

# UK Covid-19 Inquiry

## Accessible communications policy

### Introduction

1. The Covid-19 pandemic affected everyone across the UK. As a public inquiry, we want everybody to have the opportunity to hear about the Inquiry's work, access public hearings and participate in Every Story Matters if they wish to do so.
2. The Inquiry's Terms of Reference says we will: "consider any disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different categories of people, including, but not limited to, those relating to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and equality categories under the Northern Ireland Act 1998".
  - 2.1. The Inquiry is not a public authority therefore it is not subject to the public sector equality duty contained in the Act in the same way as a government department is. However, it is a body performing public functions, therefore this policy has been written paying due regard to Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This has involved the Inquiry reaching out to and working with numerous organisations that represent the diverse population of the UK, to inform this policy.
3. This policy sets out our proposed approach to accessible communications, with a particular focus on:
  - Welsh speakers
  - people who speak little/no English or Welsh
  - disabled people who require accessible formats.
4. We have prioritised these groups because they are likely to face communication and participation barriers. We will continue to explore other factors and add to this policy, and it will be regularly reviewed alongside the Inquiry's equalities policy.
5. We have spoken to national and UK-wide organisations that represent the views of disabled people and/or people who are not proficient in English/Welsh. Their assistance has been very helpful in shaping our approach.
6. We will continue to monitor audience insights to understand if there are any additional accessibility requirements of our audiences via dashboards, lessons learned exercises and engagement forums, to enable us to plan effectively.

## **Legal hearings and reports**

### **Welsh**

7. In the vast majority of cases we will launch each module with information in Welsh (a news article, the module scope and social media posts). As Welsh is a national language in the UK, we will ensure we provide high-quality translations. We will publish these materials at the same time as English versions wherever possible.
8. In the vast majority of cases, we will publish the executive summary of reports in Welsh concurrently with English versions. We will promote these reports with Welsh language materials (for example social media posts) and work with organisations to promote the reports and recommendations in Wales.

### **Module 2B: Core political and administrative decision-making in Wales**

9. Module 2B is about core political and administrative decision-making in Wales. The full report for all of the recommendations for Module 2 will be published in English and, as with other module reports, will be machine-translated to Welsh and available in HTML format on our website. We will ensure communications materials for module 2B are available in professionally-translated Welsh (for example the In Brief summary, press releases, social media posts and commemorative materials such as the human impact film).
10. The hearings for M2B were based in Wales. If a witness indicated that they would like to give evidence in Welsh, an interpreter would be booked in advance of the hearings. Requests had to be made 2 weeks in advance. The interpretation was simultaneous to minimise any potential disruption to timings during the hearings.
11. Simultaneous interpretation in English and Welsh was available within the hearing centre and on two separate livestreams (one in English and one in Welsh). The livestreams had automated captions which may have had inaccuracies.

### **People who are not proficient in English/Welsh**

12. In exceptional circumstances, we will consider requests for witnesses to give evidence in a language other than English or Welsh. Any requests must be

made at least 2 weeks in advance of the hearing date.

13. It will be difficult for many people who are not proficient in English or Welsh to follow the hearings.
14. To improve access, we have installed a translation tool on our website to allow individuals to translate material into a range of different languages (organisations recommended 10-15 languages based on need, rather than prevalence). Please be aware that translations are generated automatically. The Inquiry cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies or any actions taken as a result of these translations.
15. The tool can only translate webpages and does not work on documents. Individuals will be able to use the tool to read descriptions of each document and they can request translations. We will handle these requests on a case-by-case basis.
16. We will decline requests if we think they are unnecessary, disproportionate or represent poor value for taxpayers' money. For example if an individual can speak/write English to a good standard or if someone asks for the whole website to be translated for a school project. We will decline requests to translate evidence that has been submitted to the Inquiry by third parties to avoid mistranslating/misinterpreting any text.

