Tuesday, 18 February 2025 1 I shall now ask Ms Blackwell, Ms Kate Blackwell, 1 2 2 (10.30 am) King's Counsel, to outline the approach the Inquiry team 3 Opening introductory remarks by THE CHAIR 3 intends to adopt in conducting Module 10 and any issues 4 4 I need to decide at this stage. I shall then hear from MS BLACKWELL: Good morning, my Lady. May I just check that 5 you can see us and hear us? 5 any Core Participants. 6 LADY HALLETT: I can. Thank you very much indeed, 6 Ms Blackwell. 7 Ms Blackwell 7 Statement by LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY FOR MODULE 10 8 8 Good morning, everyone. This morning, we begin the MS BLACKWELL: Thank you, my Lady. Module 10 of the Inquiry 9 9 first preliminary hearing for our final module, concerns the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on society, as 10 Module 10, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on 10 my Lady has already said, with a particular focus on the society. 11 experiences of key workers, the most vulnerable and the 11 12 12 bereaved. By the time I reach the hearings for Module 10 in 13 early 2026, the Inquiry will have gathered, and I will 13 I appear this morning along with the other members 14 have heard, a great deal of evidence on the impact of 14 of the counsel team, my learned friends Ms Rahman, 15 the pandemic and the response to it on society. I will 15 King's Counsel, Ms Vitte, Mr Phipps and Mr Ndow-Njie. 16 be assisted by that evidence in making my findings and 16 In accordance with the agenda for today's 17 any recommendations in Module 10. However, the evidence 17 preliminary hearing, I will address the following six 18 gathered to date will not suffice to fulfil my terms of 18 19 reference. 19 First, some practical arrangements, and I will 20 We have yet to gather, and I have yet to hear, 20 address the designation of Core Participants. 21 21 important additional evidence relating to various groups Second, the provisional outline of scope for 22 22 of people specified in my terms of reference. Moreover, Module 10. 23 where I have heard evidence relating to a specific 23 Third, the Inquiry's approach to gathering 24 24 group, for example, the bereaved, there remain issues information and evidence which will include the 25 that we must explore in greater detail. 25 following: roundtable events, a Systematic Evidence 1 Review, expert material and the instruction of expert 1 Coalition, represented by Ms Munroe, King's Counsel; the 2 witnesses, Rule 9 requests, and Every Story Matters and 2 Prison and Immigration Detention Advocacy Group, 3 its role within Module 10. 3 represented by Mr O'Ceallaigh, King's Counsel; the 4 Fourth, the disclosure process for Core 4 Migrants' Rights Consortium, represented by Ms Moffatt; 5 Participants. 5 the Trades Union Congress, represented by Ms Peacock; 6 Fifth, future hearing dates and next steps. 6 the Local Government Association, the Welsh Local 7 And sixth, and finally, the submissions received 7 Government Association, and the Convention of Scottish 8 from Core Participants. 8 Local Authorities, represented by Ms Stober; and Mind, 9 There will then be an opportunity for those who have 9 represented by Ms Livermore. 10 been designated as Core Participants to make submissions 10 A full list of Core Participants in Module 10 and 11 if they wish to do so. 11 their legal representatives will be published on the 12 12 My Lady, pursuant to Rule five of the Inquiry Rules Inquiry website in due course. 13 of 2006, the following 14 applicants were designated as 13 Turning then to the practical arrangements for 14 Core Participants for Module 10. I introduce them and 14 today's hearing, the proceedings are being recorded and 15 their representatives in no particular order. Covid-19 15 live streamed to other locations. This allows the 16 Bereaved Families for Justice, represented by Ms Stone; 16 hearing to be followed by a greater number of people 17 Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice, 17 than would be able to be accommodated in the hearing 18 represented by Ms McDermott; Covid-19 Bereaved Families 18 room, which satisfies the obligation set out in 19 for Justice Cymru, represented by Mr Stanton; Scottish 19 section 18 of the Inquiries Act for my Lady to take such 20 Covid Bereaved, represented by Dr Mitchell, King's 20 steps as you consider reasonable to ensure that members 21 Counsel; Clinically Vulnerable Families, represented by 21 of the public are able to attend and see and hear 22 Mr Wagner; the Disabled People's Organisations, 22 a simultaneous transmission of the proceedings.

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represented by Ms Beattie; the DA Group, represented by

Ms Davies, King's Counsel; Shelter, represented by

Mr Westgate, King's Counsel; the Justice Sector 3

a three-minute delay. This provides the opportunity for 4

broadcasting of this hearing will be conducted with

In addition, as is routine in public inquiries, the

the feed to be paused if anything unexpected is aired -which should not be. We don't expect this to arise over the course of today, but I mention it so that those who are following proceedings from further afield can understand the reasons for any such short delay.

I have already set out the names of those organisations which have been granted Core Participant status for Module 10. For those who are either not granted Core Participant status, or for those who did not apply to be a designated Core Participant, I wish to reiterate that not being a Core Participant in no way precludes any person, entity, or group from participating in the following ways: bringing any matter to the attention of the Inquiry; providing the Inquiry with relevant information and evidence; where appropriate, and relevant, giving evidence at a hearing; whereupon receipt of an invitation, attending a roundtable organised by the Inquiry; and in the case of an individual affected by the pandemic, taking part in the Inquiry's nationwide listening exercise, Every Story Matters.

My Lady, I will now turn to address the scope of Module 10 and then the evidence gathering and investigation stage that has already begun for the module.

shield for prolonged periods, often in isolation, raising concerns about mental health, loneliness, and access to essential services. Those living in temporary or overcrowded housing or experiencing homelessness encountered particular difficulties in adhering to public health guidance, while victims of domestic abuse were placed at even greater risk due to lockdown measures that made it harder to seek help or escape unsafe environments.

The justice system was also significantly affected, with court closures, delays, and restrictions on visits to prisons and immigration detention centres, leaving many isolated in periods of uncertainty.

The mental health and wellbeing of the population was also impacted by the pandemic, with effects exacerbated by social isolation, financial insecurity, loss of routine, and fear of the virus.

The restrictions on social, cultural and religious life had a deep impact on individuals and communities. The closure of places of worship, community centres, sports facilities, theatres and other cultural spaces disrupted fundamental aspects of social and spiritual life with consequences for mental health, social bonds, and community cohesion.

The restrictions on travel, leisure and hospitality,

The provisional outline for scope. The societal impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was profound and far reaching, altering almost every aspect of daily life in the United Kingdom. The pandemic reshaped social interactions, mental health, community cohesion, and access to public services. From the strictest periods of national lockdowns to the gradual reopening of society, individuals and communities faced unprecedented restrictions, hardships and uncertainty, with some consequences that continue to be felt today.

There will be few, if any, individuals or groups who were unaffected by the consequences of the pandemic. The challenges extended from key workers who served on the frontline at significant personal risk, to those in communal or institutional settings, who faced severe restrictions on their daily lives. The bereaved families who lost loved funds in exceptionally difficult and often isolating circumstances endured profound grief. For many, this was compounded by the lack of ability to perform their traditional rites of mourning and the lack of social support structures that are so fundamental to the human experience.

The pandemic had disproportionate effects on different parts of society. The clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable were required to

not only had a significant economic impact but also disrupted the way people engaged with society, family and friends. Many individuals were unable to visit sick or elderly relatives or to travel to, and to attend significant life events or say farewell to loved ones in their final moments. For some, this compounded feelings of grief, loneliness and frustration.

However, the pandemic also brought about extraordinary acts of resilience, solidarity and community innovation. Many individuals, organisations and local communities mobilised themselves to support those in need. The role of charities and the voluntary sector more generally was vital in helping those facing financial or social hardship. Communities adapted to maintain social and cultural connections with many moving services online, accelerating digital transformation and providing new ways of connecting.

The Inquiry will examine such examples of social, societal adaption and collective resilience, ensuring that any positive lessons learned can also inform the UK's preparedness for future crises.

The Inquiry will maintain a focus on the key themes in and issues emerging from the evidence. The impact of the pandemic on society was vast and multifaceted. The wide scope of the module necessitates efficient use of

investigative time to ensure these themes are effectively examined.

The provisional outline of scope for Module 10, which has been published on the Inquiry website, in both English and Welsh, states as follows:

"Module 10 is the final module of the Covid-19 UK Inquiry and, in accordance with its terms of reference, will examine the impact of Covid on the population of the United Kingdom with a particular focus on key workers, the most vulnerable, the bereaved, mental health and wellbeing. It will investigate the impact of the pandemic and the measures put in place to combat the disease and any disproportionate impact. The module will also seek to identify where societal strengths, resilience, and/or innovation reduced any adverse impact.

"Module 10 will therefore examine the pandemic and the measures put in place on the following:

"1. The general population of the UK, including the impact on mental health and wellbeing of the population. This will include the community-level impact on sport and leisure and cultural institutions, and the societal impact of the closure and opening restrictions imposed on the hospitality, retail, travel and tourism industries. It will also cover the impact of

The scope remains provisional and will continue to be reflected upon as evidence is received throughout the Module 10 investigation. The Module 10 team is also mindful of other module's investigations that may touch upon issues relevant to the impact of the pandemic on society. This includes, although is not limited to, Module 3, which has dealt with the impact of the pandemic on health care systems; Module 8, which addresses children and young people; and Module 9, which will look at the economic response to the pandemic. The Inquiry teams will continue to work together to avoid any unnecessary duplication.

However, whilst the scope remains provisional, to assist Core Participants, we have identified questions that the Inquiry is likely to consider in Module 10.

This will be expanded upon in the list of issues which will be circulated ahead of the final hearings for Module 10. These questions include the following:

How did the general adult population's mental health and wellbeing change during the pandemic?

What were the risk factors for the development of mild to moderate anxiety and depression, and were there any protective factors?

Were there inequalities in terms of the impact within and between different demographic groups?

restrictions on worship, resulting from the closure and reopening of places of worship.

- "2. Key workers, excluding health and social care workers but including those working in the police service, fire and rescue workers, teachers, cleaners, transport workers, taxi and delivery drivers, funeral workers, security guards and public-facing sales and retail workers. It will cover the impact of implementing government decisions, any inequality in the impact of interventions, including lockdown, testing and workplace safety, and any inequality on the impact on health outcomes, such as infections, mortality and mental and physical wellbeing.
- "3. The most vulnerable, including those outlined in the Inquiry's equality statement, as well as the clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable. It will include the following topics: housing and homelessness, safeguarding and support for victims of domestic abuse, those within the immigration and asylum system, those within prisons and other places of detention, and those affected by the operation of the justice system.
- "4. The bereaved, including restrictions and arrangements for funeral and burials and post-bereavement support."

What were the changes in symptoms during the pandemic for individuals with severe mental health conditions, including those in communal and institutional settings?

Was there a treatment gap in providing services to people with diagnosed and severe mental health conditions?

What was the impact of the pandemic on physical activity levels of the population?

What were the consequences of closures and restrictions on sports, leisure and cultural institutions?

How did the closure and reopening of places of worship affect religious practices, and how did faith groups and places of worship adapt to the changes bought about by the pandemic?

What was the societal impact of the closure and reopening restrictions on the hospitality, retail, travel and tourism industries?

Were key workers disproportionately impacted by the pandemic in terms of infections, mortality rates and physical and mental health outcomes?

What was the impact of increased workloads, staff shortages, and having to isolate from family members on the general wellbeing of key workers, and were there

disparities in that impact across different key worker groups and different demographic groups of key workers?

What was the impact of the pandemic and measures put in place on the most vulnerable in society, including the impact on access to support services?

What was the impact of the pandemic on the bereaved, including access to support services for the bereaved, and which innovations or changes in practice which emerged during the pandemic, if any, could inform future pandemic responses?

The Inquiry is grateful for the additional questions and issues suggested by Core Participants in their written submissions. These contributions, informed as they are by Core Participants' expertise and the lived experience of their memories, are invaluable in shaping the Inquiry's approach.

I would like to clarify that the questions which
I've just outlined are intended to provide only
an illustrative list of issues that Module 10 is likely
to consider, rather than an exhaustive list. As the
Inquiry's work progresses, this list will be developed
and expanded to ensure that Module 10 comprehensively
addresses the full range of relevant matters. The
Module 10 team have carefully considered and will
continue to consider the submissions of Core

The Inquiry remains committed to a thorough and inclusive investigation within the scope of Module 10. Core Participants' contributions continue to be a crucial part of this process, and the Inquiry looks forward to engaging further on the issues that fall within the module's remit.

My Lady, a number of costs have provided detailed written submissions regarding the provisional outline of scope for Module 10, and these submissions reflect the breadth of issues covered within this module and the importance of ensuring that all aspects of societal impact are thoroughly investigated. The Inquiry has carefully considered these submissions and will continue to do so. In many instances, they align with the Inquiry's planned approach. Some submissions raise points of clarification or refinement, while others advocate for additional areas of investigation.

The Inquiry is mindful that Module 10 serves as the final module of the Inquiry and, as such, Core
Participants have expressed a showing desire to ensure that any gaps are addressed before the conclusion of the Inquiry's work. Given the breadth of issues raised, it is not practical to address all points of detail today.
However, I will highlight the most significant themes and concerns emerging from the Core Participants'

Participants on key issues and, where appropriate, they will be incorporated into areas for investigation.

It is, however, important to also clarify that some of the proposed questions and issues, so far suggested, fall outside the provisional scope for Module 10 and are therefore unlikely to be included in this module's investigation, for example decision-making processes.

Some submissions suggest questions that relate to the decision-making process within government, how decisions were made, whether they were appropriate and whether certain contains should have been made differently. This falls outside of the scope of Module 10, which will not address decision making but rather focus on the impact of restrictions on the general population.

Issues beyond the relevant period of investigation. Some submissions raise issues that extend beyond the timeframe covered by Module 10, and therefore are unlikely to be included within this module's scope.

And the impact on children and young people. Where questions relate specifically to the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, these will also fall outside the remit of this module, given that the Inquiry has a specific module considering children and young people. That is Module 8.

submissions, each of whom will, of course, have the opportunity to expand on their positions during their oral submissions today.

So, first, the effect of the pandemic and lockdown.

The DA Group has submitted that the Inquiry's framing of its investigation should explicitly recognise that the pandemic and lockdown were distinct events, each contributing to harm in different ways. They argue that lockdown was not simply an inevitable byproduct of the pandemic but was a policy decision that had its own distinct and measurable effects on individuals and communities.

The Inquiry recognises that the pandemic and the measures implemented in response to it, such as lockdowns, must be examined together. However, as lockdowns were a consequence of the pandemic, my Lady may consider that the existing language of the provisional outline of scope, which refers to the "impact of the pandemic" and the "measures put in place to combat the disease" sufficiently encapsulates this. Nonetheless, should the investigation reveal that a clearer distinction is necessary, this could be reflected.

Long-term and ongoing effects of the pandemic.

Several Core Participants, including the Prison and

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Immigration Detention Advocacy Group, Clinically Vulnerable Families and the Trades Union Congress, have urged the Inquiry to extend its examination beyond the immediate pandemic period to include the ongoing, long-term impact of Covid-19. They have emphasised the need to consider the following: the lasting effects of Covid-19 on the prisoner state and immigration detention; the long-term health, employment and financial consequences for clinically vulnerable people; and the disproportionate and enduring impact of long Covid, particularly on key workers.

The Inquiry's terms of reference state that it will examine, consider and report on preparations and the response to the pandemic in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, up to and including the Inquiry's formal setting update, which was 28 June 2022.

However, Module 10's focus on impact may include an assessment of the likely impact which may extend beyond the above date, for example, in relation to ongoing or long-term impact.

Mental health and wellbeing.

The Inquiry's focus on mental health in Module 10 has been positively received by Mind, the Disabled People's Organisations and the DA Group. These organisations have requested that the investigation

explicitly examines community mental health services and not just hospital-based services; the impact of the pandemic on all mental health conditions, rather than just severe mental health conditions, be addressed; that the proportionate impact of the pandemic on disabled people's mental health is specifically considered; and that the Inquiry assess how the provision and accessibility of mental health care changed during the pandemic.

The Inquiry has already sought expert evidence regarding the operation of mental health services at all levels, including community-based care, and the systemic evidence review will also consider disparities in mental health outcomes between demographic groups. Given this, my Lady may consider that the Inquiry remains committed to fully exploring these issues.

