

## Appendix to Submissions

We are mindful of the time constraints and in an effort to assist the Inquiry we conducted a survey between 7<sup>th</sup> and 12 October with a number of bereaved families who we represent to obtain their instruction on the Inquiry's current proposals on how they are to share their accounts with the Inquiry. Specific questions were asked about the Listening Exercise and Pen Portraits. We received 412 responses in the 6 day window.

Of those, 96% are of the view that it is a good idea that a number of Pen Portraits are heard directly by the Chair in the Inquiry Hearing. They were mindful of the need to be proportionate. 76% wanted the assistance of their legal representatives in preparing their Pen Portraits.

Of those who would like to share an account about the circumstances in which they lost their loved one, 78% have said they would need assistance from their legal representatives to do so.

We also received 224 "free form" responses from bereaved families who wanted their comments to be reflected in these submissions. We have narrowed this down to 33 responses which we believe are a proportionate representation of the wider views.

<b>Do you have any thoughts about the proposals for the Listening Exercise that you'd like to share?</b>
It's important to me to share my mum's pen portrait and account, however I object very strongly to this being collected and collated by a 3rd party with no expertise in this specific kind of evidence gathering. I don't believe it would serve the purposes of the Inquiry to do it this way and if it's done by a company that has been involved in the 'Covid Response' it is likely a serious potential conflict of interest and would smack of an attempt to rig the outcome of the Inquiry.
My Mum and her story is not something I want a PR company dealing with. Her life and death are not data to be summarised or watered down. I need to know the circumstances around her loss will be heard by this inquiry.
Every single person who lost someone to Covid, or during the Pandemic, has a relevant experience. I think that we're all wise enough to know that it would be impossible to hear 204,000 accounts about loved ones, but there should be a representative number of accounts, illustrating the gamut of issues that occurred. People don't want to talk to some private company about what happened to their loved ones, they want to be able to stand up at the official Inquiry and have their accounts on the record - affording our accounts the gravitas that they deserve.
Of course, it would be impossible for so many people that would like to contribute their experiences of loss to the panel to be heard. But surely time should be given for a cross section of those who wish to contribute to be heard. For many the opportunity to be able to relate to those who are supposed to prevent these things ever happening again - i.e the Government - would be quite cathartic if they were really listened to and understood. I do not think that the present proposals for the Listening Exercise is in any way going to do this.
Not having legal representation opens up the possibility of misrepresentation and PR companies are employed to put positive spin on things. This means that bereaved families are open to their stories being twisted and abused, as well as the families themselves being bullied as part of the project.
I think selling our loved one's stories to the lowest bidding PR company and 3rd parties only help to "marginalise" Bereaved families is disrespectful and in poor taste.

I am not convinced that using a private research company, analysed and summarised by them, and without any input or assistance from our representatives, would be impartial nor equitable, particularly considering that I read that eight of the twelve suggested companies were given Govt contracts during Covid.

I was dismayed to learn that the experiences of bereaved families are to be heard in this way. My trust in having a fair hearing is ebbing.

Whilst I appreciate the number of deaths involved, each fatality is individual and personal to the bereaved. I am unhappy, to the point of refusing to cooperate with a private company whose background may be suspect, to share my very personal feelings and emotions regards the death of my Wife. As there is no apparent control over the listening exercise, I would not be participating.

We have been denied inquests for our loved ones due to a legal loophole which stated that issues surrounding covid-19 would instead be covered in the public inquiry, and now our voices and our loved ones' stories are being excluded from the inquiry. It feels as though their lives meant nothing, but they should be central to the inquiry. Lessons cannot be learned without thorough consideration of our evidence, and without reminders that our loved ones were real people whose lives should have been protected.

The proposed listening exercise without legal backup or any other type of support, excludes those with difficulties with writing or formulating their experiences into written words e.g., dyslexia.

It is about sharing our stories to effect change so no one has to suffer as we and our loved ones did. To share such a painful experience without purpose is not something I would like to do. It is only though the full horror of bearing witness that I believe real meaningful change is possible. To be summarised into themes is deeply offensive...

It is vital evidence for the chair and panel members to hear and also members of the public who watch the public hearings. It is important for bereaved families to be central.

A sanitised, anonymised summary of the "themes" captured by a third-party company on behalf of the Inquiry through the proposed process in no way allows the voices of those bereaved by Covid-19 to form and shape the direction of the Inquiry. Every single day of the hearings should begin with a bereaved person standing in front of the hearing telling the story of what happened to the person they loved, and, in turn, what this has done to them. The 205,051 people who are dead with Covid-19 on their death certificates as a cause of death as of 29th Sept 2022 have been silenced. They cannot speak, but we - the people who love them - we have a duty and a right to speak for them. And this Inquiry must hear us.

The Chair has said that she wants the bereaved to be at the heart of the inquiry, and the inquiry website itself states "The UK Covid-19 Inquiry has been set up to examine the UK's response to and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and learn lessons for the future." But how can the impact be properly examined without have specific, first-hand, lived testimony about it? Our loved ones were human beings not data. The impact of this virus on the bereaved is emotional - not statistical.