### **People who require accessible formats**

17. We recognise that people have different communications needs and there is no "one size fits all" solution. We will aim to be proactive in identifying communications barriers and taking practical and proportionate steps to remove/overcome them.
18. We will work with all witnesses to ensure they are prepared to give evidence. If appropriate, we will make reasonable adjustments. For example if they need a sign language interpreter or support worker to give evidence. If you need additional support, please tell us at least three weeks in advance.
19. The Inquiry's hearings are streamed on YouTube, subject to a three minute delay. Users can turn on automated captions for all public hearings. Please be aware that captions are automated and may contain inaccuracies. We publish a transcript at the end of each day's hearing - you should refer to the transcript for an accurate record of proceedings.

20. Core Participants (CPs) will continue to have access to a live transcript of proceedings.
21. People who wish to bring an interpreter to a hearing may sit in the viewing room and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
22. We will consider accessibility when we publish information and reports. We will:
  - test to ensure the website works with different screen readers and browsers, including understanding whether the website overrides or aligns with personal settings
  - test and improve navigation and search functionality, for example making sure content is grouped together or tagged so someone can access all the Easy Read documents in one place; making sure live streams are archived/searchable so people can find particular items
  - review how the live streams appear on our website to ensure they can be accessed, searched and retrieved quickly
  - post reports as accessible PDFs and in HTML
  - publish summaries of reports in professionally-translated Welsh, British Sign Language and Easy Read
  - HTML summaries of reports will automatically be machine-translated to all the other languages already available on our website
  - work with people/organisations where appropriate to encourage diverse audiences to engage with the Inquiry's work and to promote the availability of accessible formats
  - create accessible social media content, for example add alt text to images unless they are decorative
  - use inclusive language and imagery in our communications
  - provide regular training so the Inquiry team can continue to learn about diversity, inclusion and accessibility issues
  - review feedback about diversity, inclusion and accessibility issues, and consider improvements that can be made.
23. If a person/organisation wants information in an accessible format, they can contact the Inquiry using the contact details provided in the Correspondence section towards the end of this document. We will consider all requests including whether the information is already available and the time/costs of producing an alternative. In some cases, we may decline a request but we will try to offer a suitable alternative. For example if someone requests a transcript in a large font, we will explain how they can use the accessibility tool to enlarge the text.

## **Every Story Matters**

24. Every Story Matters is the public's opportunity to help the UK Covid-19 Inquiry understand their experience of the pandemic. Every Story Matters will be there for you to share your story until 23 May 2025.
25. Individuals can complete the Every Story Matters form in a wide range of languages (10 available online) and in Easy Read. A BSL video explaining what Every Story Matters is, is also available on the Every Story Matters website with English subtitles. Participants can also request a Braille explanation and guide to completing it by using the contact details below.
26. In-person events will take place across the UK. Following consultation with specialist organisations, we will also hold targeted online events with different groups, such as disabled people and those who are clinically vulnerable.
27. As part of the planning process for events, we will ask people for their accessibility and language requirements before they attend, and where possible we will provide reasonable adjustments. For in-person events, we will do our best to ensure that venues are as accessible as possible, and we will provide attendees with accessibility information before the event.

## **Correspondence**

28. The Inquiry can be contacted by members of the public and organisations through our Freepost address (FREEPOST, UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry) and through our contact email address (contact@[covid19.public-inquiry.uk](mailto:contact@covid19.public-inquiry.uk)). These contact points are open to anyone and we receive a range of queries, opinions and assorted submissions which correspondents wish to be treated as evidence.
29. If we receive correspondence in a language other than English, we will endeavour to respond in that language. In order to provide best use of taxpayers' money, this response may be generated using free machine translation technology. This means that there may be some inaccuracies in the translation. The Inquiry cannot be held responsible for any inaccuracies or any actions taken as a result of these translations.

## **How we will monitor and enforce this policy**

30. The Inquiry will review this policy every six months to make sure it captures the key points. We will consider any feedback about diversity, inclusion and accessibility issues and we will use this information to update the policy when

appropriate. Key themes will also be shared with the Inquiry's senior leadership team.

31. This policy was last updated in March 2025.

### **Contact details**

32. If you would like to request a translation or alternative format (such as an accessible PDF, large print, Easy Read, audio recording or braille), please email [contact@coronavirus.inquiry.gov.uk](mailto:contact@coronavirus.inquiry.gov.uk).

We'll consider your request and respond within 10 working days.