The general population, integrating the experiences of disabled and clinically vulnerable people.

The Disabled People's Organisations and Clinically Vulnerable Families, have expressed concern that the experiences of disabled and clinically vulnerable people should not be treated as separate from the general population. The Inquiry recognises that issues of disability and clinical vulnerability must be fully considered throughout the investigation, rather than

being confined to a single section. This has already been considered in the design of the information and evidence gathering process for Module 10 and, therefore, my Lady may consider that the current framework is flexible enough to capture these concerns.

Economic impact.

The DA Group has urged the Inquiry to consider the economic effects of the pandemic, particularly on those in casual, insecure or informal employment, and those who experienced an increase in debt. The economic response to the pandemic is primarily within the remit of Module 9 but, that being said, Module 10 recognises it is inevitable that information will be received that touches upon the economic and financial impacts of the pandemic

With respect to key workers, this will likely include the financial impact on key workers, including issues related to sick pay, furlough and wages, to the extent that these impacted on the wellbeing of key workers. In light of this, your Ladyship may consider that the existing scope sufficiently addresses economic hardship within the context of key workers.

On to key workers themselves.

Whilst the provisional outline of scope includes teachers, police, fire and rescue workers, cleaners,

transport workers, taxi and delivery drivers, funeral workers, security guards and public-facing retail workers, several Core Participants have argued that this list does not fully capture the breadth of key workers who ensured society continued to function during the pandemic. Amongst, others, it has been suggested that the provisional scope ought to be updated to explicitly include homelessness services workers, as suggested by Shelter; early years and educational workers, rather than just teachers; and logistics and delivery workers, rather than just delivery drivers, as suggested by the Trades Union Congress.

My Lady, the list of key workers explicitly listed in the provisional outline of scope is not intended to be exhaustive. As a result, my Lady may reasonably consider that no further refinements are necessary. The fact that a key worker is not explicitly listed in the provisional outline of scope does not mean they will not be considered in the module's investigation. Several Core Participants have pointed to significant disparities in how different groups of key workers experience the pandemic, and have highlighted key concerns which warrant consideration when considering the impact on key workers. The Inquiry is grateful for these submissions and will take these considerations

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into account. The most vulnerable.

Several Core Participants have made submissions regarding the categorisation of "the most vulnerable", in particular, the Disabled People's Organisations has cautioned against treating vulnerability as an inherent characteristic, rather than something shaped by social, economic and political factors. Shelter has urged the Inquiry to fully consider the impact of poor housing conditions, particularly overcrowding. The Migrants' Rights Consortium has requested express confirmation that all migrants, not just those within the formal immigration and asylum system, will be considered.

The Inquiry's evidence-gathering strategy for this module has included consideration for disparities in vulnerability to be explored, including those arising from housing disability and immigration status. There is also no intention for the impact of the pandemic on undocumented migrants to be expressly excluded from the module's consideration, although we recognise that obtaining reliable information in this regard may prove challenging.

In light of this, amendments to the provisional scope to reflect these submissions are not proposed at this stage, but the Inquiry will continue to take these

material, Rule 9 requests, and Every Story Matters. Careful consideration will be given to which method or methods of investigation are appropriate for each aspect of the module's scope.

Roundtables. These are a core part of the Inquiry's information-gathering strategy for Module 10. These sessions are one of the methods being deployed to enable a diverse range of organisations to provide their perspectives on the societal impact of the pandemic.

A total of nine roundtables are planned, with the first being held this month, and the final roundtable due to take place in June of this year. The roundtable events will cover the following topics:

The Faith Groups and Places of Worship Roundtable will examine the experiences of religious institutions and faith communities due to closures and restrictions on worship and adaptations during the pandemic.

The Key Workers Roundtable will hear from organisations representing key workers across a wide range of sectors about the unique pressures and risks they faced during the pandemic.

The Domestic Abuse Support and Safeguarding Roundtable will engage with organisations that support victims and survivors of domestic abuse to understand how lockdown measures and restrictions impacted access considerations into account in the implementation of its evidence-gathering process.

And finally on this topic, lessons learned and innovations. Several Core Participants, including the Trades Union Congress, Shelter, and the Disabled People's Organisations, have stressed the importance of ensuring Module 10 is not solely retrospective but also identifies positive lessons from the pandemic.

This perspective is welcomed. As outlined in the provisional outline of scope, Module 10 will seek to identify societal strengths and resilience that mitigated harm, and the Inquiry remains committed to ensuring that positive lessons from the pandemic are not overlooked

So I turn now, my Lady, to deal with the Inquiry's approach to gathering information and evidence.

We are committed to conducting an evidence-based investigation into the societal impact of the pandemic. This work will involve gathering information and evidence from a wide range of sources to ensure that the experiences of individuals, communities, and organisations, are fully captured.

As outlined earlier, the information gathering and evidence-gathering processes will include the use of roundtable events, a Systematic Evidence Review, expert

to support services and their ability to provide assistance to those that needed it the most.

The Funerals, Burials and Bereavement Support Roundtable will explore the effects of restrictions on funerals and how bereaved families navigated their grief during the pandemic.

The Justice System Roundtable will address the impact on those in prisons and detention centres and those affected by court closures and delays.

The Hospitality, Retail, Travel and Tourism Industries Roundtable will engage with business leaders to examine how closures, restrictions, and the reopening measures impacted these critical sectors.

The Community-Level Sport and Leisure Roundtable will investigate the impact of restrictions on community-level sports, fitness and recreational activities.

The Cultural Institutions Roundtable will seek to investigate the effects of closures and restrictions on museums, theatres and other cultural institutions.

And finally, the Housing and Homelessness Roundtable will explore how the pandemic affected housing insecurity, eviction protections, and homelessness support services.

Each roundtable will be chaired by a senior member

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of the Inquiry Secretariat, with discussions facilitated by an external provider to ensure a structured and productive dialogue. A report summarising the discussions will be produced for each roundtable and shared with Core Participants to inform the investigation.

Core Participants have generally welcomed the inclusion of roundtable events as a means of gathering information and facilitating discussions among affected groups. However, several Core Participants have raised questions regarding gaps in representation, breadth of topics covered, and the format of discussions.

The Inquiry welcomes the feedback on the roundtable events and will reflect on the issues raised.

Further, some Core Participants have made submissions about the location and/or accessibility of the roundtable events, which the Inquiry has carefully considered. Having regard to logistics and available resources, the in-person roundtable events are being, where possible, held at Dorland House here in London. Some roundtables will be taking place by remote attendance, and there will be a facility for attendees to participate virtually.

The Inquiry will remain mindful of ensuring that voices from across all sectors of society are included

identifying any risk and protective factors for changes and whether there were any disparities in mental health outcomes based on equality characteristics.

The key questions that the review will consider are: how did the general adult population's mental health and wellbeing change during the pandemic, if at all, compared to pre-pandemic trends? And: what were the risk and protective factors for changes in mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic, relative to pre-pandemic trajectories?

The review will also seek to identify the influence of factors such as:

Behaviours or activities that have a positive impact on mental health, such as physical activity levels, participation in cultural activities, and participation in religious worship, and:

The relationships between mental health and wellbeing and other characteristics, such as age, disability, sex, race, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, religion and belief, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, geographical differences, clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable, occupation, immigration status, residential status, and other vulnerable populations such as those in prison or those with severe mental illness.

in the investigation for this module and will carefully consider how different organisations can contribute to roundtable discussions or otherwise engage with the investigation.

The Systematic Evidence Review.

The Inquiry is aware that the topic of mental health and wellbeing in the pandemic has been a very substantial area of scientific inquiry with a large number of studies having been published that cover these topics. The Inquiry is commissioning a Systematic Evidence Review to provide a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the available research on the societal impact of the pandemic insofar as it relates to mental health and wellbeing of the general population.

Following a competitive procurement process, the Inquiry has appointed the Centre for Strategic and Evaluation Services to undertake this. They have previously led work for the European Parliament on the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, have led a mental health evidence review for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and evaluations of government policies for other departments.

The review will compare changes in the mental health and wellbeing of the population during the pandemic against pre-pandemic trends, focusing on UK research and

This systematic review will culminate in a detailed written report which will present the findings of the review, and a copy of this report will be provided to Core Participants.

Core Participants broadly support the Systematic Evidence Review as a means of gathering research on the impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing. A number of Core Participants have made suggestions about the areas of potential inclusion regarding the Systematic Review for Module 10, and these will be given careful consideration.

Some of these are as follows: the DA Group suggests that the Systematic Review should include published research on the effects of the pandemic and lockdown on both victims and survivors of domestic violence and the effects on their mental health of those victims and survivors. In addition, the DA Group requests that research into the disproportionate impact on black, minoritised and migrant victims and survivors, including their access to health care, be incorporated.

The DA Group also makes submissions that the Systematic Review ought to include research into access to domestic abuse services and any increased demand on such services, including access to healthcare, housing services, police responses to domestic abuse, and the

accessibility of the justice systems, both during and after the pandemic.

The submissions from the Justice Sector Coalition request that the Systematic Review should include consideration of the following: the effects on lack of access to justice, particularly in the aftermath of lockdown; the effects of the lack of legal aid; key workers and effects on mental health; the amount of unrepresented people in all courts and immigration tribunals; the increased demand post-lockdown on immigration, civil and family services, if any; the disconnection from support services and social isolation; the reality of insufficient data collected by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice on these issues, and the shift to remote hearings and the impact of those who are digitally excluded or have data

The Prison and Immigration Detention Advocacy Group makes submissions that a Systematic Evidence Review be considered in the context of both prisoners and people in immigration detention who ought to be among the demographic groups that are identified for consideration. They also suggest that the position of those incarcerated be considered when assessing the impact of the pandemic on physical activity and the lack

have already been considered as part of our work to date and, if not, how they might inform the evidence gathering of this module.

Turning to expert material and the instruction of expert witnesses.

Module 10 has commenced the process of identifying the areas where expert evidence is likely to be of assistance. This process naturally benefits from early discussion with possible experts and such discussions will help to ensure that any eventual reports are comprehensive.

The Inquiry is currently engaging in such discussions with those whose expertise enabled them to consider the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on people from a range of specific, sociodemographic backgrounds.

Module 10 has instructed two psychiatric experts,
Professors Jayati Das-Munshi and David Osborn to produce
a joint expert report. Professor Das-Munshi is
a professor of social and psychiatric epidemiology at
King's College London and an honorary consultant liaison
psychiatrist. Her work focuses on mental health
inequalities. Professor Osborn is a Professor of
psychiatric epidemiology at UCL and his work focuses on
the interface between mental health and physical health.

of access to support services.

And the Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK and Northern Ireland invited the Inquiry to provide Core Participants with further information as to the criteria for this process and the nature of the expertise that is sought.

We are grateful to all the submissions made by Core Participants regarding the Systematic Evidence Review. The Inquiry recognises the value of ensuring that the Systematic Evidence Review is as comprehensive as possible while remaining manageable and methodologically robust.

The Systematic Review is intended to be an expansive piece of research as the Inquiry acknowledges the vast amount of available data regarding the impact of the pandemic and restrictions on the wellbeing and mental health of the population. While it is not practical for Module 10 to carry out a similar Systematic Evidence Review on all the topics within the provisional outline of scope, other topics will be examined via other methods in line with our information and evidence-gathering strategy for this module.

Where Core Participants have identified or referred to other available research in their submissions, the Inquiry will carefully consider the extent to which they

The Inquiry has already identified number of expert reports produced in previous modules, which are relevant to Module 10 issues. These are being considered by the Module 10 legal team to determine the extent to which they may assist the investigation for Module 10.

The identities of further instructed experts will be contained in the Solicitor to the Inquiry's update notes. Once experts are instructed, these notes will also provide further details of the topics which the experts will address in their reports, thereby enabling Core Participants to comment on those matters, should they wish to do so. In addition to this, as in other modules, Core Participant organisations will have the opportunity to comment substantially on the content of a draft version of the reports.

It is envisaged that any experts instructed will produce written reports and, where appropriate, they may also give oral evidence at the public hearings for Module 10.

A number of Core Participants in their submissions have made suggestions about areas for potential expert evidence for Module 10 and these will be given careful consideration.

Some of these include the following:
Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK and Northern
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Ireland suggest expert evidence to examine the emotional, psychological and societal consequences of bereavement during the pandemic and on the availability, accessibility and adequacy of bereavement support services during and after the pandemic. They also request that an expert should be instructed to examine the cumulative impact of bereavement, financial hardship and social inequalities.

The Trades Union Congress request expert evidence to examine the impact of outsourced and agency work upon key workers and the role this may have played in terms of inequality of impact.

Shelter encourage the inclusion of expert evidence addressing the intersection of homelessness and poor housing with race and other inequality issues.

Mind suggest the instruction of experts with sufficient experience of working with a diverse range of patients across a range of mental health settings in England and Wales.

The DA Group request the instruction of experts to examine both the impact of the pandemic on those with pre-existing mental health conditions who experienced domestic abuse, those who experienced domestic abuse and, as a result, experienced an effect on their mental health

The Justice Sector Coalition request expert evidence to examine access to frontline advice and legal services, particularly for those vulnerable groups, including those with mental health needs. They also make submissions that expert evidence on the relationship between access to justice and health outcomes during the pandemic ought to be explored.

The Prison and Immigration Detention Advocacy Group makes submissions for experts' psychiatric evidence to be obtained in the context of both prisoners and people in immigration detention, and submits that at least one of the experts should have expertise in the field of psychiatry, specifically in the context of both immigration and criminal incarceration.

The Disabled People's Organisations request expert evidence to examine the following: the impact of loneliness on pre-existing mental health issues for those isolated and shielding; the impact of other aspects of the pandemic response on the mental health and wellbeing of disabled people; the impact on disabled people detained under the Mental Health Act 2007; and the mental health impact on young people, insofar as it supplements matters to be considered in Module 8. The Disabled People's Organisations also request that any expert report should be informed by the Social Model of

Disability.

The Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK and Northern Ireland request psychiatric evidence relating to the impact on the bereaved and that expert evidence should be obtained on the emotional, psychological, and social consequences of bereavement during the pandemic and on the availability, accessibility and adequacy of bereavement support services and, in addition, that any expert should examine the cumulative impact of bereavement, financial hardship and social inequalities.

We are grateful for all of the submissions made by the Core Participants, and will continue to consider these submissions as our investigation progresses.

Our investigation is, and will remain, dynamic, and the Inquiry is continuing to consider which other aspects of the provisional scope would benefit from expert evidence. Core Participants will be kept updated on expert instructions via the monthly update provided.

Rule 9 requests. The Inquiry is at an advanced stage in relation to issuing the first tranche of formal requests for evidence pursuant to Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006, to a number of individuals and organisations, which appear to have an important role in matters relevant to Module 10.

The Inquiry is grateful to Core Participants for

identifying potential recipients of Rule 9 requests and will consider these as part of the ongoing investigation. The Inquiry does not intend to share any Rule 9 requests with Core Participants. This is on the basis that disclosure to Core Participants of the Rule 9 requests themselves, as opposed to the relevant documents and materials generated by them, is neither required by the rules, nor generally established in past practice. However, the Module 10 lead solicitor will continue to keep Core Participants informed about the progress of Rule 9 requests via the monthly update notes

The Module 10 team is considering not only the requests already made by other Inquiry modules but also those made by the Scottish Inquiry. This process means that it may take a little more time to issue Rule 9 requests to Scottish bodies but it is hoped that this process will avoid unnecessary repetition as between the Inquiries. In that regard, on 23 February 2022, the Inquiry published a memorandum of understanding setting out how this Inquiry and the Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry intend to work effectively together, and I am aware that your Ladyship has met with the Chair of the Scottish Inquiry, Lord Brailsford, to discuss the constructive ways in which the two Inquiries can collaborate and

cooperate.

Finally on this topic, Every Story Matters, and its role within Module 10.

This is the Inquiry's nationwide listening exercise. The Inquiry's terms of reference make clear that, although the Inquiry will not investigate individual cases of harm or death in detail, listening to the accounts and experiences of the bereaved families and others who suffered hardship or loss will inform the Inquiry's understanding of the impact of the pandemic and the response, and of lessons to be learned.

Every Story Matters is therefore the process by which the public can contribute to the Inquiry so that it will be able not just to hear the voices of the people of the UK and to reflect upon their experiences but also to incorporate the emerging themes into its work.

