

Witness Name: Erica
Saunders
Statement No.: 1
Exhibits: ES/1 – ES/3
Dated: 9th September
2024

THIRLWALL INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ERICA SAUNDERS

I, Erica Saunders, will say as follows: -

1. I am employed as Director of Corporate Affairs at Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust. This is a Board level Executive position which carries responsibility for the Trust's corporate governance, regulatory, risk and legal matters. Under this remit I am the Trust's executive lead for public inquiries as well as a range of other sensitive, confidential matters that may arise from the broad aspects of my role. I am directly accountable to the Chair and Chief Executive. I have been in post since September 2010. Prior to that I held the same position at Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust for a period of seven years. I have worked in the NHS since 1991, entering via the national graduate management training programme. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in Medieval and Modern History from the University of Liverpool and a Master of Business Administration from Liverpool John Moores University.
2. Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust is a specialist paediatric centre providing all aspects of healthcare to over 450,000 children and young people each year. With an operating turnover of £1&S the Trust employs a workforce of 4,500 staff who work across our community and hospital sites and as a teaching and training hospital we provide education and training to around 900 medical and dental students and over 1,000 nursing and allied health professional students each year.
3. It is known that Lucy Letby attended the Trust in order to undertake 'observational visits' during the period January to April 2017. The visits were facilitated and arranged by Dr U who at that time was a locum consultant in Diabetes and General Paediatrics at the Trust. This appeared to be the result of a personal connection arising from a professional relationship which developed when he and Letby worked together at the Countess of Chester Hospital. To that extent, the request to visit Alder Hey was not made directly to the Trust by Letby herself.

4. The initial request made by Dr U with regard to the visits was addressed to colleagues in the Theatres management and education team on 7th December 2016 by email [Exhibit ES/1 [INQ0108004]] referencing a prior conversation with Mr Graham Lamont, a senior paediatric surgeon and then clinical director (now retired). The email identifies Letby as '*a Band 5 staff nurse with an interest in NICU nursing of post-operative babies*' and states that the purpose of the visits was '*in order to facilitate her personal development.*'
5. On 8th December Dr U was informed that if Letby had clearance to attend the Trust the visits could be accommodated. Dr U responded to inquire as to the checks Letby required in order to attend, ie DBS. Dr U later emailed members of the HR team to inquire as to whether Letby would require an 'honorary proforma'. He provided Letby's email address to enable direct communication and stated, '*If you need an in house signatory to confirm – please send the proforma to me.*'
6. Following questions from a recruitment officer as to the nature of the activity she would be undertaking, Dr U was informed on 9th December that Letby would require a letter of access rather than an honorary contract. Further, they would contact the Countess of Chester Hospital to '*ask them to confirm Lucy's Pre-employment checks. Once they have confirm (sic) I will let you know if we need to apply for any outstanding checks ie DBS.*' A proforma was received from the Countess of Chester confirming the pre-employment checks undertaken by them on Letby's appointment including DBS. [Exhibit ES/2 [INQ0108005]]
7. The letter of access was issued to Letby and Dr U separately on 9th December and contained the following condition: '*The observational visit will be for the period 1st January 2017 until 28th February 2017, during this time you must be supervised at all times. No direct patient contact is permitted during your visit.*' [Exhibit ES/3 [INQ0108002]]
8. Dr U also sought an opportunity for Letby to observe an ENT list [redacted] I&S [redacted] I&S [redacted]
9. On 9th February Dr U emailed the recruitment officer with a request to extend the letter of access until May 2017 as Letby was '*unable to get across to Alder Hey but is now able to do so*'. The letter was re-issued on the same day to the end of May in accordance with this request.
10. On 3rd May 2017 Dr U sent a further email stating '*Lucy is having a little trouble being released from Chester to attend Alder Hey for the observation. Would you mind extending the letter of authority through to December for me?*' This was actioned on 4th May.

11. The request made by Dr U on Letby's behalf was informal in nature. The 'observational visits' proposed did not fall under the scope of the Trust's formal work experience policy thus this was not applied. The Trust frequently receives requests for colleagues from many other organisations to visit our services and as can be seen from the Exhibits, the appropriate steps were taken to ensure both Dr U and Letby understood the conditions that applied to the visits.
12. So far as the Trust has been able to ascertain, ie via documentary evidence, Letby attended a Diabetes MDT meeting on 2nd March 2017, at which her presence was minuted; in addition, it is understood that she **may have** attended an outpatient clinic with Dr U during March and a 'roadshow' related to insulin pumps on 22nd April.
13. The visits were sponsored by Dr U as can be seen by the email correspondence at Exhibit INQ0108004 ES/1 and to that extent he was the responsible officer. Media reports following Letby's conviction last August reference that management at the Countess of Chester 'wanted to find Letby a placement at Alder Hey'. The Trust has no record of any approach from anyone at the Countess of Chester. Moreover, as described above, the nature of the contact was ad hoc observational visits not a placement or work experience.
14. Trust senior management was unaware of the arrangements being made for the visits by Dr U, therefore no inquiries were made to the Countess of Chester regarding Letby's role, background or qualifications. Checks were made at the appropriate level given the nature of the request, as per paragraph 6 above.
15. The Trust took steps to establish the facts in relation to the visits following Letby's arrest in 2018 and again following the verdicts in the criminal case; all written records have been checked where these exist.

16.

I&S

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed:

PD

Dated: 9th September 2024