

Crisis response learnings from the Covid-19 Public Inquiry

To respond to crises effectively, the British state needs to engage and listen to a wider range of views:

The Covid-19 Public Inquiry module 1 and 2 report both highlight the need for diversity of view and challenge, which “lead to better-informed and improved decision-making”.

It’s not just the science that matters but wider views on what should be done:

The Inquiry specifically highlighted that it’s not just science but “policy options” that ministers need to have access to at the “appropriate time”.

It identified are five key flaws in previous government approaches to determining risk: too much reliance on single scenarios; planning to deal with situations rather than prevent them; lack of awareness of the domino effect of a crisis; failure to recognise long term risks particularly to the vulnerable; and lack of joint up approach between planning and strategy.

The Inquiry noted that heading from a breadth of perspective helped mitigate these risks.

Groupthink must be avoided:

The Inquiry heard a significant amount of evidence about the damage of groupthink with an emphasis on getting different voices in the room. It was concluded that the government suffered from “a narrowed perspective” because of not having those different views, which in turn damaged decision making.

It’s not just about empowering government:

Conclusions show that most emergencies will require collaboration across government, as well as with other organisations and the public.

When the union movement was involved in the pandemic response, we made a constructive helpful difference:

Chancellor at the time, Rishi Sunak, described engagement with the TUC during the pandemic as incredibly valuable. He set out to the Inquiry that he felt it made a “huge difference to have a good constructive working relationship”.