Contributions provided through Every Story Matters will be analysed and turned into themed reports called records, which are submitted into each relevant investigation. These reports will be anonymised, disclosed to the Inquiry's Core Participants and used in evidence. The reports are expected to identify trends and themes and include illustrative case studies which will assist in bringing a personalised viewpoint to

Disclosure will be subject to three procedures: firstly a relevance review so that only relevant documents are disclosed; second, a deduplication exercise; and third, redactions in accordance with the Inquiry's redactions protocol.

Disclosure is likely to be in tranches made on a rolling basis and it will be made via the electronic data management and disclosure system, Relativity.

Disclosure updates will be provided by the Module 10 solicitors team informing the Core Participants of the progress which has been made in obtaining relevant documents and we will also provide a further update at the next preliminary hearing.

The Inquiry has begun by reviewing documents from previous modules that have been identified as having potential relevance to Module 10 issues. The process of disclosure to Core Participants in this module is anticipated to begin in late spring this year.

The Inquiry will be asking document providers to locate and disclose documents that are likely to be relevant to the Module 10 investigation. Where the Inquiry has any queries or concerns about a provider's processes for locating relevant documents, it will raise them and pursue them and, of course, as documents are reviewed and gaps identified, further documents will be

different themes of impact. Every Story Matters records have already been used in hearings for Modules 3 and 4.

It is not too late for anyone to contribute.

Although the public events phase has now ended, Every Story Matters wishes to obtain insights and information from anyone in the UK and over 18 who was impacted by the pandemic and wishes to share their experience.

There are different ways for people to share their experience of the pandemic with the Inquiry. This can be done via our webform and a variety of alternative formats including Easy Read and paper forms.

The Inquiry acknowledges the helpful submissions provided by Core Participants, particularly in relation to the range of experiences to be reflected in the ESM records and the need to capture the experiences of various groups whose voices are seldom heard. Module 10 is giving careful consideration to these matters and will provide a further update in the coming weeks.

My Lady, my penultimate topic this morning is disclosure. In common with the approach taken in previous modules, Module 10 will adopt the following approach to disclosure:

All Core Participants will receive all documents disclosed in Module 10, not just those documents relevant to them.

sought.

Should the need arise, then your Ladyship has the power to compel the production of documents under Section 21 of the Inquiries Act. In addition to which, there are provisions in Section 35 of the Inquiries Act, which makes it an offence during the course of an inquiry for a person to do anything to alter or distort a relevant document or prevent any relevant document being produced to the Inquiry, or to intentionally destroy, suppress or conceal a relevant document.

With regards to the disclosure generally, the Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK and Northern Ireland request that the Inquiry should set a firm deadline by which the bulk of Module 10 disclosure will be completed and request that this should be no later than two months before the start of the module. The Inquiry understands that disclosure is only meaningful if it is provided in good time, allowing both the Inquiry and Core Participants to properly review material and make informed contributions. The Inquiry will remain focused on timely disclosure to ensure an effective process.

Finally, my Lady, I turn to future hearing dates and other matters.

As you know, the current plans are for a further 40

preliminary hearing for Module 10 to take place here at Dorland House towards the end of this year, and then for the public hearings to take place here over three weeks in early 2026. Further timetabling details will be provided by way of an update to Core Participants and announced on the Inquiry's website once those details are finalised.

My Lady, I know that, once you have had an opportunity to consider the written submissions and those that are going to be made orally to you today, you will publish any appropriate directions in due course. It is a matter for your discretion as to whether any of the written submissions received by you should be published on the Inquiry's website.

That concludes all of the matters upon which I wish to address you this morning. Your Ladyship has received written submissions from 13 Core Participants, many of which have been referred to within my oral address.

I understand that 12 Core Participants also wish to address my Lady orally and so, unless I can assist you any further, may I invite you to hear firstly from Ms Stone who represents the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice.

24 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Blackwell.
 25 Certainly. Ms Stone, I would be grateful to hear

Sorry about this Ms Stone, nothing personal, I assure you.

**MS STONE:** No, I did actually see it happen to Ms Campbell, so I wasn't primed but I understood what was happening.

My Lady, you can see and hear me okay now, I trust? Good morning. I am mindful of what you say, my Lady, about time.

As you know, I represent Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK, which comprises a wide range of around 7,000 people who were bereaved by Covid-19 across the UK. As you also know well, the goal of CBFFJ UK has always been to establish the truth about how our members' loved ones died, to participate effectively in pursuit of that truth and, in doing so, to ensure accountability and prevent future deaths.

Within this Inquiry, we seek to assist you in achieving those goals, my Lady, and we welcome the opportunity to participate in, and assist you with, this important last module of the Inquiry. My Lady, you're familiar with that background and also, I think, with our overarching procedural submissions, including those, for example, on disclosure which have been addressed by Ms Blackwell, King's Counsel this morning.

As always, we'd be keen to work in partnership with your team to ensure that this module is rigorous and

1 what you have to say.

Can I just say this on behalf in respect of all Core Participants: we've got a lot to get through so I'm afraid I'm going to have to be tough on timing, and so I urge people not to try to exceed their time estimate.

Ms Stone.

Submissions on behalf of Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK by MS STONE

 $\,$  MS STONE: My Lady, good morning. Could I just check that

10 you can see and hear me okay?

11 LADY HALLETT: Can't hear you, Ms Stone.

**MS STONE:** You can't hear me, the microphone is on.

13 LADY HALLETT: It might be that seat. We had problems

14 before.

**MS STONE**: Still no good?

16 LADY HALLETT: No.

**MS STONE**: No?

18 LADY HALLETT: I will do a thumbs-up when I can hear you.

19 MS STONE: I am grateful for that, thank you.20 MS BLACKWELL: My Lady, can you hear me?

21 LADY HALLETT: Yes, I can. This happened before.

 $\,$  MS BLACKWELL:  $\,$  Yes, I'm going to invite Ms Stone to come and

23 take my place.

24 LADY HALLETT: Yes, we had this with Ms Campbell, who had to

25 do exactly the same.

thorough and, in this regard, my Lady, we note that we're still at an early stage in this module, and we respectfully agree with the TUC written submission that the length of hearings that will ultimately take place should be kept under review.

My Lady, this morning could I address you briefly, please, on three topic areas: the first is scope; the second is the Systematic Review and expert evidence; and the third is the evidence of the bereaved.

On the first, scope, this module rightly, in our respectful submission, seeks to address the impact of the pandemic on the population as a whole, with particular focus on a number of groups affected in different ways, including the bereaved.

We support the Inquiry and its intention to consider the specific impact on other groups, including key workers and those who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We would submit that this can only be done effectively by considering pre-existing inequalities, considering structural and institutional discrimination and how those inequalities were exacerbated both by the pandemic and also by the response to it, and how we can address and mitigate those impacts for the future.

My Lady, as you have heard throughout this Inquiry,

the time to do this work is now, and we submit that the Inquiry must be a strong force in driving those efforts.

My Lady, our members come from across UK society and many of them were directly affected by the pandemic, not only through their bereavement, although that was profound, but also from their particular perspectives, for example as key workers or as members of minoritised communities, and those intersectional impacts will be a key aspect, I know, of your investigation in this module.

My Lady, the written submissions emphasise the singularity of the experience of bereavement in the pandemic, and I know again this is something that you will have well in mind, including as a result of the evidence that you've heard to date in other modules.

As our written submissions have it, our families navigated grief in circumstances where restrictions on hospital visits, funerals, other rituals, deeply altered the experience of bereavement and mourning, depriving the bereaved of the solace which many of us find in those rituals, and increasing the trauma associated with profound loss. This was also a context in which social networks were disrupted and access to bereavement support services was often limited.

So this impact, in both its personal and societal

how, firstly, disruptions to children and family life, including education, and secondly, the economic impacts of the pandemic affected the experience of the bereaved and other focus groups, and we welcome the indication from Ms Blackwell this morning that your team is mindful of the potential relevance of modules eight and nine here.

Turning then to the second topic which is the Systematic Review and expert evidence. As to the Systematic Review, we welcome the provision of further information this morning, and we will take that information away and reflect upon it. We do invite the Inquiry to provide further opportunities for input from Core Participants on that process, including the bereaved, before the process is finalised.

As to expert evidence, we pause here to note the value of this evidence in the modules you've heard to date, and submit that again in Module 10 this is likely to provide you with crucial information to assist in your wide-ranging scope of Inquiry. We would submit substantively that expert evidence from Module 2 on inequalities should inform the investigations on Module 10, with proper consideration with input from Core Participants, on whether supplementary reports should be sought from the experts that you instructed in

impacts, must be examined in this module as a formal record and also as a means of learning both what went right, and crucially, what can and should be improved for the next pandemic.

It's clear, my Lady, that the impact of bereavement will have been experienced differently for different people, and we again welcome the Inquiry's commitment to identify it and consider where the impact was disproportionately felt and how we might address that for the future.

We appreciate, my Lady, that you have carefully considered how best to fulfil your terms of reference through the modular structure of the Inquiry. However, the pandemic doesn't lend itself easily to being neatly divided into sections, and no one, I know, is more aware of the cross-cutting nature of many of these issues than you, my Lady.

But that has particular resonance in this module, which as you pre-figured in your opening remarks, requires you to examine how many of the issues which by then you'll have heard evidence about impacted society as a whole.

And in our written document we've touched on two particular areas where this arises, and we submit that your Module 10 consideration of impact should consider

Module 2 of the Inquiry.

The second substantive submission I make is one that Ms Blackwell has again mentioned this morning, which is one of expert evidence relating to impact on the bereaved. We would submit that this is necessary in at least two respects, the first being expert evidence to assist you in understanding how bereavement, loss and grief are fundamentally changed by the experience of loss in a pandemic situation, what that particular context does to the grieving process, and we would submit that that will inform your understanding of mental health impacts of the pandemic and how we might prepare better for the future to mitigate those adverse impacts.

The second submission we make in respect of expert evidence is that we would invite you to obtain an overview of the range of the bereavement support services across the UK, their effectiveness during the pandemic, and what would be in place in a future emergency, to include, in my respectful submission, practical suggestions for improvement for the future to assist you in making robust recommendations and we appreciate, again, the indication from Ms Blackwell that those submissions will be considered.

Finally, my Lady, may I turn to the key topic of

evidence from the bereaved. My Lady, in our submission, your Inquiry to date has been enriched by hearing directly from those who have been affected by the topic areas under consideration, including the bereaved. Their powerful evidence has provided an essential reminder of the human impact of Covid, and there is a particular imperative, in our respectful submission, to hear that evidence in this module, which is dedicated to the impact on the population.

In our submission, whatever their value as a parallel process, the roundtables and similar processes are no substitute for oral evidence. We also emphasise in our written submissions the need to ensure that those processes are truly inclusive and trauma-informed, and we welcome the indication this morning that the Core Participants' submissions on those processes will be reflected upon by your team.

As far as oral evidence is concerned, though, from the perspective of Covid Bereaved Families for Justice UK, you've heard most recently from Jean Rossiter in Module 4, who was able to articulate number of her concerns and those of the wider group around the provision of vaccines and therapeutics for Covid-19.

As well as her powerful evidence about the experience of her son Peter, a teacher, a key worker,

and the depth of her loss, she said this:

"I believe all of our families really deserve to be heard and for those cases to be taken into account."

My Lady, we submit that this has resonance throughout your Inquiry and particularly in this module. We recognise the Inquiry's position in respect of individual cases, although our members remain concerned about the lack of effective mechanisms to examine individual deaths during the pandemic, and we invite you to include mechanisms of investigation as part of the Inquiry's consideration of the impact of bereavement in this module.

But may I finish, my Lady, by repeating the call made in writing by us and other Core Participants for the Inquiry to prioritise calling a significant number of witnesses who were directly affected, and whose lives were profoundly changed by this pandemic. It can never be comprehensive but a diverse range of accounts will, in our submission, assist you in fully appreciating those impacts. We submit that giving due prominence in the hearings to the voices of those impacted, including the bereaved, is essential both to their understanding, but also to ensuring that the public recognises their importance and centrality to this Inquiry.

My Lady, unless I can assist you any further, those

are my submissions.

LADY HALLETT: I'm extremely grateful, Ms Stone. Very helpful. In relation to the circumstances of unusual deaths, as you will know and I'm sure as you've advised your clients, I'm forbidden to investigate, by my terms of reference, but I do understand the points you made about bereavement during the time of pandemic and I'm very grateful to you.

9 MS STONE: Thank you.

10 LADY HALLETT: Right. We'll break now and I shall return at11 11.55. Thank you.

12 (11.40 am)

## (A short break)

14 (11.55 am)

MS BLACKWELL: My Lady, I think we're now ready to turn to
 Ms McDermott, who will address you on behalf of Covid
 Bereaved Families for Justice Northern Ireland.

**LADY HALLETT:** Thank you very much. Ms McDermott, I hope your microphone is working.

Submissions on behalf of Covid-19 Bereaved Families For Justice Northern Ireland by MS McDERMOTT

MS McDERMOTT: Hopefully so, my Lady. I certainly can hearmyself.

My Lady, thank you. I represent the Northern
Ireland Covid Bereaved Families for Justice led by Peter
51

Wilcock KC, Brenda Campbell KC, and instructed by PA Duffy Solicitors. And may I start by thanking you for the opportunity to address you on Module 10.

Now, my Lady, I note your comments this morning about being tough on time limits, and you can fully appreciate you'll have no cause to be tough on me today.

My Lady, you are all too aware of the written submissions that we've already presented, and we're grateful for the thoughtful way in which they were addressed this morning by Ms Blackwell KC.

Our message, however, remains clear: the primary mission of the Northern Ireland Covid Bereaved Families for Justice has, and always will be, to expose the failures within the systems that left our loved ones vulnerable to a deadly virus. These systems tragically did not protect them and, in turn, the pain suffered by those left behind is profound. We firmly believe that things could and should have been different. The UK could have been better prepared. Families could have been better protected.

From the very beginning, the Northern Ireland Covid Bereaved Families for Justice have striven to contribute meaningfully to this Inquiry, and today's submissions are made in the same spirit of constructive collaboration and, as always, to echo and adopt the

powerful submissions made by Ms Stone this morning for the Covid Bereaved UK team.

For our clients, Module 10 is a critical juncture in this process. It offers the crucial opportunity to explore not just the pain of loss but the breakdown in support systems and, most importantly, the lessons that must be learned to ensure this never happens again.

The experience of bereavement during the pandemic was a uniquely harrowing one. Grieving families found themselves in a world where the very rituals that sustained us through loss for centuries were ripped away.

The absence of these practices, the denial of traditional wakes and funerals, and the inability to gather for a final farewell, these were more than just inconveniences; they were wounds upon wounds. In a time of loss, families were left isolated and abandoned, forced to navigate their grief alone.

As you are aware, the restrictions placed upon us during this time and the inconsistent, often illogical, nature of these rules meant that our family group were not just a minor inconvenience; they were a cruel denial of the human need to say goodbye.

Within our group, we've heard from countless families about the crushing heartbreak of not being able

Loss has a lasting impact, and removal of traditional mourning rituals left families as though adrift, orbiting grief, with no tether to steady them.

Those customs, which have supported us for generations, are not merely for the dead; they're for the living, for the ones left behind. To strip away those rituals was to strip away the very foundation that helps us heal. It left families suspended in grief without the community support that should have been theirs.

I'm very grateful to Ms Blackwell KC for her submissions this morning recognising the impact, as she so eloquently put it, the lack of support structure that are so fundamental to the human experience. And we note the inclusion within this module of the restrictions and arrangements for funeral and burial arrangements and post-bereavement support.

To that end, it is essential that Module 10 considers the deep emotional toil of this bereavement. It's not just about the loss of life; it's about the loss of everything that should have helped people mourn. We believe it is imperative that the Inquiry addresses these devastating realities so that no other family has to suffer in this way.

And to that end, I echo Ms Stone's submissions and 55

to lay loved ones to rest in the way they should have been, surrounded by family, with the support of a community. Instead, families were made to feel as though their loved ones, already taken by the virus, were nothing more than a dangerous object, treated as hazardous waste, rather than cherished people.

