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Our reference: 2500011561

Joyce Watson MS and Tom Giffard MS
Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

25 February 2025

Dear Ms Watson and Mr Giffard,

Thank you for your letter of 30 January 2025 and update regarding the work of the Wales COVID-19 Inquiry Special Purpose Committee. I will respond to each of the Committee's queries in turn below.

Health inequalities

The Inquiry's [Terms of Reference](#) include a specific focus on disparities evident in the impact of the pandemic on different groups of people. This includes people who share different protected characteristics, people in different nations and regions, different occupational groups and people from different socio-economic backgrounds and immigration status. This approach has been further set out in our [Equalities and Human Rights Statement](#).

Inequalities, including health inequalities, are being considered on a module by module basis as appropriate to their individual scopes.

In [Module 1](#) (Resilience and Preparedness) the Inquiry instructed two leading inequalities experts, Professor Sir Michael Marmot and Professor Clare Bamba, to provide an expert report focussing on the impact of Covid-19 on health inequalities and how such inequalities were considered by decision-makers throughout the pandemic.

The [Module 2](#) (Core UK Decision Making and Political Governance) investigation considered the extent to which decision-makers took into account pre-existing inequalities, including race and other protected characteristics. The following experts produced reports to assist in this regard, covering the position across the four nations: Professor James Nazroo, Dr Clare Wenham, Professor Laia Becares and Professor David Taylor-Robinson. The expert reports can be found on the [Documents](#) page of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry website under the tab 'Evidence'. In addition, Module 2B took evidence on inequalities issues in Wales specifically. For example, the Chair heard from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, the Children's

Commissioner for Wales, the Race Council Cymru and the Welsh Government's Disability Equality Forum.

Health inequalities were also referenced in the expert reports published in [Module 3](#) (UK Healthcare Systems). For example, Professor Chris E Brightling and Dr Rachael Evans explored Long Covid treatment and health inequalities as part of their expert report on The Treatment of Long Covid, and Professor Helen Snooks made an observation about the recognition of health inequalities as part of her expert report on Emergency Prehospital Care and Shielding.

In [Module 4](#) (Vaccines and Therapeutics), the Chair heard from Dr Kasstan-Dabush and Dr Chantler, who produced a report considering issues such as disparities in vaccine coverage, the causes of disparities, the reasons for barriers to uptake and the interplay between the vaccines roll-out and pre-existing inequalities and structural discrimination. The Chair also heard from experts on vaccine hesitancy amongst specific groups and on vaccine safety and therapeutics, both of which considered equalities elements including diversity in clinical trials and treatments.

All of these expert reports can now be found on the Inquiry website.

[Module 10](#) (Impact on Society) will examine inequalities relating to mental health, including through the commissioning of a systematic evidence review. The review will compare changes in the mental health and wellbeing of the population during the pandemic against pre-pandemic trends, focussing on UK research, identifying any risk and protective factors for changes and whether there were any disparities in mental health outcomes based on equality characteristics. The module is also instructing two psychiatric experts, Professors Jayati Das-Munshi and Professor David Osborn, to produce a joint expert report into the impact of the pandemic on people with pre-existing and severe mental health conditions, including the disproportionate impact on individuals from a range of specific socio-demographic backgrounds. The module will also cover any inequalities in health outcomes specifically for key workers, examining differences across infections, mortality and mental health and wellbeing, compared to the general population. Lastly, it will examine any disproportionate effects on those most vulnerable within society, including those outlined in the Inquiry's Equalities Statement, as well as Clinically Vulnerable and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people.

Mental health

Mental health is being considered by the Inquiry on a module-by-module basis where relevant to the scope. For example, an expert report published for Module 3 by Dr Guy Northover and Dr Sacha Evans focussed on the impact of the pandemic on treatment of non-covid conditions with a focus on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Module 3 has also taken evidence on the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of healthcare workers.

[Module 8](#) (Children and Young People) is considering the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. This includes hearing directly from children and young people about how the pandemic affected them, including their mental health and wellbeing, via the Inquiry's Children and Young People's Voices research project. The research is reflective of the UK population, including a mix of ages (currently aged between 9 to 22, who were between 5 to 18 at the start of the pandemic), ethnicities, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, those living in various geographical regions and those identifying as LGBTQ+ if aged 18 and over. The project is also hearing from children and young people who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. This includes children and young people with disabilities or health conditions, those in contact with mental health services, the criminal justice system, social services, the immigration system, and a range of other experiences during the pandemic and those who were in particular settings during the pandemic. Further information is available [here](#).

Mental health is a key topic within the provisional scope published for Module 10. As referred to above, this module is exploring the impact on mental health and the wellbeing of the general UK population, inequalities between different demographics, and mental health service provision. Module 10 is also looking at post-bereavement support, and support for people whose personal circumstances made them more vulnerable during the pandemic. The preliminary hearing, held on 18 February 2025, outlined the module's investigation and evidence gathering process in more detail.

The Inquiry's listening exercise, Every Story Matters, is also a rich source of data on mental health through the stories that individuals have shared with the Inquiry.

Listening exercise

Each story shared with us through Every Story Matters is being collated and analysed and will contribute towards themed records, which are submitted into each relevant investigation as evidence. Two of these records have already been published on our [Documents](#) page, the first covering Module 3 (Healthcare) and the most recent on Module 4 (Vaccines and Therapeutics).

There will not be an Every Story Matters record for [Module 5](#) (Procurement) as the Inquiry concluded that a record of personal stories would add limited further value to the investigation given its technical nature. All other future Inquiry modules will have Every Story Matters records. These records will be published at the start of each module hearing or shortly beforehand. The confirmed dates of future module hearings are published on the [Hearings](#) page of our website.

We have heard from more than 54,000 people so far through the Every Story Matters listening exercise, from across the UK. Three of the Inquiry's 25 public Every Story Matters events have been held in Wales (Wrexham, Llandudno and Swansea). In Cardiff, the Chair met with bereaved families to listen to their stories and in the last three years the Inquiry has met members of the public at events across North and South Wales. We have visited rural

communities at the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells, spoken to bereaved families and care home residents in Ruthin and Wrexham, and heard stories from people from disadvantaged groups and a variety of backgrounds at targeted events. All Every Story Matters resources are available in Welsh, people can share their story with a Welsh speaker and receive counselling support in Welsh at all events in Wales.

Reporting timetable

The Inquiry will be publishing detailed reports for each module, containing key analysis, findings and recommendations. The Module 2 report is expected to be published in late 2025, with the Module 3 report following in the Spring of 2026. Unfortunately, we cannot at this stage share a timetable for the publication of future module reports owing to the unique scope and nature of each of the modules.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Connah', with a horizontal line underneath.

Ben Connah
Secretary
UK Covid-19 Inquiry