

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities
Committee

By email only

Thursday 14 January 2021

Dear Caroline,

Subject: Recommendation concerning EHRC inquiry terms of reference

I write in response to the Committee's recent recommendation, set out in its report, 'Unequal Impact? Coronavirus and BAME people', to extend the terms of reference for our inquiry into racial inequality in health and social care workplaces.

We decided to undertake an inquiry focusing on racial inequality last summer in light of the deep inequalities exposed by the coronavirus pandemic and as part of our wider programme of work tackling racial inequalities.

We set out to identify a specific area of concern where there is limited evidence and where our unique remit will add particular value. While we looked at a number of sectors, health and social care was identified as a priority given the impact of the pandemic in that sector.

This focus and the terms of reference for the inquiry are based on extensive consultation with stakeholders including academics, race equality organisations, employers and government officials.

A common theme that emerged through consultation was that there had been significant focus on ethnic minority representation at senior levels, but very little attention on the experiences of the lowest paid workers, where ethnic minority workers are generally overrepresented.

While we agree there is a need to understand racial inequalities across a range of employment sectors, we must limit the scope of our inquiries according to our limited resources and our intention to report findings within a meaningful

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timeframe. Further, while the scope is restricted to health and social care sectors, we anticipate that our findings and recommendations will be relevant to other sectors.

The Committee recommends we investigate the economic impacts of coronavirus for workers and determine if there is a causal link between occupation and exposure, infection and mortality rates. We will examine the health and economic impact on lower paid workers through qualitative interviews and analysis of available health and social care workforce datasets. However, our focus for this inquiry is on the wider impact, treatment and experience of workers and not to determine if there is a causal link between occupation and infection. We understand that Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are addressing occupational risk and exposure issues. HSE told us in September that they will be using their inquiry powers to report on the lessons learnt from investigations into Covid-19 deaths conducted under the Work-related Death Protocol.

There are also a number of practical challenges to reviewing the terms of reference – published on 5 November - including that we have launched a call for evidence and appointed contractors to carry out research based on them.

I hope you find this helpful. Thank you for your continued interest in this inquiry and we would welcome your support as soon as the findings and recommendations are made.

Yours sincerely,

Alastair Pringle



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