One poignant account is that of Claire Smith, who told the heart-wrenching story of how her mother was sealed in a body bag, placed in a coffin, and taken away by the funeral home. Claire had no choice but to leave her mother behind. She was not allowed to bring her home, and it was as though her mother was treated as a threat even in death.

The funeral was limited to just 15 people, and at the crematorium, they were forced to watch the service from a distance, watching on by way of video link. Was it really impossible to even shelter those who came to mourn, to allow them the smallest of comfort to being together if only in spirit?

Annetta Milliken, another of our clients, has shared devastating ongoing effects of her father's death. Her family's grief is raw, and her mother continues to struggle with the trauma. Annetta's words echo the anguish that so many families feel: our lives are shattered.

implore your Ladyship to hear as many voices as you can. It is only then that you can truly feel the texture of their experience.

As we have seen in the testimonies from other members of the Covid Bereaved Families for Justice, both in Northern Ireland and across the UK, bereavement during the pandemic didn't occur in isolation. It was compounded by financial hardship, educational disruption, and the broader societal inequalities that so many are already grappling with.

The financial devastation of losing a loved one, especially for those in precarious employment, was made infinitely worse by the pandemic's relentless toll.

Many families not only mourned the death of a loved one, they also found themselves plunged into poverty, unable to make ends meet.

Regrettably, it is common case that Northern Ireland has some of the poorest areas in the United Kingdom, historically suffering from lack of budgetary planning, given the various absences in government, most recently between 2017 to 2020, and then again from February 2022 until February 2024, and it therefore follows that the implementation of effective economic measures to assist those most vulnerable is perhaps even more significant in Northern Ireland than any other part in the UK, given

its already susceptible economic state.

Furthermore, Northern Ireland, together with other devolved administrations, is inextricably linked financially to the UK Treasury, both during peacetime and during pandemic. These decisions made by the UK Treasury had a significant impact in the nature and time of economic interventions in all of the devolved governments during the pandemic, and the lack of autonomy and such vital issues for Northern Ireland means that fair and balanced economic interventions by the UK Government during Covid carried even more importance than it otherwise would.

In addition, the interruption of education for children and young people, many of whom lost parents or caregivers, was devastating. The emotional burden of losing a parent while already struggling with an educational system in chaos compounded the anguish. For families already dealing with the grief of losing someone they loved, the financial and educational impact was almost too much to bear.

Whilst the Northern Ireland Covid Bereaved Families for Justice were not CP to Module 8, we do have a particular interest in, and importantly, can assist issues that perhaps, we would suggest, this Inquiry is now best to consider in Module 10, and that is the

We urge the Inquiry to consider these intersections to explore not just the immediate effects of bereavement but the long lasting, multifaceted repercussions that ripple through society.

We are aware of the Inquiry's plans to gather information through roundtable events and Every Story Matters, but we strongly believe that these events must be conducted with great care. Bereaved families need an environment where they can speak freely, without fear of retraumatisation. We urge that these events be organised with the guidance of professionals trained in bereavement support, to ensure that they're conducted in a sensitive and compassionate way.

Fundamentally, the voices of the bereaved must be at the heart of this module. We cannot allow for the voices of ordinarily people, those who suffered the greatest losses, to be drowned out. Politicians may have had their say, but it is the lived experience of those left behind, the families of the lost, that must drive this Inquiry forward. Therefore, voices must not only be heard but they must also be prioritised.

To that end, we note the clarification from

Ms Blackwell KC this morning setting out the proposed
arrangements for the roundtable meetings but we continue
to be concerned that an unfortunate and unwanted side

extent to which Northern Ireland Assembly planned and considered the impact of a pandemic on children and young people.

Many of our group have profound experiences of their children and grandchildren suffering severe mental health issues because of the pandemic. Many children and young people were wholly unable to cope with the anxiety of the pandemic, including coping with bereavement and tragedy in their families -- for many, experienced not before or immediately anticipated -- and an inability to seek comfort and mourn with others because of the lack of funeral rites, and challenges in dealing with the shock and trauma of losing a loved one who previously was physically fit and healthy.

Singularly, and cumulatively, these experiences stripped children of the resilience which has led to long-term mental health problems brought about by the trauma they've experienced. I note the comments made by Ms Blackwell KC this morning in respect of matters which will be considered in Module 8 will not naturally be revisited in Module 10, but we do feel we have contribution to make on this topic and invite your Ladyship to extend the Inquiry's examination in this respect under the guise of mental health and/or ongoing long-term impact.

effect of the approach taken may be to add to the perception of many of the group that I represent that Northern Ireland issues, albeit not intentionally, have been sidelined during the course of the Inquiry.

Finally, we stress that the Inquiry must include expert evidence on emotional, psychological and social consequences of bereavement during the pandemic. The pandemic's impact on families was not just an abstract statistic, it was felt in the hearts and minds of those who were left to pick up the pieces. We must understand the full breath of this pain and we urge the Inquiry to bring in expertise necessary to fully grasp the scope of emotional and social toll that has been borne.

We note the comments made by Ms Blackwell KC that our submissions in respect of expert evidence are under continued consideration as your investigation progresses

In conclusion, my Lady, the pandemic was not only a time of loss; it was a time when the very systems meant to support us failed.

For the bereaved families, it was a time when grief became almost unbearable, compounded by trauma of isolation, financial hardship and societal disruption. We urge you to assent to the voices of the bereaved in to Module 10, and to ensures that the lessons learned

from their suffering guide the response to a future crisis. My Lady, those are the submissions made on behalf of the Northern Ireland Covid Bereaved, thank you. LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms McDermott. Very, very grateful. Mr Stanton is next, I think. Submissions on behalf of COVID-19 BEREAVED FAMILIES FOR JUSTICE CYMRU by MR STANTON MR STANTON: Thank you, my Lady. I hope you can hear me. My Lady, these submissions are made on behalf of the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru and concern the nature of the impact evidence to be provided by the bereaved. The group welcomes the Inquiry's intention to hold roundtable events and to utilise the accounts provided through the Every Story Matters process. However, we suggest that the most effective and 

However, we suggest that the most effective and public means of considering the impacts on the bereaved will be to allow sufficient time within the Inquiry's hearings for these issues to be comprehensively and sensitively addressed in a public forum.

As outlined in the group's Module 6 submissions on impact evidence in relation to care homes, the group's view is that it will not be sufficient for a single group member to summarise the collective experiences of

Third, while it is appreciated that the Inquiry is able to receive evidence in a number of forms and gives careful consideration to all information provided, the hearings are widely seen as the gold standard and it will be important for impact evidence from the bereaved to be taken in this forum.

Fourth, because of the sheer scale of these impacts on the population of the country, with millions of people having experienced bereavement during the pandemic.

Fifth, impact evidence illuminates and gives context to many of the complex and technical issues that the Inquiry is required to consider.

For example, in Module 3, the Inquiry heard evidence from a physiotherapist who provided close personal care to a patient with Covid-19 in the first wave of the pandemic and who specifically requested an FFP3 respirator to protect against infection. This was refused and led to the physiotherapist becoming infected and developing long Covid with devastating ongoing consequences for her professional and personal life.

We suggest that impact evidence such as this, which crystallises the real-life consequences of technical and contentious issues, search as aerosol transmission and the precautionary principle, has been invaluable to the

the bereaved families and that, to do justice to the impacts experienced, it will be necessary to take a range of witness statements from bereaved group members. We suggest this could be achieved with somewhere in the region of between 10 to 15 witness statements from each group, from which a lesser number of witnesses could be selected for oral evidence, and that these statements could be kept to a manageable length.

We also suggest that the same process for obtaining impact evidence could be managed across Modules 6 and 10.

The Cymru group entirely accepts that it is outside the scope of the Inquiry to investigate and determine individual circumstances of harm and death. However, we submit that it will be important to obtain a range of statements and to hear from a number of witnesses at Inquiry hearings for the following reasons:

First, to properly understand the full range of the devastating impacts experienced.

Second, as part of a process of catharsis, alongside initiatives such as Every Story Matters, particularly for the members of the Bereaved Families groups, who have campaigned so tirelessly for so long and have been so actively within the Inquiry's proceedings.

Inquiry's understanding and that impact evidence from bereaved groups will have a similar evidential significance, for example the experiences of many families when a parent with underlying health issues was admitted to hospital for treatment during the pandemic, knowing that this was the least safe place for them to because of the poor state of NHS estates and the inability to control infection in these environments, and the terrible foreboding, as their worst fears were realised when a loved one became infected while in hospital and, in too many cases, tragically died.

The group's written submissions set out a lengthy list of impacts experienced, from which I propose to highlight just three issues to further illustrate the benefits of impact evidence in helping the Inquiry determine complex and contentious issues, all of which might also form the basis of recommendations for the future.

The first is the lack of information provided to families about the circumstances in which their loved one died and the subsequent handling of complaints. Given the circumstances in which people in hospitals and care homes died, often alone, due to visiting restrictions, many families understandably sought further information. However, the responses provided

were often insufficient, incomplete and contradictory and, in many cases, this led to formal complaints which were themselves characterised by insufficient and contradictory responses.

The failure to provide timely, accurate and sufficient information can sometimes lead to grieving families constructing their own narratives to fill the vacuum out of a need for closure but, without access to the full facts, these narratives are not always accurate and it can often take many years for the truth to be established, if at all.

The group suggests that the Inquiry's understanding of these issues and the way that bereavement is prolonged and exacerbated by the failure to provide adequate and timely information would benefit from expert evidence, particularly so the Inquiry is able to make recommendations for improvements in this area.

Issues specific to Wales in this regard are the National Nosocomial Covid-19 Programme, established in April 2022, which the Cymru group understood would comprehensively investigate individual deaths from nosocomial infection but was subsequently limited to a thematic review and an inadequate 24-page final report.

Separately, the NHS duty of candour was only

Wales, which has been justified on the basis of documenting the pandemic for journalistic purposes in the public interest but which the group says occurred without consent. The taking and subsequent publication of photographs of this type, including in morgues and of intubated and unconscious patients, where consent could not possibly have been obtained, has caused huge distress to bereaved families.

While the Cymru group does not expect the Inquiry to determine any individual breaches of data protection and confidentiality, it is an issue of widespread public concern that would benefit from the Inquiry's scrutiny, including the role of trusts and boards in permitting this type of activity and the extent to which patient confidentiality can be overridden by the public interest in recording an event, such as a pandemic, which the Cymru group seriously doubts could ever be justified in the absence of express consent.

Finally, my Lady, a point about cross-cutting issues and evidence. By the time the Inquiry hears evidence in Module 10 it will have heard and considered a huge range of evidence across 12 prior modules, as has already been mentioned. This will include significant amounts of impact evidence in a variety of forms, including witness statements, oral evidence, and documentary evidence.

introduced in Wales in April 2023, five years after Scotland and three years after England, and also the lack of a strong voice in Wales to speak on behalf of patients, which is particularly important, given the deficiencies in the provision of information, the inadequate investigations and complaints processes, and the absence of effective regulation in Wales.

The second issue is the quality of bereavement support services within health and social care settings in Wales. There have been a number of initiatives since the pandemic, however, they have failed to deliver the change needed because of a lack of engagement with families and a lack of learning from the awful experiences of the pandemic. In this respect, the group asks that the Inquiry considers issuing a Rule 9 request to the Welsh Government bereavement lead, as set out in the written submissions.

The group also suggests that the Inquiry could usefully consider the Charter for Families Bereaved Through Public Tragedy, which was drafted in response to the Hillsborough tragedy, and, again, that this is an area that would benefit from recommendations for improvement.

The third issue to mention is the circumstances in which photographs of patients were taken in hospitals in

The group suggests that Core Participant groups who have participated in a number of Inquiry modules are well placed to assist the Inquiry to identify impact evidence from previous modules for use in Module 10, and that engagement of this kind could be managed in a proportionate way, without the need for a formal protocol, and would utilise the knowledge and unique perspectives of Core Participants, built up over a number of years at the Inquiry, to the Inquiry's

My Lady, those are the submissions on behalf of the Covid Bereaved Families for Justice Cymru.

13 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Stanton. Very14 helpful.

Dr Mitchell, I think you're next.

Submissions on behalf of SCOTTISH COVID BEREAVED by DR
MITCHELL KC

DR MITCHELL: My Lady, the Scottish Covid Bereaved thank the Chair for their designation as Core Participant in this module and are grateful to Ms Blackwell KC to the Inquiry for providing a detailed note in advance of today's hearing and for the submissions this morning. We have already put our thanks for the Inquiry's work and its workers in writing and we repeat it here.

I would like to address the following two matters:

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1. Roundtable events. The bereaved hears that roundtable events are to be held in London for logistic and resource reasons. Somewhat ironically, it's for the exact same reasons, in relation to their logistics and resources, that the Scottish Covid Bereaved would ask that a roundtable be held in Scotland.

This is, of course, an Inquiry for the whole of the United Kingdom and while travel expenses are to be reimbursed, those are not the only barriers to many of the bereaved, particularly for those outwith the southeast of England. A one-day roundtable in London may necessitate two to three days away from home in Scotland. For those with, for example, childcare and other caring responsibilities, this may be a significant factor, including where they may have lost a care partner as part of their Covid experience.

There are additional considerations in relation to travel for those with disabilities. The Scottish Covid Bereaved ask the Inquiry to consider holding roundtable events in Scotland to allow for equal opportunity for all those who suffered to outline the impacts on the pandemic that they had. It's respectfully submitted that setting up a day in Scotland, perhaps liaising with the Scottish Inquiry to minimise cost for a location to carry out a roundtable, would not be a significant

We submit that the Chair may be assisted from more of such witnesses, hearing directly from those who suffered and those who were bereaved as a result of the pandemic, not, of course, to explore the individual case but, as in other modules, to explore certain common important themes.

We appreciate this may lead to a slightly longer timetable, but we would submit that it would reap considerable rewards in terms of impact.

As we have mentioned before in previous submissions, in order to engage the general public and politicians to support and see merit in recommendations, there is no better way of highlighting the importance of the Inquiry's work than by evidence from the people who were most greatly affected by it. Again, as noted before, the press is most positive when covering stories of those directly affected.

The Scottish Covid Bereaved submit that, given the scope of Module 10, the Inquiry should consider hearing directly, perhaps, from more of those witnesses impacted, and we ask the Chair to consider greater use of the impact evidence in the public hearings in this module.

My Lady, those are the submissions on behalf of the Scottish Covid Bereaved. 71

budgetary strain, particularly if the alternative is that the Inquiry assists with travel and accommodation for those travelling down south, nor may it be a significantly greater logistical problem than has been faced by the Inquiry before and has not been found to be insurmountable.

The Scottish Covid Bereaved have felt that the promise that it would truly be a four-nation Inquiry has been kept and we would ask the Chair to consider this submission in light of the foregoing.

The second issue is in relation to evidence in Module 2 and perhaps the following submission will not be of surprise to my Lady. It's submitted that the roundtable exercise and Every Story Matters, whilst important, cannot capture, in the same way as direct evidence, the impact that the pandemic had on the bereaved. One only has to recall the impact of hearing of those who have given personal evidence about their experiences and the profound effect they've had on our understanding of the effects of Covid.

It was one thing to read that doctors were working beyond capacity with insufficient PPE; it was quite another to see and hear the evidence of Dr Fong talking about it, enhancing our understanding, and the impact felt of those experiences.

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LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Mitchell.

Right, I think Mr Wagner is next.

MR WAGNER: I am. Can you hear me? LADY HALLETT: I can, Mr Wagner, thank you, and I can see

Submissions on behalf of CLINICALLY VULNERABLE FAMILIES by MR WAGNER

MR WAGNER: Thank you. Good afternoon. I act for Clinically Vulnerable Families, CVF, with Margherita Cornaglia, and instructed by Kim Harrison and Shane Smith of Slater & Gordon.

CVF represents those who are clinically vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable, and the severely immunosuppressed, as well as their households, across all four nations. CVF are grateful to you, Chair, for granting it Core Participant status, having already been granted CP status in Modules 3, 4 and 8. CVF also thanks the Inquiry team, including the staff at Dorland House, for their continuing work on this and other modules.

I'll begin with the broader picture, and what the impact of society means from the perspective of the clinically vulnerable. Module 10 provides an important opportunity, we say the final opportunity, given it's the final module, for the Inquiry to take account of the

severe and lasting impact that the pandemic has had on clinically vulnerable people and their families.

