Dear Sarah Louise Barbera

We refer to your request where you asked:

“1. Which individuals or groups were responsible for providing ethical advice and guidance to Conrad Bird and MullenLowe during the development of the ‘Look into my eyes’ Covid-19 communications campaign. Also please provide copies of relevant meeting minutes or correspondence where ethical specialists expressed their views on the content of the adverts and videos produced by MullenLowe for this campaign.

2. In response to an earlier FOI request (2023 08 29 FOI 2023 09251 Material for Disclosure.pdf (whatdotheyknow.com)), you helpfully described how provisional versions of adverts/videos comprising the ‘Look into my eyes’ Covid-19 communications were field tested to provide feedback on their effectiveness and appropriateness – for example, one view expressed was that the materials were ‘hard-hitting in the right way’, ‘appropriate for the current situation’, and ‘emotive and gripping’. Please provide details about:

a) Who comprised this panel of people who provided feedback, and how they were selected;

b) What specific remit were they given (please provide explicit details of the particular aspects of the adverts/videos they were asked to comment on).

Yours faithfully,”

We are writing to advise you that following a search of our paper and electronic records,
we have established that the information you requested is held by the Cabinet Office. In reference to point 1, ethical considerations are built into all campaign development and delivery. However, ethical approval on government campaigns is not a standard requirement. All Covid-19 campaigns were developed and delivered at pace in alignment with best practice principles which include the clear, accurate and timely communication of government public health policy and use of audience testing via insight research to inform development and ensure accuracy of message take-out. In line with this ‘Look into my eyes’:

- was carefully developed based on qualitative insight research that was used to test, inform and calibrate campaign creative and messaging design. This found the route to be powerful, evocative, and authentic in how it represented the impact of the pandemic at that moment, and the consequences of people not staying at home. Research findings did not indicate that additional, non-standard approvals – such as ethical approval - were required.

- featured real people and captured the impact of the virus at that specific point in time.

In reference to point 2a, the panels consisted of six 90 minute focus groups, each consisting of six respondents. Recruitment of participants was managed independently via a specialist market research recruitment agency, accredited to ISO20252. The agency manages recruitment centrally using a network of recruiters across the UK, who work to Market Research Society (MRS) Guidelines and recruit using their own local panels of participants.

The makeup of the panels were as follows:

- 3 groups who agreed that the risks of Coronavirus were exaggerated
  - 1 x 20-45, mix life stage, C2DE, male skew
  - 1 x 20-45, mixed life stage, BC1, male skew
  - 1 x 25-45, all parents, C2D, female skew

- 2 groups who were unsure that the risks of Coronavirus were exaggerated
  - 1 x 20-45, mix life stage,
  - 2 x C2DE, 20-45, working out of home, C2D

- 1 group who disagreed that the risks of Coronavirus were exaggerated
  - 45-65, older/empty nester, BC1
Black and minority ethnic participants were spread over the groups (groups 1, 4 and 6) and the sample was from across English locations, with 4 from Scotland, 4 from Wales and 3 from Northern Ireland.

In reference to point 2b, the remit of the panels was to provide their opinions on the proposed campaign materials.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Head of Freedom of Information
Cabinet Office
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

e-mail: foi-team@cabinetoffice.gov.uk

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by the Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/

The Information Commissioner’s Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely
FOI Team
Cabinet Office