

Witness Name: Clair Walton
Statement No.: WITN1589029
Exhibits: None
Dated: 3 April 2025

INFECTED BLOOD INQUIRY

FOURTH WRITTEN STATEMENT OF CLAIR WALTON

I provide this statement in response to a request under Rule 9 of the Inquiry Rules 2006 dated 24 March 2025.

I, Clair Walton, will say as follows:

1. I note at the outset of this statement that I have had an extremely limited time within which to prepare it. I make no criticism of the Inquiry for the timescale within which it has sought my evidence, I simply make the point that I have necessarily not given a full account of the entirety of my experiences but have instead focused on events which demonstrate themes which I think are important.
2. This is the fourth written statement which I have given to the Inquiry, I have been asked within this statement, to deal with my experiences of the Infected Blood Compensation Authority ("IBCA") and particularly, my experiences as a User Consultant for the IBCA.
3. I have read a number of the written statements filed by other infected and affected people about the aftermath of the publication of Inquiry's 2024 Report,

the establishment of the IBCA and Sir Robert Francis' consultation with infected and affected people through the summer of 2024 which resulted in the Infected Blood Compensation Scheme Regulations 2024. Given that history appears well covered, I have focused here on my experiences since late July 2024.

4. During August 2024, a job advertisement had come to my attention. I do not have a copy of the advertisement, but it was for a permanent civil service position, working with the IBCA; the requirement for the role specified that applicants must be eligible to make a claim to the IBCA for compensation arising out of either being infected or affected by the use of contaminated blood or blood products.
5. In July 2024, I had seen a communication from IBCA regarding the intention to create a "Community Representative" post. I had deep concerns about the creation of the single position and wrote to Sir Robert and David Foley on 24 July, noting that the "community" was diverse and that it was unrealistic to expect any single person to be able to effectively advocate on behalf of all.
6. I did not receive a reply from Sir Robert or David Foley but when the post for User Consultant was advertised, I was satisfied IBCA had given more consideration and altered the role resulting in a shift from representative to consultant. Therefore, I did give some thought to the new role and decided that given my lived experiences and my professional skills I might be able to make a difference within the IBCA and to offer some valuable input to the design of the scheme. I applied for the position before the deadline for applications which was 2 September.
7. I was interviewed for the position on 20 September and then received a call from the IBCA's Interim Director of Communications on 25 September, to say that the IBCA was interested in working with me.
8. In my application and in this subsequent call, I had suggested that the role be split into a job share; this was a further reflection of my belief that the IBCA required broader input than any one infected or affected person could provide.

9. There were a number of 'catch-up' calls between me and the IBCA over the following weeks and I came to understand that there were two other people likely to be appointed as user consultants; this was something that I was pleased about because it somewhat addressed my concerns about any single person holding the position.
10. It then became increasingly clear that the initial proposal to make the positions civil service appointments was running into difficulty. My understanding is that there had been concerns expressed about impartiality and our clear lack of it, given that we would be working for the IBCA but would also have an innate interest in its work, given that we would be claimants.
11. Ultimately, there was a proposal from the IBCA that we be appointed as contractors, and this happened, in my case, on or around 6 December; my first day working part time for the IBCA was on 17 December. I was employed for a fixed period under an external umbrella employer rather than the permanent civil service post that was advertised.
12. When told about what is expected of User Consultants on a day-to-day basis, we were encouraged to ask anything, go anywhere in areas we are interested in. In one sense, this demonstrates a large degree of transparency on the IBCA's part but on another, it makes it very difficult to do anything effective, without any structure.
13. By February 2025, after sufficient time to review the experience of my new role; asking anything, going anywhere, in areas that interested me - I asked the IBCA to improve User Consultants engagement, including having issues we raised logged, followed up and a request for regular contact with each other as User Consultants and with senior management. The purpose of this request was to facilitate a more effective and efficient way of working. Since raising this, steps have been begun within the IBCA to improve the structure of our engagement.