Clinically vulnerable people had a different experience of the pandemic, being most at risk of severe injury and death from Covid-19. When society reopened for many, it did not reopen for some who were clinically vulnerable. Many remained in their homes with no choice but to shield themselves, even after formal shielding ended, from a virus which, if they became infected, would potentially lead to their deaths.

There is an important point about how the Inquiry frames this part of the investigation. The first part of the outline of scope refers to the measures put in place to combat the disease and any disproportionate impact and, later, it refers to restrictions imposed on various parts of society.

CVF says that the more neutral wording of "measures" should be used going forward. The distinction is an important one, because whichever is chosen will frame the way the Inquiry approaches the impact on society. Often, protective measures, such as social distancing rules, compulsory mask wearing, were described as "restrictions", and the lifting of those measures was often referred to as the "return of freedom". Without doubt, some felt restricted by those measures, as

and long term, to protect the public.

Speaking of the longer term, it was reassuring to hear Ms Blackwell KC's submissions this morning that Module 10's focus on impact may include an assessment of the likely impact which may extend beyond the date range in the Inquiry's terms of reference. For example, in relation to ongoing or longer term impact.

As I have submitted previously, and your Ladyship accepted in an early ruling, it's necessary to consider both present and future in order to make effective recommendations. That's just common sense.

People who are particularly vulnerable to pathogens existed before Covid, but during the pandemic, for a brief moment, clinically vulnerable people became visible to everyone else. For that brief moment, the opportunity was there to educate the public, businesses and public authorities, on the importance of high-quality masks, ventilation, and clean air, and make steps towards lasting change in those areas. That opportunity wasn't taken. And that applies across the board, including in the spaces this module will focus on, such as courts, prisons, the hospitality sector and places of worship.

Covid-19 may no longer kill as many people as it did in 2020, but it has not transitioned to a seasonal

a seatbelt can also be feel restrictive, and when seatbelts were introduced, they were seen by some as a limit on our freedom. Nobody seriously says that now. Why? Because there was a public education campaign and, more simply, there was proof that seatbelts worked.

Like seatbelts, pandemic safety measures were needed to keep us safe, particularly for the millions of people at serious risk of injury or death from Covid-19. CVF doesn't say that all of those measures should have continued, of course they shouldn't, but some could have or some could have been developed or evolved. Why? Well, the continuing framing of safety measures as restrictions may have prevented simple measures from making us more safe, such as clean air and mask wearing, from being continued in a proportionate way in the longer term.

Unfortunately, the issue of masks was dragged into a culture war, rather than being seen as an important protective public health measure. Your Ladyship heard from Dr Finnis of CVF in her evidence in Module 3 that people who continue to wear masks to this day for health reasons now face public abuse and discrimination.

The other, wider consequence of this dynamic is that no serious consideration appears to have been given to what measures can be put in place now, and in the medium

virus, and it's still rife, as are flu, norovirus and other airborne pathogens such as RSV.

A more enlightened approach to ventilation and other safety measures would reduce the spread of all airborne infections, not just in a future pandemic but now.

Investment in those measures would also reduce the need, in a future pandemic, for social distancing measures and to make those spaces safer not just for high-risk people but for everyone.

The failure to do this has had profound impacts for clinically vulnerable people. Immunocompromised clinically vulnerable people have no preventative medication to rely on, and many cannot depend on vaccinations. The antivirals programme is in disarray, providing little reassurance to people at high risk of Covid-19 should they become infected, and many millions, including the majority of clinically vulnerable and formerly -- and clinically extremely vulnerable, as formerly described, face being removed from the Covid vaccination programme later this year.

Some of those issues are wider issues for different modules, but the overall impact and the impact on society, as this module is considering, is a great loss, not just for clinically vulnerable people but for society at large.

Many clinically vulnerable people have ended up feeling excluded from a society which left them behind in the rush to escape from restrictions and towards the false promise of freedom day. Excluded from the workplace, from crowded and poorly ventilated spaces, and certainly from the public consciousness, from visible to invisible, again.

Against those wider points, I turn to the provisional outline of scope.

The clinically vulnerable cannot remain invisible, and CVF are concerned that the provisional scope makes only passing reference to clinically vulnerable people without properly integrating them into the three provisional scope topics or into the 13 questions which the Inquiry team has posed itself, albeit we've been told this morning they are very much provisional.

There is no clinically vulnerable roundtable. There is no reference to clinical vulnerability in the potential instruction of experts. And we note and welcome Ms Blackwell KC's reassurance that the team is listening to Core Participant concerns, but we also note that she did not announce any changes to the scope or even the indicative questions. And it's important, we submit, that there are changes before the evidence-gathering process properly begins.

a court, to people who weren't clinically vulnerable.

CVF does not propose any amendment to this topic but assumes that any inequality in the impact of -- the wording of the provisional outline of scope -- will include consideration of clinically vulnerable key workers, given the overall focus of this module.

And on provisional scope topic 3, it's important that this topic, which is about vulnerability, makes clear reference to the clinically vulnerable, not just in its text, but in its substance. And CVF is concerned that there is insufficient focus on how clinically vulnerable people will be considered within this topic, because, of course, vulnerability is a wide concept.

And CVF has also raised an additional issue at paragraph 27 about the variation of support and the variation in safety measures across different parts of the UK.

CVF, from paragraph 28, has proposed a number of additional questions and some slight edits to some of the indicative questions that the Inquiry team have posed themselves. And I don't read them out now, but they are there for your Ladyship's consideration from paragraph 28 of our submissions.

Expert reports.

We submit that the expert evidence should explicitly

The experience of clinically vulnerable people should be considered in relation to all the subtopics in this module. This is because in every social space where the pandemic impacted, that impact was different and often more severe for those who are clinically vulnerable. That includes the places Module 10 will be investigating.

CVF have proposed some amendments to the provisional scope and certain questions to ensure the experiences of clinically vulnerable people are not left out of accounts. So on provisional scope, topic 1, we have proposed a relatively small change, adding a simple line to the long paragraph:

"... including the impact of those who could not benefit from reopening, such as many clinically vulnerable people."

This, again, is about framing because reopening implies -- or it does more than imply -- that society was open for everyone, but from the perspective of clinically vulnerable people, it simply was not. And for some, it still is not to this day.

On provisional scope topic 2, it's important that the experience of clinically vulnerable key workers are covered by Module 10 because, again, they had a very different experience, whether in a school or a prison or

cover the impact on clinically vulnerable people, both on their mental health and generally.

Roundtables.

It's very important to CVF that a roundtable is added to assess the impact of the pandemic on the clinically vulnerable, but in any case, clinically vulnerable representative groups should be invited to the existing roundtables.

And finally, final substantive point on the length of hearing, I don't think CTI dealt with this in her submissions this morning, but it is a topic that's raised by a number of CPs, and we say simply this: that similar submissions about the length were made in the build-up to Module 4, which was also three weeks, which ultimately ended up being about 12 days or 11 days of evidence. And whilst the Inquiry team did an excellent job of packing in the witnesses, four or five per day, the inevitable impact is it reduces the length of time for questioning by Core Participants to very, very little; a maximum of five minutes, I think, in Module 4. And in my respectful submission, that should be prioritised in Module 10, particularly as this is the impact on society module, and given the breadth of topics, it may simply not be practical to do anything different to have a module with any less than four or

five witnesses per day, so I do respectfully ask that your Ladyship considers that point.

In conclusion, it's a mistake to see clinically vulnerable people as somehow detached from the general public. They represent millions of people. Everyone either has or had or will have a loved one who is clinically vulnerable if they're not clinically vulnerable themselves. But clinically vulnerable people have been consistently left behind and sidelined. And this is why CVF had proposed, and proposed again, that clinical vulnerability is added as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act. This would prevent the dynamic that I have referred to where they go in and out of visibility. Enshrining in law is one way -- not the only way, but one way -- that clinical vulnerability can become a permanent part of institutions' consideration of safety measures, reasonable adjustments, lack of discrimination, and other matters.

And whether your Ladyship is initially attracted to this idea or not, we ask that consideration is at least given to supplementing the Inquiry's expert evidence to include clinical vulnerability and consider what can be done better in the future. Many thanks.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Wagner.

I think the next person to speak is Ms Beattie.

Module 10 throws into sharp relief the social model which the DPO have advocated throughout the Inquiry, which identifies the interaction of impairments or conditions with barriers and attitudes in society as hindering the full and effective participation of disabled people on an equal basis with others.

The Inquiry will see how, in contrast with disabled people, the rest of society generally lives without appreciation of the accommodations they enjoy, but did not recognise as such until Covid brought some of them into jeopardy.

We unconsciously live with adjustments and accommodations to make our work and lifestyles possible, many of which rely on key workers to make them happen. We do not call them adjustments, but they are.

Take food as an example. We might think that we can feed ourselves, but we rely on shops and services staffed at all hours by retail workers, cleaners, and security guards, and supplied by distribution and transport workers and delivery drivers to provide us with access to food or to deliver it to our doors.

For some, the reality of dependency and our reliance on adjustments only dawned during the pandemic. For disabled people, awareness of that reality was not new but required navigation through what professors Submissions on behalf of DISABLED PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS by MS BEATTIE

MS BEATTIE: My Lady, we act for three Disabled People's Organisations, or DPO, from across the UK. They are Disability Rights UK, Inclusion Scotland, and Disability Action Northern Ireland. The DPO thank you for recognising them as Core Participants in Module 10.

I start with vulnerability. For Module 10, where the Inquiry is setting out expressly to examine the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable, the DPO repeat our previous encouragement to be constructively critical about the term. We are all vulnerable at different times in different ways. Each of us may also find ourselves, at one or more times in our lives, and unexpectedly, among some of the most vulnerable, as identified in issue 3 of the provisional outline of scope for Module 10, facing unsuitable or insecure housing, or homelessness, being a victim of domestic abuse, or affected by the justice system.

For disabled people, pre-existing inequalities determined by social, economic, and political choice made the risk of such circumstances even greater and made the impact of the pandemic, including on mental health and wellbeing, even harsher.

My Lady, the combination of issues to be covered in

Shakespeare and Watson called the triple jeopardy, from: one, the virus itself; two, reduced care for pre-existing needs; and three, the disproportionate impact on disabled people because of non-pharmaceutical interventions.

My Lady, on the approach to Module 10, the DPO make five points.

First, disabled people are of course part of the general population referred to in issue 1 of the provisional outline of scope. The DPO are reassured by Counsel to the Inquiry's remarks today that there will be no inadvertent lapse into examining the impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the population without taking into account the triple jeopardy faced by disabled people, who form 24% of the UK population and without considering the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on disabled people's mental health and wellbeing.

My Lady, we set out at paragraph 3.1 of our written submissions some of the many ways in which disabled people's mental health and wellbeing was disproportionately affected.

Module 10 will also be the opportunity to examine the cumulative and compounding impact on disabled people's mental health and wellbeing of other aspects of

the pandemic, which the Inquiry will have looked at in other modules. Be that disproportionate mortality rates of disabled people, DNACPR notices, vaccine prioritisation decisions, prolonged shielding by those who cannot take vaccines, the clinical frailty scale and ceilings of care in hospitals, school closures, or local authority easements to statutory duties under the Care Act and the Children and Families Act, all of which the Inquiry will have heard about by the time of Module 10. For disabled people, these matters did not happen in isolation. They were not experienced as separate events but were combined and felt relentless.

The DPO therefore welcome Counsel to the Inquiry's commitment and reassurance this morning that Module 10 and the expert evidence will consider whether there were inequalities in the impact on mental health and wellbeing within and between different demographic groups, including disabled people.

We invite the Inquiry to ask professors Shakespeare and Watson to provide a short report on the impact of the pandemic on disabled people to supplement their Module 2 report on the structural inequality which disabled people faced at the pandemic's outset.

Second, as with the general population, disabled people are among those working in the key worker

The position of disabled key workers must be examined and the DPO invite the Inquiry to build on the work of the TUC in their June 2021 report on disabled workers' experiences during the pandemic.

This must also include the impact of interventions on key workers who have disabled family members, who faced the risk of spreading Covid if they continued to work but were unable to access alternative sources of income or financial support.

Third, the DPO welcome Counsel to the Inquiry's confirmation that the proposed expert evidence will consider operation of mental health services at all levels, including community-based care, which we understand is not limited to people with severe mental health conditions, and inequalities of impact within and between different demographic groups. NHS Digital statistics, while incomplete, suggest that during 2020 to 2021, the overall use of the Mental Health Act increased by about 4.5%. At the same time, external monitoring of institutional settings reduced, as the CQC suspended onsite visits to carry out Mental Health Act monitoring reviews which were replaced with remote monitoring via video calls. Onsite visits did not start again until July 2021. Visits from family, friends and advocates were also restricted and for periods ceased

occupations in issue 2, and the DPO urge the Inquiry to consider the position of disabled workers in relation to each of the subtopics listed.

One of the primary ways to avoid disease exposure at work was to work at home. But despite higher clinical vulnerability and the advent in many occupations of home working, disabled people in employment in the UK were more likely to be going out to work during the pandemic rather than working from home, and disabled people were working in occupations that were more exposed to Covid than the occupations of non-disabled workers.

Of the key worker groups mentioned in the provisional outline of scope, the DPO are aware of some research suggesting that disabled workers are more likely to work in key public services, food and other necessary goods occupations, and in local and national government, but less likely to work in transport.

But this research also suggests that the occupational distribution of disabled workers, although particularly important, given the risks faced by different occupations during the pandemic, has not been extensively explored.

What is known is that 3 million disabled workers earn less than £15 per hour, with disabled people more likely to be on precarious zero-hours contracts.

totally.

The DPO invite the Inquiry to scrutinise what, if any, safeguarding measures were put in place to ensure those isolated in psychiatric wards were protected and whether reasonable adjustments were made, including allowing visits from family and friends, supporting communication and digital access needs and involving people in decision making and co-production of care. As already envisaged, the Inquiry will need to consider communal settings, other mental health services and whether there were gaps in service provision.

Fourth, on the Inquiry's proposed approach to Module 10, the DPO are keen to participate in the proposed roundtable events, each of which will consider aspects of the pandemic which affected disabled people. Hearing from disabled people as participants in each of the roundtables will be an important part of the Inquiry's information-gathering exercise.

In addition to the inviting DPO to the roundtables already listed, the Inquiry would likely benefit from a separate roundtable focusing on issues impacting on disabled people that have not been addressed, or not addressed sufficiently in the earlier sessions. The size of the population of disabled people across the UK and the discrete issues affecting them call for that

consideration.

In our written submissions, the DPO have set out how disabled people are disproportionately affected when it comes to issues of housing and homelessness, as victims of domestic abuse, in prisons and other places of detention, and in the justice system.

My Lady, you are hearing today from other Core Participants on a number of these areas and so I will not repeat those points, save to mention that, in Module 2, the Inquiry received relevant evidence on the pre-pandemic situation affecting disabled people. It will be for Module 10 to complete the evidence about the impact of the pandemic itself on disabled people.

Fifth and finally, Module 10 will seek to identify where societal strengths, resilience and/or innovation reduced any adverse impact. For disabled people, the pandemic presented a number of innovations, some of which disabled people had long called for but had not been realised. For example, working from home enabled many disabled people to work more or to return to work: a reasonable adjustment which should always have been available, but which only became widely accepted once the pandemic forced it upon the population as a whole. The use of masks reduced infection risk for immunocompromised people.

The DPO welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry's exploration of both innovations and potential for change, in order that such system resilience can be attained and lessons learned to inform preparations for future pandemics across the UK.

Thank you, my Lady.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Beattie.

Ms Davies, if you'd like to take us up to lunch?

MS DAVIES: Thank you, my Lady. Can my Lady hear and see

me?

LADY HALLETT: Can't hear you at the moment and can't see

12 you.

**MS DAVIES:** Can you do both now?

LADY HALLETT: I can see you and hear you. Got it.

Submissions on behalf of THE DOMESTIC ABUSE GROUP by MS

**DAVIES KC** 

MS DAVIES: I'm delighted, my Lady. Thank you very much.

My Lady, the Domestic Abuse Group, which we've been calling the DA Group -- it's important to have the full name at the beginning of submissions -- were pleased to have been given CP status for Module 10. You will recall two of the organisations in our group, Southall Black Sisters and Solace Women's Aid, who were

represented in Module 2, and they have been joined by a third organisation, Latin American Women's Rights

But to be fully inclusive must take into account must take the needs of deaf and hearing-impaired people and resources to communicate access needs were co-designed by disabled people and achieved what pre-existing legal duties to provide accessible information did not.

