The Chairman of the Inquiry, Baroness Hallett, is currently discussing her terms of reference with government ministers. The outcome is not expected to be very different from the version put out for public consultation some weeks ago.

The Inquiry is charged with providing a factual narrative of what happened, including how decisions were made and by whom.

It will be a UK inquiry but will not seek to duplicate Inquiries launched by devolved governments.

The success, impact and value of government communications will be reviewed but there is no mention of a review of the role played by the media.

Let us hope this is corrected.

Nothing is said explicitly about the role of the scientific advisory committees and the quality of their input, but a judgement is inescapable.

The Inquiry will look at the use of lock downs, face coverings and the shielding and protection of the clinically vulnerable.

It will no doubt look closely at the decision to transfer patients out of hospital into care homes.

Travel restrictions are up for review as is what happened in prisons and other places of detention [presumably including special hospitals]. The impact on health and social care staff is included in the terms of reference.

Testing and contact tracing is bound to come under critical review. What did it achieve and at what cost? Would more local schemes have been more or less successful?

The response of the NHS and Care Home sector will be reviewed including the procurement of PPE although this might be complicated by ongoing police inquiries.

The inquiry will want to establish whether hospitals were, in the early days, super spreaders.

Was the building of Nightingale hospitals a sensible precaution or a waste of money?

How did Public Health England perform and why was it closed down in the middle of a pandemic?

More challenging for the Inquiry is the task of establishing the impact of covid measures on non-covid related conditions and the economic consequences of support

for business and jobs. A “reasonable” review of international experience is to be included.

The focus should be on a search for lessons rather than blame or criticism, but this will be a fine line to tread.

The Chair will also have to careful to limit the Inquiry to essentials otherwise it will go on for years and its impact on the future management of pandemics will then be minimal.

The terms of reference do provide for interim reports.

We will report further when the terms of reference are finalised.

If, like in other Inquiries, Baroness Hallett recruits expert panels we will see who her advisors are.

Prof Brian Edwards and the Covid reporting team.