
IN THE MATTER OF THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

**WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF
THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION
FOR THE PRELIMINARY HEARING IN MODULE 8
ON 6 SEPTEMBER 2024**

1. These are the written submissions of the Department for Education (“DfE”) for the first preliminary hearing in Module 8 on 6 September 2024.
2. DfE welcomes the focus in Module 8 on children and young people and the impact of the pandemic on them. It is grateful for its designation as a Core Participant in Module 8, and the opportunity to participate and assist the Inquiry in its examination of the important issues raised in the Provisional Outline of Scope. As the Government department responsible for children’s services and education, many of the areas listed in the Provisional Outline of Scope either fall directly within, or touch upon, matters for which the DfE is responsible. DfE therefore expects to be an active Core Participant in Module 8, and is fully committed to assisting the Inquiry in its investigation so as to ensure that the matters identified in the Provisional Outline of Scope can be properly and thoroughly examined.
3. DfE is acutely conscious of the impact that the pandemic and associated measures had, and continue to have, on children and young people. The scale of the policy and operational challenges that the pandemic presented to DfE and the services for which it has responsibility also cannot be underestimated. Throughout the pandemic, and following it, DfE has sought to identify and learn lessons to improve our approaches and deliver the best outcomes for children and learners. The Department accepts and acknowledges that there will be further important and valuable lessons to be learned in relation to aspects of the response that could have been handled better. Where that is the case, DfE is determined to use the opportunity presented by the Inquiry to ensure that those lessons are learned and implemented in any future pandemic and, where appropriate, in policy making more generally.

4. Against that backdrop, it is also important to acknowledge and pay tribute to the enormous efforts made by staff on the ground, in all education settings, children's social care services and elsewhere, who worked in immensely challenging circumstances, with dedication and often bravery, to seek to mitigate the impacts on children and young people. DfE recognises that "school closures" may be a commonly understood shorthand for the attendance restrictions that were imposed in 2020 and 2021, but would emphasise that schools were never in fact "closed", with vulnerable children and those whose parents were key workers entitled to attend throughout, and teachers and other staff of course continuing to work in schools and through the provision of remote education.
5. DfE would therefore respectfully ask that the term "attendance restrictions" is adopted by the Inquiry and, where possible, by other participants, in the interests both of accuracy and of recognising and respecting those staff. It is important that their commitment and contribution during this challenging time is not overlooked.
6. DfE is grateful to the Solicitor and Counsel to the Inquiry for their notes circulated in advance of the preliminary hearing. Other than the point of terminology raised above, it does not take any issue with the proposed Outline of Scope or Key Lines of Enquiry. It will of course consider any submissions made by other Core Participants and may supplement these written submissions orally as appropriate.

GALINA WARD KC

HAFSAH MAHSOOD

Landmark Chambers

22 August 2024