

## **IN THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY**

**Before the Right Honourable Baroness Hallett**

---

### **WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS OF THE WELSH GOVERNMENT**

#### **FOR THE MODULE 8 PRELIMINARY HEARING**

**ON 6<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024**

---

1. The Welsh Government 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.
2. Areas central to Module 8, such as, education, health and social care have been devolved functions (broadly the responsibility of the Welsh Government) since 1999. The Welsh Government will therefore provide evidence and input on all the issues identified for consideration within Module 8. The significant impact of the pandemic on children and young people is acknowledged. The Welsh Government welcomes consideration of the decisions it took during and after the pandemic to mitigate the impact.
3. During the pandemic the Welsh Government undertook a broad range of engagement with children and young people and took a range of measures intended to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on children and young people, including (but not limited to):
  - a. Welsh Ministers approved legislative changes to the statutory framework in Wales which were designed to enable and facilitate continuity of education provision in Wales. Several Curriculum Requirements were made in exercise of the Welsh Ministers powers in the Coronavirus Act 2020 throughout 2020 in response to the pandemic.
  - b. The Welsh Government produced and published a significant number of guidance documents relating to children and young people over the course of the pandemic including (not exhaustive) guidance for elective home educating families, documents to support teachers, learners and children,

including guidance for headteachers and governors covering the support of the well-being of their staff and management of learning online.

- c. The Welsh Government was engaged in the monitoring and assessment of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people in Wales and responded with necessary policy decisions.
  - d. In support of safeguarding vulnerable children and young people during the pandemic the Welsh Government established a cross-government group including policy leads from education, children and families, housing, communities, health and social services.
  - e. The Welsh Government Technical Advisory Group also established a Children and Education Sub-group, specifically focused on children and young people, education and childcare.
  - f. Additional funding was also provided by the Welsh Government for a range of measures intended to support children and young people, including funding to enhance mental health support for children and young people who may have experienced additional stress or anxiety as a result of the pandemic and in support of digitally excluded learners during the pandemic.
4. 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. The provisional scope for Module 8 and the key lines of enquiry identified in the Counsel to the Inquiry note raise important issues. We note the clear indication that education will be considered in its broadest sense, to include pre and post compulsory schooling, further and higher education and traineeships. The Welsh Government also welcomes consideration of children and young peoples' engagement with social care services, access to and use of the internet, social media and online and children and young people in contact with the criminal justice system. Welsh Language Education plays an important role in Wales and we would invite the inquiry to consider the impact on Welsh Language learners in their examination of this module.
5. As the Inquiry progresses to its eighth 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 specifically, the impact of the pandemic on

children and young people 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.

**6. Dated 19 August 2024**