



Campaigners Need to Act Now Ahead of the Covid Inquiry

‘Those individuals, campaigners and organisations who have taken advice, and really began to formulate their thoughts as to how the inquiry should work, will be best placed’.

In May 2021, Boris Johnston announced that the much anticipated Covid Public Inquiry will start next spring (2022). Meanwhile, Scotland is forging ahead at pace. Nicola Sturgeon has already announced the setting up of the Scottish Public Inquiry. It will commence before the end of 2021. The Scottish Government has invited feedback by the end of September. The Scottish Government has already identified what it believes to be the four main planks of the inquiry: direct Covid health impact (including care homes) non Covid health impacts, education, and economic impact.

At Watkins and Gunn, we are acting for a large number of victims in the ongoing Infected Blood Inquiry. We act for the majority of the victims from Wales and from Northern Ireland. One of the main lessons we quickly learnt was the importance of the time period immediately **before** the inquiry actually commenced. Those months are the only real chance

victims have to shape the inquiry. Victims and those who act for them had the opportunity – during those pre inquiry months – to make representations as to

- Who would chair the inquiry
- The nature of the inquiry and structure
- What would be the main issues the inquiry would cover (its terms of reference)?

With the infected blood inquiry, the outcome was a statutory Judge led inquiry with wide ranging terms of reference. However, this was not inevitable but was the outcome from careful and considered representations by the key victims’ groups.

The Covid Inquiry is going to be particularly complex. It can be seen that Scotland is already seeking to break away and steal a march on the rest of the UK. How will that impact on the other devolved nations? Another lesson we learnt from the Infected Blood Inquiry was that, in acting for victims in Northern Ireland and Wales, it’s been a vital part of our role to prevent the inquiry from becoming too “English centric”. If Northern Ireland and Wales do **not** have their own separate inquiries (the First Minister of Wales has publicly expressed a view that Wales should indeed not), how will sufficient focus be given to the devolved nations? Will the Westminster generated inquiry have the same four