

Ann Hithersay was the final witness of the week of Inquiry hearings.

Ms Hithersay became Director of the Macfarlane Trust (MFT) and Eileen Trust (ELT) from early October 1997 to October 2003. She took directions from the Board of Trustees and her role was to implement these directions and delegate them to the staff members and liaise with the registrants. Her previous experience was in the charitable sector. Despite this, when she joined MFT she knew very little about haemophilia and contaminated blood so had to read a lot and talked to staff and registrants to learn. She described this as a steep learning curve.

Ms Hithersay discussed several topics put to him by Katie Scott, Inquiry Counsel, over the course of her two days of evidence and these included:

- The Trustees saw part of their role as having a responsibility to grow the money received from the Government by keeping it in their account and not be 'over generous' to registrants. Ms Hithersay spoke of how her approach to distributing the fund would have been different and to ensure the registrants received regular payments.
- She spoke of that, to her knowledge, everyone registered with MFT received a payment if they had been infected with HIV.
- One of the topics that featured heavily during the two days of evidence was payments to widows and children. Ms Hithersay said that to her knowledge all widows received payments from MFT if the primary beneficiary had passed away. She advised that she had no knowledge of how the Trustees decided about who paid what. She also couldn't recall there being different rates and then being an issue that she was aware of.
- Ms Hithersay did agree that, in hindsight, support to widows was inadequate but at the time she didn't see any possibility of the funding situation being looked at by the Trustees and at the time she did just accept that there were certain ways the Trust had been set up. She didn't question the widow's policy and again in hindsight the provision for widows and dependents was not adequate.
- Ms Scott also questioned Ms Hithersay about how the Trust authorised grants that registrants had applied for. The staff had Office Guidelines to follow and if the request for a grant fell within the cost limits within the Guidelines then the staff could approve the request. If the grant request did not fall within the Guidelines, then the grant request had to be put to the Board of Trustees who were not bound by the Guidelines.
- Ms Hithersay also discussed how debt was dealt with by the Trustees and their guidelines for payment of debt which did include securing loans against the registrant's property.

At the close of her evidence Ms Hithersay acknowledged that the area she felt that the Trustee's did not address adequately was that of life insurance and the fact that those infected with HIV were unable to obtain life insurance which was generally a requirement for a mortgage. Ms Hithersay's hope was that the Inquiry would have the scope to examine this and recognise what would have been available to widows had life insurance been in place.

For a full transcript of Ann Hithersay's evidence please visit <https://www.infectedbloodinquiry.org.uk/evidence> where you can read the transcript or watch the evidence via YouTube video.