14. I have visited the IBCA's offices in Newcastle and have been involved in meetings with the Cabinet Office Minister and the Board of the IBCA as well as meeting with Claim Managers to understand how they work on a day-to-day basis. As a result of these interactions, I have the following points of note:

- a) On 16 January 2025, I attended a meeting virtually where the issue of sequencing invitations to claim (i.e. the order of prioritising invitations) was being discussed. I remember asking questions about why there had ever been a consultation with the 'community' in relation to the point when it seemed obvious that different factions would each argue that they ought to be prioritised. Also, that the process had been traumatising. The sequencing consultation had taken place prior to me taking up my role and I had participated in the consultation and witnessed the damaging impact. I was told that the IBCA had to consult on such an important issue.
- b) The User Consultants were invited to a Board meeting on 21 January where we were introduced to the Board. At that meeting the issue of sequencing was discussed. User Consultants are not Board members, therefore as expected, the subsequent decision on sequencing was made solely by the Board.
- c) With an interest in how the IBCA communicates and who it engages with, I continued to pursue the outcome of the sequencing consultation. I was told that there had been no clear consensus - I felt that this rather proved my point. I was told that there was only one area of clear consensus which was that priority be given to those near end of life.
- d) I have not been invited to any board meetings since that January meeting though I understand that some have taken place.
- e) I began my role in mid-December 2024 around the time the first cohort had been invited to claim. The IBCA have been running a beta test and learn operation inviting up to 250 by end March 2025 before scaling up the claims.

Therefore, my experience to date has been to understand how claims are processed within that test and learn period.

- f) In speaking with claim managers and viewing how they go about dealing with claims, I have the following points which I think are of note:
 - i) Upon sending out an invitation to make a claim, I was informed the claim manager will access the claimant's AHO records and any evidence that the claimant gave to the Inquiry, they will then review this information. This may happen before the initial call with the claimant. It might be said that this detailed preparation prior to a call is desirable but I find it intrusive and wasteful. I do not see why the claim manager needs to spend significant amounts of time reading up on someone's background. It seems to me a far more efficient use of time to simply have a short call with the claimant where the manager identifies what information the claimant holds, what is missing and what needs to be obtained in order to progress the claim.
 - ii) Claim managers have been encouraged to spend as much time with claimants as the claimant needs. There is a culture of kindness and compassion. I am sure everyone would agree that claimants should be treated in a friendly way and with empathy but there is a line to be drawn – particularly in circumstances where thousands of people are waiting to be able to make their claims.
 - iii) The IBCA, through claim managers, has taken it as its sole responsibility to obtain evidence on behalf of claimants. There will be plenty of occasions where this needs to happen, but it doesn't need to be the default position. In many cases, it will be quicker, cheaper and easier to simply get documents and information from a claimant or their representative.

15. The main points which I wish to convey in this statement are:

- a) We have reached the end of the IBCA's test and learn phase of processing applications; it is unclear to me as I write this statement, what learning has resulted, what changes will result from that learning and how those changes will secure a more efficient service going forward.

- b) Whatever the current resources of the IBCA and whatever they might ultimately be increased to include, it is questionable whether resources are being used efficiently. If claim managers were trained to deal with claims in an efficient manner – obtaining information and documents through the easiest route, interacting in a friendly but perfunctory way with claimants – I have no doubt that more claims could be being processed than is currently the case.

- c) I have no idea when I will be able to make my claim for compensation and I have no idea when the scheme will open up to applications without invitation. This is the biggest source of anger and upset for everyone waiting to make their claim. More information needs to be given about anticipated timescales because as matters stand, we don't know whether it will be two months or two years before we are able to make our claims.

16. I am pleased that I was appointed as a User Consultant and feel that I can do some good in the role, particularly if, as we move forward, greater definition and structure is given to the position.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

GRO-C

Signed _____

Dated _____ 3 April 2025 _____