approaches taken across the UK in dealing with common issues, it is hoped that valuable lessons will be learned for future preparedness for other public health challenges.

7. We are grateful to the Solicitor to the Inquiry and Counsel to the Inquiry for their notes circulated in advance of the preliminary hearing. We note from the Counsel to the Inquiry's note that the scope and key lines of enquiry identified are necessarily provisional at this stage.
8. As the Inquiry progresses to its seventh module, it is important to underline the continuing importance of The Listening Exercise ("Every Story Matters") and Commemoration. Understanding the difficulties suffered by people from different communities and backgrounds and the impact caused to them by the test, trace and isolate system across the four nations must form a central part of the Inquiry's work as we strive to learn lessons from the handling of the pandemic. The scope for Module 7 and the key lines of enquiry identified in the Counsel to the Inquiry note also raise important issues of far-reaching concern for Governments, including accessibility of public services, public messaging and enforcement.
9. Paragraph 41 of the Counsel to the Inquiry's note on the proposed targeted qualitative research areas is welcomed. As the Welsh Government has explained in previous written submissions, the Welsh and English languages have equal legal status in Wales. The Inquiry has previously recognised the importance of equal status of the Welsh and English languages in the Inquiry. It is important that when taking into account the views of the proposed groups for qualitative research in Module 7, referred to in paragraph 42 of the note, the Inquiry ensure that the impact on Welsh language

speakers is also included as part of the general population and appropriate arrangements put in place to facilitate obtaining the views of this cohort. The lessons learned will ensure that this Welsh Government, and future Welsh Governments, have the best possible information available to prepare for, and respond to, any future public health challenges.

IAN ROGERS KC

Monckton Chambers

Dated 9 June 2024