

Decision making training for Ministers essential following COVID-19 Inquiry report findings

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Former National Audit Office Director and Coronadiary author David Finlay calls for training for Ministers as critical Covid-19 Inquiry report findings show government failed citizens during the pandemic

In his book *Coronadiary: 100 days that changed our lives and three skills government had been told to improve* former National Audit Office Director David Finlay reveals a startling finding: Ministers had had no collective training in skills which would help them make the complex decisions they were responsible for during the COVID pandemic. Also, Finlay's research identified that the government had been warned before the pandemic to improve its skills in planning, making use of data and managing risks, skills which should have been central to making appropriate decisions in response to the COVID threat.

Finlay says the COVID-19 Inquiry report findings reinforce his view that the failure to train Ministers in decision making skills had a major impact on the state's inability to prepare and respond to the COVID pandemic effectively. "It's clear from the Inquiry report," Finlay says "that Ministers had not planned properly for how government should respond to a pandemic like COVID, they did not have the data to track its progress in the early stages and, as the report recommends, there needs to be a new approach to risk assessment when dealing with emergencies. These go back to the three key skills of planning, using data and managing risks which my research shows were previous weaknesses which Ministers had not addressed and were not trained to think about."

Finlay continues "The lack of formal training for Ministers in planning for emergencies, assessing relevant data, considering alternative strategies and the trade-offs they may involve, whilst correctly identifying and managing risk, inevitably led to sub-optimal actions when Ministers were under pressure to make complex COVID decisions. You don't expect doctors or pilots to look after the public without suitable training and qualifications. But we put our trust in Ministers to make critical decisions during the pandemic affecting our health and livelihoods without any training in how to make such momentous decisions."

Finlay agrees with the COVID Inquiry's ten recommendations noting that they call for major improvements in each of his three themes of better planning, collecting data and managing risk. "But you won't achieve the improvements the COVID-19 Inquiry is calling for," Finlay asserts "unless Ministers are trained to always have a mindset which focuses on these three skills which are relevant to planning and executing all government projects." Finlay calls on the Cabinet Office to urgently introduce a short but effective Minister training programme.

Finlay has a strong message "The COVID-19 Inquiry report has rightly said the state must not again fail its citizens by repeating the mistakes that were made during the COVID pandemic. But as citizens we surely have the right to expect that our Ministers will have been suitably trained in making complex decisions under the intense pressures which will always arise during national emergencies"

David Finlay is the author of Coronadiary: 100 days that changed our lives and three skills government had been told to improve (ISBN 9781802270792). He can be contacted at davidfinlay2012@hotmail.co.uk

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