The Inquiry has heard evidence in several modules about the benefit of DPO and other civil society groups becoming involved in co-design of policy, including at the stages of data collection, equality impact assessments and in co-production more broadly. The DPO are keen that Module 10 explores this method of policy making beyond slogans, so that it can become the ordinary way in which government works and, indeed, a new way of binding state and society together.

My Lady, returning to the DPO's starting point for all your Ladyship's modules: it was the system that was vulnerable, not people. In looking at societal strengths and innovation, the DPO cautioned your Ladyship against seeking out individual instances of resilience, rather it is for systems themselves to become resilient. They achieve this by being responsive to the people they are designed to serve, responsive to the fluctuating vulnerability of the human condition in all its manifestations.

Service or LAWRS, and I don't need to explain their purpose because the name is self-explanatory. They're represented by myself and Ms Sergides, and we're instructed by Public Interest Law Centre.

These oral submissions are in addition to the Group's written submissions which we know, and indeed it was made very clear by Ms Blackwell this morning, that you and your counsel and solicitor team have taken into consideration.

I want to start with the proposals for roundtables. We very much welcome this initiative and we hope that a number of violence against women and girls organisations would be able to participate and we offered in our written submissions to provide a list of possible invitees. I have to say, therefore, my Lady that we were very surprised when we received an invitation to one roundtable event on domestic abuse and two, but not all three of our organisations, were invited to attend. So our first ask is that the omitted group, Solace Women's Aid, receive an invitation.

We do not agree that just because their services are delivered to survivors in London, that makes their experience unimportant. In 2020, Solace supported over 10,000 domestic abuse survivors. With SBS, they lobbied for funding to establish a Crisis emergency refuge and

then ran that refugee. They provide refuge accommodation directly, unlike the other two organisations.

So SBS and LAWRS are pleased to have been invited to participate but they feel strongly that Solace should also be invited, not least because SBS and LAWRS are by and for organisations. They provide services by members of particular communities to those particular communities, whereas Solace has a different remit and we say the Inquiry would be depriving itself of valuable accounts of experience on the ground if Solace is not invited to the roundtable.

Secondly, we are surprised that there is only one roundtable on the subject of domestic abuse and that it is only in London. We heard explanation this morning, but we reiterate that the roundtable exercise would want to obtain a wide range of views from a national, regional and different community perspective, reflecting the diversity of those who experienced domestic abuse. We support the submissions from Scotland, for example, that attendance remotely or payment of travel expenses is not the same as being able to attend roundtables more locally than that.

If roundtable meetings do take place out of London, and we are aware of resources, but we say a more

asylum, and more broadly migrants' rights are not lost, and both ourselves and the Migrants' Rights Coalition noticed that initially in the CTI note they did appear to have dropped down.

We hope that the focus on key workers will include those workers in the domestic abuse sector who were delivering frontline services, and those who were not frontline but providing necessary support. We gave evidence in Module 2 of the confusion over the status for domestic abuse workers, whether they could access schooling, vaccination, as key workers, et cetera, and we hope that the Inquiry will accept that those dealing with survivors of domestic abuse are self-evidently key workers, and should be treated as such, both by this Inquiry and by government in future pandemics.

We have made the point in written submissions that for survivors of domestic abuse, the most obvious harm from the pandemic was lockdown, which we know resulted in a significant increase in domestic abuse and difficulty in seeking help, support and a place of safety. But we also say that the overall harm of the pandemic and lockdown was more nuanced than that. It involved the potential harm to health from the virus, the isolation of lockdown and the ability of perpetrators to use both the fear of the virus and

representative national picture of the experience of the domestic abuse sector will be obtained, not least because many violence against women and girls organisations are outside London are precisely those by and for organisations and can bring diverse voices to the table.

We would suggest that the Inquiry suggest this directly with the Domestic Abuse Group on invitations to the roundtables and where they could be heard, so that there's a good mix of national, regional providers and the voices of diverse communities, and we'd be delighted to cooperate with that.

We also recognise, in relation to the roundtable, that the different issues, domestic abuse, justice, housing, and so forth, don't entirely operate in silos, and we suggest that consideration is given so that organisations whose primary concern is one of those issues, in our case domestic abuse, are also invited to participate on housing, justice and key workers because otherwise we believe the valuable experience will be lost.

My Lady, I can be shorter on my four other points which are scope, further evidence gathering, disclosure, and the time estimate.

On scope, we urge that issues round immigration and 94

lockdown against victims.

We heard Ms Blackwell today and we appreciate that CTI recognises this is not a semantic point but that all different harmful effects of the pandemic and of lockdown and of the other measures will be considered, and we support the point made eloquently just now by the Disabled People's Organisations around triple jeopardy, where she was effectively making the same point.

On evidence gathering, we do propose that the remit of expert evidence is expanded beyond diagnosed and severe mental health conditions to include prevalence of trauma, requests for counselling services, and other mental health conditions that may not have been diagnosed as severe, and our experience is that women seeking support from the domestic abuse sector reported a significant increase in the complexity of their cases, and also the aggravation of mental health conditions.

We stress that the approach at all stages of evidence gathering should be based on an understanding of intersectionality. Individuals suffered different types of harm during the pandemic and lockdown, depending on their different circumstances. Men were less likely to experience domestic abuse than women, black and minoritised women's experience of domestic abuse can be different to those of white women. We

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agree with the point made by the Disabled People's Organisations that disabled people disproportionately experience domestic abuse, and we remind the Inquiry of the triple abuse experienced by migrant survivors of domestic abuse: the pandemic, and the opportunity for further control by perpetrators who can threaten reports to the Home Office or destitution.

The Migrants' Rights Coalition has made a further point about the even more vulnerable position of undocumented migrants and, clearly, undocumented migrant survivors of domestic abuse were in a yet further worse position, and all those different structural constraints need to be understood in relation to expert evidence, the Systematic Evidence Review and the roundtable.

We would welcome the opportunity to suggest existing research, some of it indeed adduced by the Southall Black Sisters and Solace Women's Aid in Module 2 as part of the Systematic Review.

In Module 2 we also invited other domestic abuse organisations to give accounts of their experience and those of the survivors during the pandemic and lockdown, and we reported those to the Inquiry, and, if helpful, we'll be happy to repeat the exercise. We support the submissions already made that both expert evidence and impact evidence already provided for Module 2 should be

within the remit of Module 10 to consider.

Finally, my final two very short points, my Lady, which are practical matters. We support the suggestion that disclosure should be completed, indeed fully completed, two months prior to the start of the hearing, and we suggest that those documents that were disclosed in earlier modules are labelled as such because those CPs who have been involved in earlier modules will find it much easier then to analyse the documents.

On the time estimate, we agree that three weeks is probably insufficient. We would have thought four weeks but we think it's right to keep it under review.

We reiterate that we are delighted to cooperate with any requests from the Inquiry on evidence gathering or anything else, and particularly to help the Inquiry on arranging the roundtables and appropriate invitees.

Thank you very much, my Lady.

18 LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Davies. Quite 19 a canter. I assure those whom you represent that I will 20 obviously bear very much in mind all that is contained 21 in your written submissions.

22 Very well, Ms Blackwell, shall we break now for 23 lunch --

MS BLACKWELL: Yes, please, my Lady. 24 LADY HALLETT: -- and return for 2.00, please.

1 MS BLACKWELL: Thank you. 2

(1.03 pm)

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3 (The Short Adjournment)

4 (2.00 pm)

5 MS BLACKWELL: Good afternoon, my Lady. Can you see and 6

7 LADY HALLETT: Good afternoon. I can, thank you.

MS BLACKWELL: I think we're ready now to go to Mr Westgate,

9 King's Counsel, who will address you on behalf of 10 Shelter.

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LADY HALLETT: Mr Westgate.

Submissions on behalf of SHELTER by MR WESTGATE KC 12

MR WESTGATE: Thank you. I hope you can hear me. 13

14 LADY HALLETT: I can.

MR WESTGATE: Thank you. I act on behalf of Shelter, 15 16 a charity working across the fields of housing and 17 homelessness, providing legal help and services, and

also acting as a campaigning and research organisation

engaging with national and local government.

Shelter is grateful to be designated as a Core Participant and it welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Inquiry. We've made written submissions -- we don't repeat those -- and we recognise the careful and thoughtful engagement that we heard this morning from Counsel to the Inquiry about

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suggestions made in ours and various other submissions, and we note what's said about key workers and the focus on lessons to be learned, including action on evictions.

We particularly welcome the commitment to hearing the voices of those who are often overlooked or hard to access, and Shelter is keen to engage in how to make this effective, especially for those who have experienced homelessness.

Rather than repeat our written submission, what we want to do is stress two themes: firstly, the centrality of housing issues to this model and the need to understand, we say, the extent of housing vulnerability and inequality before the pandemic started. This, we suggest, needs to be a broad enquiry, not only to focus on specific areas such as temporary accommodation, important though that is. The second point is about access to housing services and particularly the Everyone In initiative.

On the first point, Shelter believes that access to housing and housing quality played a key role in how the pandemic and lockdown impacted. The injunction in March 2020 that you must "stay at home" meant very different things depending on what home, if any, you had. That's in the background where, in the autumn of 2019, over 4,000 people were estimate to have no home at

all and to be sleeping rough. A far larger proportion, a far larger number, were in temporary accommodation as homeless persons. By December 2020, these numbered more than a quarter million, and as we set out in our submissions, 17% of those were in bed and breakfast and hostels. The multiple adverse effects on their wellbeing were recorded in a contemporary report by Shelter in that year.

But beyond this, there's a wider and chronic problem of poor housing conditions. In 2020, 3.5 million homes didn't meet the Decent Homes Standard, and 941,000 had serious damp. And often, many problems in housing overlap.

In addition to that, according to the 2021 census, some 1.1 million households in England and Wales were overcrowded. Many homes had no private plot or outdoor space for use by the occupier. And all of this is compounded by unaffordable rents and inadequate help for those struggling to pay, which reduces housing choice and means that accommodation when it is found is often precarious.

Now, against that background, we of course understand that the Inquiry isn't charged with making recommendations about the general state of housing in the UK or what can be done to remedy it, but it does

harshly on the wellbeing of those in overcrowded and poor housing, in addition, potentially exposing to other health risks quite apart from Covid. And mitigations, thirdly, available to others don't apply. There's often going to be no space to take advantage of something like working from home, and of course less ability to move or go and stay with others.

And it's that last point that leads on to our second general theme, which is access to housing services and Everyone In.

During the pandemic, numbers in temporary accommodation appear to have increased, and the Inquiry should, we consider, consider how effectively people were able to obtain housing and homelessness services and the quality and type of accommodation they were able to secure through that route and how it affected them, and we're pleased to note that this is specifically under consideration and is a topic to be included in the roundtable headings.

The second point we make, and linked to this, is about a specific initiative, Everyone In, under which local authorities were asked to provide accommodation for all who were at risk of street homelessness. There are, as we've said in our written submissions, a number of positive lessons to be learned from this, and we are

need, we suggest, to be fully apprised of the pre-existing prevalence of housing disadvantage and how that was liable to compromise occupiers' resilience and their ability to cope.

The need to address that is all the more pressing because housing disadvantage of this kind is more likely or more severe for those who already suffer discrimination or who are particularly vulnerable. We have dealt with that in our written submissions, and it's something the Inquiry has rightly stressed as a priority. Other submissions speak powerfully to this, and it's critical the Inquiry gives full attention to it. But it should do so against the wider background of low quality and insecure housing, where this often overlaps with other factors such as low income. This, we say, is crucial to understanding how the pandemic affected the population generally, and also necessary to model the effects of a similar emergency in the future and identify what steps are necessary to avoid it.

There's a general correlation between ill health and poor housing, and the issues here include: a vulnerability to Covid infection and the ability to keep safe and take measures to avoid infection, such as ventilation, distancing, and keeping clean; and also the fact that measures restricting movement bear more

happy to be able to work with the Inquiry in identifying those. But the problem also suffered from a lack of clarity and consistency with too many people being turned away for a variety of reasons, and support was sometimes difficult to access.

A particular problem arose for those who were ineligible for housing and most other assistance because of their immigration status. It would have been possible to alter this in perhaps the same way that there were easements for other statutory duties, but that wasn't done, and nor was there any clear guidance.

Now, there may be a number of ways to address this in a future, similar pandemic, and Shelter would favour a specific emergency duty. But what happened was that the system was insufficiently agile when faced with a clash between a measure imposed for one purpose, immigration control and limiting access to state help, and the demands of public safety.

This is -- we understand what's been said about the Inquiry not trespassing into decision making in this module, but we don't understand an Inquiry of this kind to fall on the wrong side of the line.

So those -- so in conclusion, those are two issues that we've identified. We've identified a number of others in our written submissions, and by focusing on

two, we don't intend to sideline the other points. But we do, of course, recognise, though, that the Inquiry is going to have to be proportionate and selective in what it addresses, given a module of this width. But even with that, we agree with other Core Participants that a three-week hearing may be insufficient to deal with all the many issues that arise, and we support the suggestion that that should be kept under review. Those are our submissions. LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Westgate, especially for focusing on the main issues that you wished to highlight. Thank you. I will take into

your written submissions.
Right, Ms Munroe.

## Submissions on behalf of JUSTICE SECTOR COALITION by MS MUNROE

account, obviously, all the other matters you raise in

**MS MUNROE:** Good afternoon, my Lady. Can you hear me and see me?

20 LADY HALLETT: I can. You've changed horses, Ms Munroe.
 21 MS MUNROE: I'm wearing a different hat today in a different

**MS MUNROE**: I'm wearing a different hat today in a different location.

Good afternoon, my Lady. Today I make oral submissions on behalf of the Justice Sector Coalition, herein I'll refer to simply as JSC, who I represent,

five points: access to justice, the roundtables, data and stats, Rule 9 and disclosure, all of those in light of Ms Blackwell's very helpful submissions this morning.

But before that, just by way of a brief introduction, my Lady, the hallmark of a properly functioning society is how it treats its most vulnerable citizens and, in terms of the justice systems, they are illustrative of that fact in many instances because it is the most vulnerable in our society who often find themselves at the interface of the civil, family, criminal courts and tribunals.

We heard in Module 1 in particular about the state of preparedness and planning of the healthcare systems, across the four nations, and the question of resilience or otherwise of those systems was brought starkly into focus.

We say an analogy can be drawn with the justice systems. Like health, the justice systems are cornerstones of our society. They employ tens of thousands of individuals, professionals from a variety of skills and seniority. These professionals, by dint of their employment, come into direct and close contact with members of the public, often when they are at their lowest, weakest and most in need of help. In a very real and obvious sense, these are frontline key workers,

along with Ms Sergides and Ms Twite, instructed by Joseph Latimer of Public Interest Law Centre. JSC brings together 12 groups -- they are listed on the heading of our submission, so I won't read them all out now -- but they encompass charities and legal professional bodies, legal aid groups, law centres, who are representative of the whole of the UK.

JSC's evidence will provide the Inquiry, we hope, with the insight into the operation of the legal system during the pandemic, across multiple areas of law affecting the vulnerable communities outlined in the Inquiry's Equality Statement.

When speaking of the justice system, we say it is important not to conflate justice system and places of detention, for example. For JSC, the justice system includes the obvious -- civil, family and criminal courts -- but also advice services, ability of our members to enter mental health establishments, police stations, interview rooms and prisons.

My Lady, I'm grateful that you've read and are fully aware of our written submissions. I will not address all matters in that document due to the time available, but we do not resile from any of the important points that we raise there.

I do propose simply to highlight, in short form, 106

and, like health, the justice system needed to be strong and resilient at the time the pandemic broke.

It is important, we say, to contextualise the justice systems at the start of the pandemic. Like health, justice systems faced increasing difficulties and challenges to sustain themselves and properly meet the demands of the public and society to have effective, fair, open and transparent accessible justice systems.

That is important to understand, in order to grasp what happened to them and what happened to those who tried to access and use them. It is their lived experiences that highlight and perhaps best illustrate the problems and difficulties that were faced.

