



**Truth Recovery  
Independent Panel**

**Seeking the Truth**

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## NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the introductory edition of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel Newsletter.

We would like to thank you for engaging with us and we hope you will be encouraged to participate further as we move through our complex evidence gathering process.

Our aim is to share regular updates on aspects of the important work we are focused on. This newsletter will be issued bi-monthly to all those registered with us.

# WHAT LED TO THE APPOINTMENT OF THE INDEPENDENT PANEL?

2016

## INTER-DEPARTMENTAL WORKING GROUP

Following years of campaigning by victims-survivors, including Birth Mothers & Their Children For Justice, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to the establishment of an independently chaired Inter-Departmental Working Group, jointly sponsored by the Department of Health and The Executive Office. Its purpose was to review available evidence on the operations of Mother and Baby Institutions and Magdalene Laundries, and present recommendations to Ministers on the way forward.

The Department of Health commissioned research incorporating: a literature review; an examination of archive records; and an oral history project, including testimony of those impacted and other witnesses.

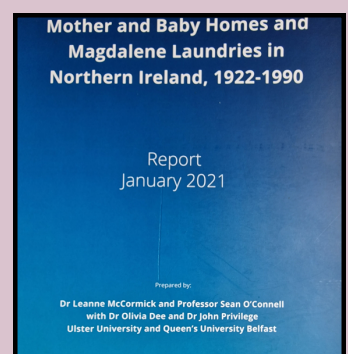
2018

## ACADEMIC RESEARCH

### Queen's University and Ulster University Report

January 2021

The research, jointly conducted by Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, revealed more detail of entrance and exit pathways, living conditions, mortality rates, the adoption process and first hand experiences of the women and girls, and their children who were admitted to the institutions over many decades up until the late 1990s. However it also left many unanswered questions.



The Truth Recovery Design Panel (TRDP) was established in March 2021 following all party agreement within the Northern Ireland Executive. The TRDP members were Deirdre Mahon (seconded from her post as Director of Women and Children's Services and the Executive Director of Social Work in the Western Trust), Dr Maeve O'Rourke (National University of Ireland, Galway) and Professor Phil Scraton (Queen's University Belfast). They were tasked to work with victims-survivors to make recommendations to the Northern Ireland Executive for an independent investigation / inquiry. At this stage Workhouses were added to the scope of investigation.

2021

TRUTH RECOVERY  
DESIGN PANEL



**Pictured above at Stormont, at the official launch of the Truth Recovery Design Panel Report are Design Panel members, Dr Maeve O'Rourke, Deirdre Mahon (Chair) and Professor Phil Scraton.**

# TRUTH, ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

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The TRDP published its findings in October 2021. The Truth, Acknowledgment and Accountability Report ('TAA Report') highlighted widespread grave and systemic abuses in the past, the persistent long-term impact of this, and ongoing issues with access to records in Northern Ireland. The report detailed a framework for implementing TRDP's five core recommendations:

1. Adoption of guiding principles
2. Responsibilities of The Executive Office
3. An Integrated Truth Investigation
4. Access to Records
5. Redress, Reparation and Compensation

## NI EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

The recommendations set out in the TAA Report were accepted in full and agreed for implementation by the Northern Ireland Executive on 15 November 2021. In total the report made 5 core recommendations and 77 sub recommendations. The Executive Office established the Truth Recovery Programme to lead on the implementation.

October 2021



# INTRODUCING THE PANEL MEMBERS

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## 2023



**Truth Recovery Independent Panel members pictured above at one of their meetings in Stormont Castle.**

The integrated truth investigation will be comprised of two discrete, but integrated phases: a non-statutory Independent Panel and a full statutory Public Inquiry.

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel was appointed by The Executive Office in April 2023. The 10-person panel is comprised of professional expertise in six key areas and victims-survivors' representatives with experience of institutionalisation and the adoption system.

The following people were appointed to the Independent Panel as Expert Members across the six areas of expertise:

**Leanne McCormick and Sean O'Connell (co-chairs)**  
Social and Oral History

**Patricia Canning**  
Sociology of Discrimination and Gender-based Violence

**Beverley Clarke**  
Trauma Informed Practice

**Mark Farrell**  
Archiving

**Colin Smith**  
International Human Rights Law and Domestic Law

**Steven Smyrl**  
Genealogy

The following people were appointed to the Independent Panel as  
Victim-Survivor Representatives:

**Maria Cogley**  
**Paul McClarey**  
**Roisin McGlone**



### **A MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS**

“We are delighted to be appointed Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel.

“A primary role of the Independent Panel is to provide those with direct experience of the institutions and practices an opportunity to provide their testimonies in a non-adversarial, supported, and if requested, confidential way.

“We appreciate the importance, impact and responsibility of the Independent Panel and our roles. We look forward to working with victims-survivors and with the rest of the Panel to support access to truth, acknowledgement and accountability.”

# Developing Work Streams

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Since its inception the Independent Panel has established a number of individual work streams which will shape its work in line with its Terms of Reference. The following are some important stages of our progressive work completed to date.

- Development of participation and consent forms for giving testimony.
- Development of ethical principles, privacy and data security protocols.
- Implementation of protocols and procedures.
- Working relationship established with PRONI to preserve and digitise institutional records.
- Engagement with victims-survivors and representative groups.
- Procurement of Press and Media Relations Specialist, secure storage system and a small team of researchers.
- Locating and securing Independent Panel premises.



Pictured above, Independent Panel identify key areas of work.



## OUR VISION STATEMENT

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Front and centre of the important work we are doing, is our vision statement:

“

**To work together as an Independent Panel,  
creating a safe, inclusive Human Rights  
based process.**

**Listening empathetically and recording and  
reporting truthfully, the experiences of  
those whose lives have been impacted.**

”

### **KNOW SOMEONE ELSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE UPDATES?**

If you are aware of anyone else who would like to receive updates on our progress and receive further newsletters, please ask them to register their interest and be added to our mailing list by emailing:

**[secretariat@independentpanel.org.uk](mailto:secretariat@independentpanel.org.uk)**