...the proposal for the "Listening Exercise" sounds to be exactly what it is i.e., an exercise. It ticks the box and fulfils the aims of those conducting the inquiry. Regretfully, the proposal "de-personalises;" it keeps the stories of the bereaved at arm's length which, inevitably, implies that hearing the stories first-hand is unimportant.

To be central to the inquiry, the dead and bereaved and their testimonies need to be integral. A parallel exercise will not fulfil this criterion.

A group summary of our grief will automatically desensitise and depersonalise the horror that we've had to go through. The only way to get our voices heard, is for our real voices to be heard, not a diluted, redacted version of a group of stories. And everyone's story is different. The Chair cannot listen to 200,000 stories, but those who wish could all supply pen portraits, and then some representatives each tell their stories as direct evidence.

I would not trust a commercial organisation 3rd party sufficiently to be able to tell them what happened to my father. Anonymising data is wholly unacceptable and does not help me feel that the Inquiry is listening. As a bereaved person who has been traumatised by the circumstances surrounding my father's death, it is very important to me that his name and identity is known to the Inquiry. While I appreciate that the Chair is trying to contain the magnitude of the task, I feel very strongly that marginalising bereaved families will result in an Inquiry that does not have credibility with bereaved families.

I understand that hearing the evidence of 200,000 families is impractical. But just because it's impractical doesn't mean that it should be side-lined. I do not want to be part of an 'exercise'. Nor do I want the tragic circumstances of my mother's death - which illustrate the clear failings and callous disregard of the government - to be part of an 'exercise'. I want to give evidence, under oath. I want to be treated seriously. And if my evidence has to be gathered together with that of others, then I want it to be done by lawyers - in the same way that the evidence offered by the government will be gathered and analysed by lawyers.

At the meeting with the families that was held in Exeter, Lady Hallett promised that the bereaved would be at the heart and centre of the inquiry. Now it seems as though the so-called listening exercise is very much a parallel process with a nod to those lost being through a memorialisation installation in the hearing room. I do not want my mum's story to be part of a data analysis exercise which has been outsourced to a third party nor do I want it to be part of an installation.

I would like you to please reconsider your plans to outsource our accounts to a research company and our personal details being anonymised. Please allow us the chance to have our traumatic accounts heard individually and our evidence shown publicly. Our loved ones were our world and were not just a number/statistic.

The proposed Listening exercise is totally inadequate to understand and express the deep loss which has been experienced by those bereaved by Covid. Summarising accounts submitted into key themes will be ineffective as a way of enabling the bereaved to be heard at the inquiry and will fail to communicate the full extent of impact of losing a loved one in the circumstances created by decisions made (or not made!) by public bodies/the government from the emergence of the threat of Covid and throughout the subsequent pandemic.

I feel really strongly that by outsourcing the listening exercise to external agencies to those making the final decision on the inquiry findings is humiliating and totally unconcerning of the bereaved. We need to be heard by those at the sharp end of policies and those making the decisions, so that the true emotional impact can be listened to, acknowledged and so that actions based on our evidence can really be taken going forward. We need to be heard by those carrying out the findings.

I am surprised and disappointed at the proposal. This feels like families of bereaved are being side-lined and this is a tick box exercise to pacify them, not to truly understand the distress and impact many have suffered and why the inquiry is so important.

The proposed Listening Exercise format will unquestionably marginalise & deny bereaved families from being part of the core Inquiry Hearings. Furthermore, it will also deprive the Public from full access to powerful, convincing, testimonies of Government & Agencies failures.

The proposed Listening Exercise by a research company to identify key themes which will then be summarised and anonymised in a report to the Chair is not adequate. This process of 'sanitising' Covid bereavements in this manner is inappropriate.

My mum is not a number, nor should she be put into a melting pot to become part of a summary. If history is to reflect the pandemic accurately then front and centre has to be the people who died during it. A summary will not, with the best will in the world be an accurate account of so many different experiences.

I feel that the way the listening project is being proposed would make my husband's death totally impersonal and amount to a bit of "data".

I would find it extremely difficult to share my mother's story with a research company. I think the bereaved members of this group deserve better than this. Our loved ones should not be summarised if this is to be the thorough inquiry that was promised

It is essential that the inquiry hears from families about their lost loved ones. It is perhaps even more important, given most of us could not see our loved ones when ill or be with them when they passed away, hold proper funerals etc. These additional factors have caused trauma which can only be truly understood by hearing a real-life story. I also do not understand why if this was allowed in other inquiries, why it would not be in this one.

I strongly believe that the bereaved deserve to be heard, not only in our own right, but as the only voice available to the victims.

It is vital that those of us who have lost someone get our voice heard. How can you consider the effect of the pandemic without this? This is the human cost to mistakes made and it is a lifelong cost that needs to be heard and understood.