We have also seen, my Lady, throughout the modules in this Inquiry the theme of discrimination and inequalities and how the pandemic exacerbated existing societal inequalities, particularly in terms of class and structural racism. It will come as no surprise to your Ladyship that we also find those patterns when one dissects what was going on in the justice systems at the time of and during the pandemic?

So, one, access to justice.

Delays in the system led to vulnerable people failing to access justice in a timely manner. Without full and proper access to justice, there is no fairness 108

or effective participation. Everything flows from access. For many of those most vulnerable people in society, the pandemic directly and severely impeded their ability to access such justice. The pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns and social restrictions had an immediate and profound impact on those systems, causing postponements, cancellations, delays in applications, processes, hearings and judgments. This had a direct bearing on the service-users themselves, who were unable to access justice when, where and how it was required.

It is often said that justice delayed is justice denied and in the family and criminal court certainly, even before the pandemic, they already faced backlogs and delays and lengthy waiting times. The pandemic exacerbated and increased that.

Taking crime as an example, my Lady, custody time limits were routinely extended leaving remand defendants and children -- though that was changed following legal challenge in relation to children -- languishing for extended periods in custody awaiting trial. It also meant that witnesses, including those who were victims of crime, were waiting longer to give evidence.

The ramifications were particularly starkly observed in the family courts. Delay and adjourning cases 109

properly considered in the planning. Remote hearings were often not remotely fair. By way of example, poorer families and excluded communities found it more difficult to access the relevant technology, due to not having sufficient phone credits, access to smartphones or computers, or indeed lacking in understanding or capacity to use them. One practitioner described how, in a family proceeding, where there were very difficult family dynamics, one party, the father, could only participate by using his phone from his car, whilst other parties connected to Skype for Business from the family home. He was also unable to communicate and give instructions to his lawyer.

Witnesses sometimes had to give evidence remotely from their own homes, where they could not access any emotional or psychological support. Again, a practitioner gave us a very graphic example of a case involving a ceiling of care for a child and whether or not they should be ventilated. Counsel for the parents had to contact them individually because they were in different locations, and tell them the tragic news of their son's situation. The mother, inevitably distressed, was at home with other children who overheard what was going on, leading to one of the children tearfully pleading with the mother's barrister

involved in domestic abuse, child protection, serious fact finding and welfare hearings in care proceedings left vulnerable children and families in limbo. Care proceedings placed the welfare of the child at the very centre, yet these were often the very proceedings most impacted. Children and families already facing uncertain futures had that uncertainty increased due to the delays and, in turn, negatively impacted upon their welfare and stability.

Family justice saw a surge in cases post-lockdown with the child protection referrals increasing rapidly after schools reopened, and concerns about hidden harms to children coming to light. More research, we say, and data analysis is required in this area in order to have a fuller, clearer picture.

Applications for non-molestation orders and occupation orders also rose significantly. Mental health -- which of course is a central theme for this module, mental health concerns amongst parents became a leading cause of child protection referrals.

Digital exclusion and data poverty. In many respects, when the pandemic struck, the move to remote hearings was seen as heralding innovative and speedy remedies to delays in the justice system but, in fact, digital exclusion and data poverty sadly were not

to ensure he could do all he can to save his brother's life.

Some practitioners have reported that judges were not always amenable to allowing them time to take instructions mid-hearing, for fear that pausing the link may potentially lose the link and, even where telephones and computers could be accessed, the platforms were not tried and tested. Telephone facilities often failed, especially in certain secure psychiatric hospitals and prison environments where mobile phones were not allowed, and those who needed to rely on these had to rely on video link facilities provided by the institutions. These were often overwhelmed and worked intermittently.

In certain housing matters, we have reports of the lack of access to technology leading in some cases to hearings happening without clients being present. Legal firms were sometimes asked to host clients and occasionally witnesses in their own offices for virtual hearing, thus transforming them into mini courtrooms, a solution to the difficulties faced by the courts, but without any support or risk assessment to those firms and lawyers.

Again, examples from the family court, my Lady, practitioners had reported judges bypassing legal reps

and speaking directly to parents on remote hearings on matters of importance, such as their views on a particular order. But without that parent having recourse to a private consultation with their lawyer, without them having given instructions and, importantly, without them having received legal advice. Understandably, lawyers saw this as highly disadvantageous to their clients.

In other instances, judges heard cases on submissions only without oral testimony from the usual roster of witnesses, such as social workers and parents, due to difficulties in hearing witnesses remotely.

A tier down from remote hearings were those conducted by telephone alone, which produced further problems and, we say, unfairness both in terms of the process and the outcomes.

Mental health was perhaps a very stark example of the difficulties that both practitioners and, importantly, their clients faced. Practitioners noticed that it was always very difficult gaining trust and rapport with new clients over the telephone but particularly so in the setting of mental health tribunals. When MHRTs were conducted over telephone facilities, this did impact upon the effective participation for inpatients, due to their inability to

roundtables will entail. These are important because they potentially are discussions that could provide highly relevant useful information and material to assist your Ladyship and the Inquiry in terms of fact finding and determining what happened in the justice system during the pandemic, as importantly, these discussions may assist going forward in terms of how we plan better and prepare for the future and the next pandemic. We are concerned that no opportunities are lost.

With that in mind, I echo what has already been said, in particular the submissions made on behalf of the group by Ms Davies, King's Counsel: the issues should not be considered in silo or isolation. What happens in our civil, criminal and family courts did not operate independently of what happened elsewhere and the lived experience of other groups; they intersect, and it is important that the justice sector roundtables do not become mere echo chambers. To that end, we say that the process would benefit rather than from one roundtable, but from a series of roundtables, targeted and focused, because of the sheer size of issues under consideration.

We appreciate the indication that the roundtables will be moderated and minuted, and we note that non-CPs will be invited to take part, although the

use technology or other communication issues. It also, on occasions, fuelled their own mental health or paranoia about how such tribunals were being conducted, this was also particularly difficult for those using interpreters, and there was genuine concern amongst practitioners that, as a result, many people did not exercise their right to legal representation because they felt unable to do so without a face-to-face interaction

My Lady, those are just a few of the examples that we could give, and perhaps chimes with this point about impact witnesses, and how they have given the Inquiry, thus far, some of the most important visceral and memorable evidence that has fed into reports that have already been written, and will be written in future.

Two, Roundtables. I can say, pausing here, that we are grateful and welcome Ms Blackwell's discussions with the advocates this morning at very short notice.

Ms Blackwell, King's Counsel, and her team were able to discuss with us some of the matters arising and, going forward, we certainly are confident that this collaborative approach of working together will continue.

We are heartened by what has been said in terms of fleshing-out some of the skeleton of what the

practicalities of that is obviously something that needs to be further considered.

We understand there will be reports, and they will form part of the evidence for this module. The reports, we say, should be made public and obviously inform the Inquiry's decision-making process.

Three, stats and data. Data or the lack thereof has quite rightly been a running theme in this Inquiry. We have done our own minor research and some data analysis in respect of the Met Police, employment tribunals and the family courts. Taking the police data, for example. Whilst police work in areas such as seizing drugs did not significantly change the ability of the Magistrates Courts and the Crown Courts to deal with it did.

The mental health tribunals and the social security and child support and immigration tribunals all showed a significant reduction, though they started to climb quickly again thereafter.

This limited work that we've been able to do in the time underpins our submission that the Inquiry would benefit from instructing an expert who would collate and analyse the available data in order to form a clearer view.

**LADY HALLETT:** Ms Munroe, I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to bring your

1	submissions to a close.			
2	MS MUNROE: I will, my Lady.			
3	The only other matter, then, is in relation to the			
4	Rule 9. We've got our paragraph 21, we set out five			
5	named individuals and organisations. We would also			
6	request that Rule 9 approach be made to the National			
7	Appropriate Adult Network, which is an organisation that			
8	was particularly involved in remote representation for			
9	vulnerable people at police stations.			
10	LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Munroe. I'm			
11	sorry I had to interrupt.			
12	2 MS MUNROE: Not at all.			
13	LADY HALLETT: Right, I think Mr O'Ceallaigh? Have			
14	I pronounced it correctly?			
15	MR O'CEALLAIGH: O'Ceallaigh, my Lady. Can you see and hear			
16	me?			
17	7 LADY HALLETT: I can now.			
18	Submissions on behalf of PRISON AND IMMIGRATION DETENTION			
19	ADVOCACY GROUP by MR O'CEALLAIGH KC			
20	MR O'CEALLAIGH: I'm very grateful. I appear for the Prison			
21	and Immigration Detention Advisory Group alongside Paul			
22	Clark, instructed by Joseph Latimer of the Public			
23	Interest Law Centre.			
24	It is a long-established legal principle that those			
25	incarcerated at the hands of the state are in			
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a singularly vulnerable position and that, as a result, the state has a duty to protect them. This module will be the first to consider the respects in which during the Covid-19 pandemic the British state either met that duty or failed to meet it. As a body composed of leading national charities representing the interests of those detained both in the criminal justice system and pursuant to immigration detention powers, the Prison and Immigration Detention Advisory Group, or PIDAG, is very grateful to have been designated a Core Participant in this module.

In these short submissions, I propose to address the charities briefly, and I want to say a little about decision making, roundtable events, the systematic evidence review, and then some matters arising from what the other CPs have said this morning.

We commend our written submissions to my Lady, and we don't propose to repeat them. PIDAG would particularly like to emphasise the list of potentially important issues that we set out at paragraph 14 of that document.

By way of very short introduction, PIDAG is composed of four charities. First, the Howard League for Penal Reform is the world's oldest prison charity. It engages in a broad range of activities which encompass direct

contact with persons who are detained in prison, including those who are especially vulnerable in that category, such as children, and policy and campaigning work.

During the pandemic, the Howard League provided support to prisoners, in particular children and young people, as the charity runs the only dedicated legal advice line for children and young people in custody aged 21 and under in England and Wales.

Bail for Immigration Detainees, or BID, is a charity devoted to securing access to justice for people in immigration detention. BID supports thousands of detainees annually by providing representation in bail applications all across the UK, as well as free legal advice, both in person and by telephone. BID is one of only a handful of organisations that works across the country and across the entirety of the detention estate. BID also conducts field research and uses case sample analyses of its casework as the basis for extensive publications and gives evidence to government and international human rights bodies.

The Prison Reform Trust is a charity that conducts extensive research into the workings of the prison system in order to inform prisoners, prison staff and the wider public and to encourage public debate on

prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners. It also provides advice and assistance to prisoners and their families in the form of written guides and a telephone advice line. PRT publishes extensively, including both detailed research reports on the penal system and short, focussed briefings.

Importantly, during the pandemic, PRT initiated the urgent Covid-19 Action Prison Project: Tracking Innovation, Valuing Experience, or CAPPTIVE, through its Prisoner Policy Network, which described and recorded life in prison during the pandemic in prisoners' own voices following hundreds of responses.

Medical Justice is a charity that works to uphold the health and associated legal rights of people in immigration detention. Working with clinicians and interpreters, MJ facilitates the provision of independent medical advice and assessment of those detained under immigration powers, as well as conducting research into issues affecting people in immigration detention, and producing detailed reports. MJ handles between 500 and 1,000 cases a year and continued its work during the pandemic.

The pandemic was a frightening time for all, but there's a particular terror that comes from facing the disaster through a locked door. Some prisoners were 120

kept in their cells for 23 and a half hours a day, people were held for longer than necessary and in worse conditions. Whilst many of the dangers that apply to society at large were applicable in prison, there were additional dangers faced by prisoners and immigration detainees that simply did not apply to the general population. People died, for example, because of the limitations placed on the assessment, care and custody and teamwork system because of changes to the prison regime and for other reasons which were specific to detention as a context. Many of these reasons persisted long after the pandemic was over. That is a long tail of Covid-19. We're very grateful to Ms Blackwell King's Counsel's indication that there is room for considering the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

The PIDAG charities hope to assist the Inquiry in examining the particular consequences of the pandemic on the especially vulnerable cohorts they try to speak for, including the ongoing consequences, and that long shadow.

In respect of decision making, we fully accept and understand what Ms Blackwell KC had to say about the fact that there has already been a separate module on decision making, but as far as we're aware, Module 2 did not consider what happened behind the locked doors of

In our written submissions, we flag three reasons for adopting that position:

First, those imprisoned by the state are in a position that's uniquely separate from the rest of society. Their experiences during the pandemic were vastly different from those of people who had their liberty. In circumstances where this is the module to fully examine those experiences, there is considerable value in having a roundtable dedicated to them.

Second, while those who were in detention during the pandemic will inevitably have experienced the justice system in one form or another, there will be many detainees and prisoners for whom the experience of the justice system itself wasn't critical to their experience of the pandemic, for example because it predated March 2020.

Third, the justice system itself is a very broad topic that merits its own roundtable and will require consideration of those issues outside the scope or the experience of most prisoners or detainees, as you've heard very eloquently from Ms Munroe, King's Counsel.

There is a real issue, in our submission, that if those issues are addressed at a roundtable together with issues facing detainees and prisoners, neither set of issues is examined adequately. To those reasons we detention centres in prisons. To understand what happened in those dark places, there will have to be some consideration of, for example, first, the policy choice not to have a proper early-release system; second, the policy choice to continue to use immigration detention with no time limit as a tool at a time when removals, the supposed purpose of such detention, was literally impossible.

PIDAG is anxious that the careful delineation of issues necessary in such a broad inquiry as this is not at the expense of allowing it to understand where impacts and harms arose directly from deliberate policy decisions. Without that analysis, it will not be possible for the Inquiry to make the recommendations that will lead to better outcomes in any future pandemic.

On roundtable events, I'd like to briefly address the proposals we've had. I set out in our submissions PIDAG very much welcomes the concept of the roundtable events. However, it remains our position that the category of prisons and other places of detention and those affected by the operation of the justice system is just too broadly drawn. PIDAG is very anxious that both of those topics are examined fully and, in our view, that is likely to mean separate roundtables.

would add a fourth: the key purpose of this Inquiry is to learn lessons for the next one. Prisoners and immigration detainees are a group that will by definition be affected differently and, almost certainly, more severely than the general public in any future pandemic. It is important that the analysis of the failings and successes of the pandemic in this important metric is not swamped by the many complex issues caused by the pandemic in respect of the justice system more generally. In that context we endorse the comments of the Justice Sector Coalition in paragraph 12 of their helpful submissions.

We have had a useful conversation with Ms Blackwell KC, to which Ms Munroe has already referred, this morning, and her team, and we appreciate them taking the time to speak to us. We also appreciate, if I may say, the collegiate approach suggested by that discussion and by her submissions this morning. We've been given to understand that there will be proper moderation and separate breakout rooms now at these roundtables, which may facilitate at least some detailed examination of the issues affecting immigration detainees and prisoners, Ms Blackwell KC helpfully indicated that further details of the roundtables will be provided, that detail will be essential.

PIDAG sees the roundtables as an enormous opportunity for really effective evidence gathering and is anxious that the opportunity is taken. We would welcome the opportunity to have input into the structures of those roundtables. If, contrary to our submissions, my Lady takes the view that it is not appropriate to have separate roundtables for the justice system and for those incarcerated, we would ask that the Inquiry keep under review the possibility of having further roundtables if the experience of conducting them shows that this is required.

In respect of the Systematic Evidence Review, I'd like to deal shortly with that. Again, PIDAG is very supportive of this approach, which will hopefully provide the Inquiry with an extremely useful evidence base. The charities wish, however, to flesh out three short points flagged by Ms Blackwell KC earlier on.

First, the specific context of incarceration means that it is vital that both prisoners and people in immigration detention are among the demographic groups that are identified for consideration. As I've already noted, it is highly likely to be of use in planning for and responding to any future pandemic.

Second, the work of each of PIDAG's constituent organisations, who have done a vast amount of work on 125

Third, we endorse the query raised by Mind paragraph 16, the TUC at paragraph 18 and Shelter and the DA Group today in respect of the question of whether three weeks will be sufficient time to hear important evidence. This is a concern raised in our own submissions and one that will apply with greater force if the roundtables don't turn out to be as effective as hoped.

Finally, we endorse the request that the DA Group at paragraph 14 for confirmation that the list of potential invitees supplied by Core Participants for roundtable events will be considered.

