

## COVID-19 Public Inquiry: Draft Terms of Reference

Consultation response submitted by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health: April 2022

### About us

The [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health \(RCPCH\)](#) is responsible for training and examining paediatricians, setting professional standards and informing research and policy. RCPCH has over 20,000 members in the UK and internationally. We work to transform child health through knowledge, research and expertise, to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people across the world.

### Do the Inquiry's [draft Terms of Reference](#) cover all the areas that you think should be covered by the inquiry?

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) would welcome greater focus on children and young people as part of this inquiry.

While we recognise children and young people have been generally less seriously affected by COVID-19 than adults in direct terms, they are more at risk from the negative longer-term consequences of the current pandemic. In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 12, where children and young people have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, we believe that their views and voices should be heard by the inquiry.

RCPCH view the following areas, all of which have been significantly impacted by the response to the pandemic, as particularly important for this inquiry to additionally consider:

- Children and young people's mental health.
- Safeguarding and child protection especially of vulnerable children.
- The widening of child health inequalities.
- Redeployment of the child health workforce and facilities to adult services.
- The interruption of routine child health appointments including in the community and the disruption of wider childhood vaccination programmes.
- Disruption of education such as a lack of IT access and face-to-face teaching.
- The delivery of health research including for children and young people.

RCPCH acknowledge that some of these issues could be covered within the existing areas of the inquiry as set out in the draft terms of reference, including for example under "restrictions on attendance at places of education" and "shielding and protection of the clinically vulnerable". However, the unique impact on children and young people is not limited to sub-section and we are conscious that the voice of children and young people is often lost or neglected when considered directly alongside the voice of the adult population.

There is a real risk that without a specific focus on children and young people this inquiry could fail to properly understand the full impact of, response to, and lessons learned from the pandemic as they relate to this group.

RCPCH welcomes the specific aim of the inquiry to consider the experiences and impact on health and care sector workers, and other key workers, during the pandemic. As with any other group of frontline workers, the impact of the pandemic on our members has been significant. Paediatricians worked long hours, were redeployed to other wards, communicating with relatives of adult ICU patients, facilitated the shielding of doctors doing different roles and of course giving vaccinations. It is also important to reflect on the impact that the disruption of

education has had on the undergraduate and postgraduate training of all healthcare staff including nurses, doctors, and allied healthcare professionals and how this potentially impacts the pipeline of future child health professionals.

## **How should the Inquiry be designed and run to ensure that bereaved people or those who have suffered serious harm or hardship as a result of the pandemic have their voices heard?**

RCPCH is of the view that where relevant the inquiry should seek the views and accounts of children and young people. In doing so, the inquiry will obtain a greater understanding of the impact and response to the pandemic had on this group and what lessons should be learned. As we have touched on elsewhere, the harm and hardship that children and young people have experienced is unique and has the potential to have a generational impact.

It is important that engagement with children and young people is done in an appropriate and meaningful way that maintains a rights-based approach. Through our RCPCH&US Network, we have considerable experience involving children and young people in our work and in creating meaningful opportunities for them to engage in and shape policy and practice.

Our detailed approach and engagement methodology is [set out on our website](#). It is our view that every piece of work where children and young people's insight, input and support is sought needs to have a bespoke engagement plan. We would recommend the inquiry take this approach to ensure the correct method is being used to ensure the needs of children and young people are being met alongside the inquiries aims all whilst retaining a rights-based approach.

Given the need to ensure the voice of children and young people and our existing work done on this to date, RCPCH would welcome the opportunity to apply to become a core participant of this inquiry.

### **For further information please contact:**

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