In conclusion, my Lady, and to recall something said by Ms Munroe KC earlier, it was the American author, Pearl Buck, who wrote that the test of a civilisation is the way that it cares for its helpless members. Those incarcerated by the state are, particularly during a national emergency like a pandemic, among its most helpless, most powerless, most vulnerable members. PIDAG looks forward to assisting the Inquiry as much as it can in its task of determining whether the United Kingdom passed that test during the pandemic and setting out ways of ensuring that in any future pandemic it does better.

Those are our submissions.

this, should be part of a Systematic Review of any available reach.

Third, PIDAG considers that it will be particularly important to consider the position of those incarcerated and those subject to extreme limitations on the ability to exercise when assessing the impact of the pandemic on physical activity, as well as access to support services

In respect of the comments made by some of the other Core Participants, we've had an opportunity to consider them now. We wish to adopt the following submissions:

First, the submissions from the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice UK and Northern Ireland Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice at paragraph 17, that roundtable events should be organised with advice from an expert, such as a bereavement counsellor, or psychologist, and approached in a trauma-focused way which facilitates participation and creates an atmosphere in which the bereaved feel heard.

Second, the submission of the Disabled People's Organisations in paragraph 3.6, that the Inquiry must examine the position of disabled people in prison, to which we would add that it must also consider the position of disabled people who are in immigration detention.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Mr O'Ceallaigh.

Just to assure you and a previous Core Participant who
mentioned it, everything we do is a trauma-informed

mentioned it, everything we do is a trauma-informed approach, so please ensure your clients that we'll bear that very much in mind.

Next up, I think, is Ms Moffatt. Ms Moffatt? There you are.

Submissions on behalf of MIGRANTS' RIGHTS CONSORTIUM by MS

MOFFATT

10 MS MOFFATT: My Lady, I am here.

I appear before you on behalf of the Migrants'
Rights Consortium or MRC, led by Piers Marquis and
Ms Weereratne KC, who cannot be with us in person today,
and instructed by the Public Interest Law Centre.
I should say at the outset, that the MRC is grateful for
the opportunity to assist the work of the Inquiry as
a Core Participant in this module.

The MRC is made up of a range of organisations, nine of them, whose specific focuses and activities are diverse but all of which have experience and expertise in a range of topics relevant to the impact of the pandemic on migrant people. Such topics include medical and healthcare outreach, labour exploitation and precarious employment practices, people without recourse to public funds, the immigration and asylum system, the

asylum support system and undocumented people.

My Lady, the MRC wishes to address you on three matters this afternoon: first the duration of hearings; secondly, provisional scope; and, thirdly, evidence gathering, in particular, roundtable events and the Rule 9 requests.

I can deal with the first very briefly to say that we respectfully echo the request made by a number of other Core Participants in this module, that the duration of the public hearings be kept under review, given the breadth and complexity of the four topics to be covered.

Turning secondly to scope. We acknowledge that the outline of scope for Module 10 remains provisional and that the core issues will be identified as the module progresses and as evidence is obtained. With this in mind, we make the following three submissions:

First, that the meaning of the most vulnerable should be interpreted broadly to include also those migrant people who fall outside the immigration and asylum system and, indeed, we are grateful to Counsel to the Inquiry's indication this morning that the undocumented people are not expressly excluded. We welcome this since precariousness that accompanies a lack of immigration status means that undocumented 129

and in written submissions.

Additional to the topics covered by the existing questions, as identified by Counsel to the Inquiry, the particular impacts of the pandemic on migrant people are likely to include impacts on those who are undocumented or have no recourse to public funds, those in asylum support accommodation, those in immigration detention, those affected by the closure of borders, and those affected by delays and backlogs in Home Office decision making.

The MRC respectfully requests that these points be taken into account as the core issues are identified and redefined, and when other procedural decisions relating to scope are made.

Finally, the third topic on which the MRC wishes to address you: evidence gathering and, in particular, roundtables and Rule 9 requests. Our submission on roundtables is related to our submission on scope, and I should say at the outset that the MRC welcomes the roundtable events, given the importance in Module 10 on focusing on the experience of those affected by the pandemic. However, we consider that the absence of a roundtable to address specifically the impact of the pandemic on migrant people is a material omission. Within the roundtables, as currently envisaged, we

people were particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. Many of the constituent organisations of the MRC worked with undocumented people during the pandemic and would be able to assist with evidence gathering relating to the impact of Covid-19 on this highly vulnerable group.

Secondly, the MRC observes that immigration status creates vulnerability in diverse ways, and the experiences and vulnerabilities of our client base are diverse. However, we also acknowledge that, in general terms, migrants, as distinct from citizens, are vulnerable in two overarching ways: first, they are excluded, with certain exceptions, from the demographic franchise and they do not have equal political rights to citizens; and, secondly, they're subject to some form of state control over their ability to enter and reside in the United Kingdom, which means, in particular, a vulnerability to forms of state coercive power, including detention, control over the ability to work or access benefits and, ultimately, exclusion and expulsion from the UK.

Thirdly, the MRC submits that the impact of the pandemic on migrant people should be a separate question to be investigated under Module 10. We note that a similar submission is being made by the DA Group today

consider that there are categories of migrant people whose experiences and interests would not be covered or heard.

An obvious example of this is simply those affected by the operation of the asylum and immigration system, including those affected by delays and other problems in the processing of applications.

The omission of the migrant experience from the roundtables, as currently envisaged, is striking, we say, particularly given that other groups of people within the provisional outline of scope, which the module identifies as the most vulnerable, will have dedicated roundtable events, such as housing and homelessness, prisons and those affected by the operation of the justice system.

Whilst we acknowledge that the roundtables are not the exclusive or only means of evidence gathering to be used by the Inquiry, we suggest that the Inquiry would benefit from a roundtable specifically addressing the impact on migrant people to ensure that voices from all sectors from society are included and to give parity in evidence gathering with other groups identified as the most vulnerable.

In the absence of a roundtable specifically addressing the impact on migrant people, however, the 132

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Consortium would be grateful for further information and clarification as the alternative means that will be proposed by the Inquiry and when such evidence will be gathered.

Finally and relatedly, in respect of rule 9 requests, the MRC is eager to assist the Inquiry through the provision of witness evidence, which we consider is particularly relevant to Module 10's focus on impact. In making decisions on Rule 9 requests, my Lady, we ask you to take account of the diversity and number of the MRC's constituent organisations which we believe is inimical to the provision of witness evidence through a sole statement on behalf of the group as a whole.

I close, my Lady, by saying that the MRC is committed to supporting the Inquiry's important and significant work on Module 10, and to make it as considered, thorough and effective as possible.

LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Moffatt. 18 19

Lastly, Ms Peacock.

MS PEACOCK: Thank you, my Lady. I hope you can hear me?

LADY HALLETT: I can. 21

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22 Submissions on behalf of TRADES UNION CONGRESS by MS PEACOCK

MS PEACOCK: I appear on behalf of the Trades Union Congress

led by Sam Jacobs and instructed by Thompsons

Solicitors. I need not emphasise to you, my Lady, the

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approach, as it would be to overlook some of the most vulnerable and worse impacted groups of key workers. By way of example, I intend to address in these submissions manufacturing workers, construction workers and warehousing workers.

In the first preliminary hearing in Module 7 I addressed you, my Lady, on the risk faced by manufacturing workers due to a lack of sick pay. I referred to the outbreak at a Bakkavor food processing factory which was followed by 100 workers testing positive for Covid, and the deaths of two factory workers. Similarly, a series of outbreaks in the Leicester garment factories was such a cause for concern that Public Health England sent a team of officials to Leicester to investigate the cause in June 2020.

As has been heard in other modules, data from the Office for National Statistics shows that process, plant and machine operatives were among the worst affected in terms of both infection and mortality. Indeed, in our written opening submissions in Module 1, if we cast our minds back, we highlighted that the rates of deaths of Covid-19 for factory operatives was over six times higher than those in professional occupations.

If you'll oblige me, my Lady, I intend to read just four short extracts from the survey responses received 135

critical importance of this module to those who I represent and to the over 5 million working people who make up the TUC's 48 affiliated unions.

Counsel to the Inquiry referred this morning to the great personal risk faced by key workers during the pandemic. For many, that risk transpired. Thousands of workers died with Covid-19 and many more continued to suffer lasting physical and mental harms as a result of the virus

Turning first to the scope of the module. We welcome the inclusion in the provisional outline of scope of a range of sectors and roles and we are grateful to Counsel to the Inquiry for indication this morning that the list of key worker groups is not exhaustive.

However, we remain concerned that the key worker groups identified in the provisional outline of scope focus upon the roles which were public facing and, in respect of sales and retail workers, it is specifically identified that those who were public facing are those whose experiences will be considered. The implication potentially being that those who were not public facing would not be considered.

If the intention is to focus on public facing workers, we consider that this would be an unhelpful 134

by the TUC.

A production operative working on a conveyor belt in a food processing factory in London said:

"For a long time, even after the pandemic had started, no one was wearing any mouth protection and never was I able to distance myself from the person next to me further than 2 feet. Mostly, my social distancing was limited to 1 foot."

A bakery operative at a factory in the West Midlands recounted that:

"Our employers expected us to carry on as usual. Eventually social distancing was put in place but we were refused masks. We lost a very close colleague during the pandemic and only then did we feel that people were taking this seriously. I was scared and no one at work seemed to care."

A lead technician in the northwest told the TUC:

"I didn't feel safe. There was pressure placed on the production staff to attend work regardless. I was clinically vulnerable and asked for a mask but initially my request was ignored. They were more interested in production than wellbeing."

Finally, my Lady, a bakery operative in the southeast said:

"I didn't feel safe at all. They put some measures 136

in place but we could not social distance and we got different agency workers in every night. I was sharing a workstation computer with up to ten different people each shift."

Turning to construction workers, the prevalence of insecure work and low pay in this sector led to high levels of presenteeism. A survey of construction workers in 2022 reported that for 59% of respondents, financial pressures meant that they would continue to go to work, even if they test positive for Covid-19. ONS data from 2020 found that, for men, the highest rate of death involving Covid-19 was in elementary workers, which includes construction workers, refuse workers and cleaners

In April 2020, ONS reported that there had already been 87 Covid-19 related deaths of workers in the skilled construction and building trades category, and 90 deaths among workers in the skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades.

Turning finally then to warehouse workers. Those in warehouses faced similarly elevated risks. In April 2020, GMB issued a statement on behalf of their members employed by Amazon. They explained that the workers are being made to clock in and out at the same time as hundreds of other workers, while packed company buses

and ordinarily their work takes place behind closed doors, with little public scrutiny of their working conditions

A higher degree of physical proximity to others has, in numerous sources of evidence before this Inquiry, been linked to greater risk from Covid-19. However, it is not the case that that proximity needs to be to members of the public. There is clear risk posed from proximity to colleagues. Indeed, we heard expert evidence from Dr Warne in Module 3 that a significant part of the risk for health care workers was worker to worker transmission, rather than transmission directly from patients.

For those reasons, we say that this module ought not to take as its focus only those key workers who were public facing but should analyse the situation for those who had to attend workplaces in person and could not work from home.

Turning to this module's approach to recommendations. We are grateful to Counsel to the Inquiry for her indication this morning in response to our written submissions that this module would be forward looking and would seek to identify strengths and resilience that mitigated harm to ensure that positive lessons from the pandemic are not overlooked.

ferry workers back and forth. GMB members report being made to pack and pick items in cramped aisles with no hand sanitiser, gloves or masks available.

Similarly, an outbreak in May 2020 at an ASOS warehouse, which employs 4,000 workers. A survey by GMB of 500 workers at the factory found that 98% felt unsafe at work due to Covid-19. Workers reported no social distancing measures, a complicated clocking in system, which meant large numbers of people gathered at the same time in a small area and a lack of staggered work breaks.

A recent study, cited in our written submissions at paragraph 8 reported:

"An analysis of Covid-19 workplace outbreaks across England between May and October 2020 found that warehousing workplaces, including storage and distribution centres had some of the highest outbreak rates, second only to manufacturers and packers of food."

In the manufacturing, construction and warehousing sectors, workers did not typically have direct contact with the public but they faced grave risks and lasting impacts of the pandemic nonetheless.

Indeed, it appears likely that some of the increased risk was precisely because these workers are not visible 138

We welcome that approach. We note -- and this is perhaps simply a point of emphasis, my Lady -- that there may be lessons to learn from the negative impacts of the pandemic. We must consider carefully the weaknesses and the vulnerabilities which the pandemic laid bare. Recommendations flowing from this module should be responsive to the harm suffered during the pandemic, which may require this Inquiry to look beyond what occurred during the pandemic retrospectively, but to consider what ought to happen in the next pandemic.

In respect of expert evidence, Counsel to the Inquiry referred to our request that this module obtain expert evidence which considers the impact of outsourced and agency work upon workers and the role this may have played in terms of the inequality of impact. We are grateful to Ms Blackwell KC for her indication that this matter will remain under review.

We say only that we consider that this is a gap in the evidence received in previous modules. It's an area where expert evidence, we say, would be particularly enlightening, given the vulnerability of workers in this category, who are often excluded from workplace statistics, and may be slow to come forward with their experiences due to the insecurity of their positions. We heard, for example, from an outsourced cleaner in

1	Module 3 who gave evidence only after their identity was	1	nor is it one we've made in every module.
2	concealed. There will be many more, we suspect, who	2	The final module, we say, should be a meaningful,
3	were too fearful to give evidence and about whom expert	3	substantive analysis of the impact upon society and what
4	evidence would be critical.	4	we should learn in advance of a future pandemic to avoid
5	My Lady, I now turn to Rule 9 requests for	5	those impacts occurring again. It must, we say, avoid
6	information. Mr Jacob addressed you on behalf of the	6	becoming a whistlestop tour of harm suffered during the
7	TUC during the recent preliminary hearing in Module 6 on	7	pandemic.
8	the need for the Inquiry to obtain firsthand witness	8	Thank you, my Lady. Those are the submissions of
9	evidence from workers who were on the ground in the care	9	the TUC.
10	sector during the pandemic. We consider that those	10	LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed, Ms Peacock.
11	submissions apply equally in respect of this module and	11	Extremely grateful, as ever.
12	the key workers it focuses upon.	12	I think, Ms Blackwell, that completes the
13	The need for impact evidence from a range of	13	submissions, unless there's anything you wish to say by
14	witnesses has been raised in writing and orally today by	14	way of reply?
15	a number of Core Participants. We support those	15	MS BLACKWELL: No, thank you, my Lady. There are no matters
16	submissions. We consider that there must be space in	16	in relation to which we wish to respond today, save and
17	this module for the human stories we heard in Module 3.	17	except to say that we have been listening carefully to
18	We say that there is no substitute for hearing from	18	the oral submissions made on behalf of all Core
19	workers directly and inside this Inquiry room. We stand	19	Participants, and we will take those away and continue
20	ready to assist in identifying appropriate witnesses	20	to listen throughout the course of this module. Thank
21	across a range of sectors.	21	you.
22	Finally, I turn to timetabling.	22	LADY HALLETT: Thank you very much indeed.
23	We make the submission in writing, and it has been	23	And, obviously, I'll discuss with you anything that
24	addressed and endorsed by a number of other Core	24	has occurred to me during the course of the submissions.
25	Participants. It is not a submission we make lightly,	25	They were all extremely helpful, and as I indicated
	141		142
1	earlier, I intend to take into account all the written	1	INDEX
2	submissions as well as, always, the very constructive	2	Opening introductory remarks by THE CHAIR 1
3	submissions that I've heard during the course of today.	3	
4	I'm very grateful to everybody, and that concludes	4	Statement by LEAD COUNSEL TO THE INQUIRY 2
5	today's hearing.	5	FOR MODULE 10
6	MS BLACKWELL: Thank you, my Lady. Good afternoon.	6	
7	LADY HALLETT: Thank you.	7	Submissions on behalf of Covid-19 Bereaved 42
8	(2.55 pm)	8	Families for Justice UK by MS STONE
9	(The hearing concluded)	9	
10		10	Submissions on behalf of Covid-19 Bereaved 51
11		11	Families For Justice Northern Ireland by
12		12	MS McDERMOTT
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18		18	BEREAVED by DR MITCHELL KC
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20		20	Submissions on behalf of CLINICALLY
21		21	VULNERABLE FAMILIES by MR WAGNER
22		22	•
23		23	Submissions on behalf of DISABLED PEOPLE'S 82

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