

# **Permanent Archive Consultation**

Results Summary Report

May 2025



Truth Recovery Independent Panel  
Seeking the Truth

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# 1. Introduction

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## Overview

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel is required to contribute to the drafting of legislation to establish a permanent independent archive of records. The records should include those relating to historical institutions and the individuals who spent time in them, adoption records, and other records relating to children in state care.

As part of this process, we published our suggestions for the proposed Permanent Archive in a Consultation Document, and requested feedback and opinions from victims-survivors through our survey which was open from 13 February - 20 March 2025. Additionally, to encourage and support participation in the consultation survey, we held two events on 27 February (one online and one in-person).

## What is in this report?

This report summaries the results of our consultation and of the various opinions and comments provided by victims-survivors.

Section 2 of the report provides anonymised demographic information about people who responded to the consultation, this includes (but is not limited to) the institution an individual spent time in, age range, religious background etc.

Section 3 of the report provides statistics about the number of people who agreed or disagreed with the suggestions we proposed in the Consultation Document. It also provides a summary of the feedback we received in response to each suggestion, and includes anonymous quotes from some of the responses we received.

Section 4 of the report provides an overview of the key points from the feedback that we received which we will use to help shape our recommendations.

## 2. Who Responded?

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We received **63 responses**. The tables below show the types of people who responded. **Please note:** the percentages are based on the number of people who answered each question, not the total number of people who responded.

**Table 1 - Are you someone who was admitted to:**

52.38%	Mother and Baby Institution
33.33%	Other
17.46%	Did Not Respond
4.76%	Magdalene Laundry
1.59%	Prefer Not to Say
0%	Workhouse

**Table 2 - Are you someone who was:**

52.38%	Born While Your Mother Was in One of the Institutions
46.03%	Adopted, Fostered or Boarded Out
19.05%	Related to Someone Who Spent Time in Any of the Institutions
17.46%	Did Not Respond
11.11%	Other
1.59%	Prefer Not to Say

**Table 3 - Age range:**

42.86%	55 - 64
17.46%	65 - 74
14.29%	45 - 54
9.52%	35 - 44
7.94%	75 - 84
7.94%	Did Not Respond

**Table 4 - Religious background:**

61.9%	Catholic
14.29%	Protestant
11.11%	Did Not Respond
4.76%	No Religion
4.76%	Prefer Not to Say
3.17%	Other Christian
0%	Other Religion

**Table 5 - Sex:**

71.43%	Female
12.7%	Male
11.11%	Did Not Respond
4.76%	Prefer Not to Say

**Table 6 - Ethnic group:**

80.95%	White
12.7%	Did Not Respond
4.76%	Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Groups
1.59%	Other Ethnic Group

### **3. Responses to Panel Suggestions About the Permanent Archive**

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This section of the report includes a summary of what people who responded to the survey said about the ideas we proposed. It highlights which proposals people agreed or disagreed with, and includes anonymised quotes from those who responded.

#### **Proposal 1: The Scope of the Archive's Holdings Should Be Set Out in the Legislation**

When asked if they agreed with the categories of records that the Panel would suggest are held in the Permanent Archive, they answered as shown below.

82.54%	Yes
11.11%	No
6.35%	Not Answered

People who answered ‘Yes’ to this proposal said it was important to have one central place where all the relevant records are kept. They felt this would make it easier for people to find and look at their own records in the future. They also felt it would help future generations learn about what happened in the institutions and their related pathways and practices.

Some people shared how hard it has been for them to get their records, because it is not always clear where the records are kept and the rules for accessing them are not always the same.

People who answered ‘No’ felt that our proposals are too wide and thought people should have the choice to decide if their personal records (held by the institutions or other organisations) are kept in the Permanent Archive.

Those who answered ‘Yes’ and those who answered ‘No’ agreed that privacy is very important and that people’s personal information must be protected.

#### Quotes:

“

It is important that all records are part of the archive for investigation and research purposes both now and in the future. It is important that the archive is a 'one stop shop' for all affected by the Mother and Baby Homes or in any way involved with 'Historical Institutions' to help with their searches relating to them or to their families

”

“

Makes sense to have everything relevant under one roof. My own experience has shown how difficult it can be to trace relevant documents when they are spread about

”

“

Not all victims and survivors want their records put into archive, will there be a pathway for these people, can they opt out, can they ensure no access?

”

When asked if they believed that other records not proposed by us should come within the scope of the Permanent Archive, or if they had any other comments or suggestions about what should be included, people answered as shown below.

68.25%	Yes
22.22%	No
9.52%	Not Answered

People who answered 'Yes' to this question mostly felt that medial records should be included. Other suggestions included social care records, court records and records relating to cross-border adoptions.

#### Quotes:

“ Any other relevant records, medical, etc. ”

“ Any records that relate to the illegality of cross-border adoptions without the proper process ”

#### Proposal 2: Privately-Held Records Should Be Made Public Records

When asked if they agreed with the our proposal that records currently held by private organisations should be made public records, people answered as shown.

88.89%	Yes
7.94%	No
3.17%	Not Answered

People who answered 'Yes' to this proposal strongly felt that no records should be kept privately by institutions that had caused harm in the past. They believed that moving these records into public hands would help make sure there is openness and accountability.

People who answered 'No' to this proposal thought that the institutions should be allowed to keep the records as long as they gave people the correct access when asked.

Everyone who responded agreed it was very important to keep information private and that it should not be shared without permission. A small number of people who responded said they did not want their personal records to be part of any archive.

#### Quotes:

“

There can be NO records held privately by the State, individuals, the church or private organisations or institutions if the investigation into these historical institutions is to be open and transparent

”

“

I see no reason why they shouldn't be public, and bad record keeping being a particular issue I have faced, I would hope this could make future research so much easier

”

### Proposal 3: The Legislation Should List Specific Functions and Responsibilities of the Archive

When asked if they agreed with the responsibilities and functions we proposed, people answered as shown below.

87.3%	Yes
7.94%	No
4.76%	Not Answered

Most people who completed the survey agreed with our proposal, but many did not provide additional comments.

Some people said it would be helpful for the Permanent Archive to build links with similar centres in other countries while others said the work of the Permanent Archive should be properly checked to make sure it follows legal and ethical rules.

There were also comments asking for clearer information about what the Permanent Archive will do. People felt it is important to separate the work of storing and looking after records from other services like support or counselling which people might need when accessing their records in the Permanent Archive.

#### Quote:

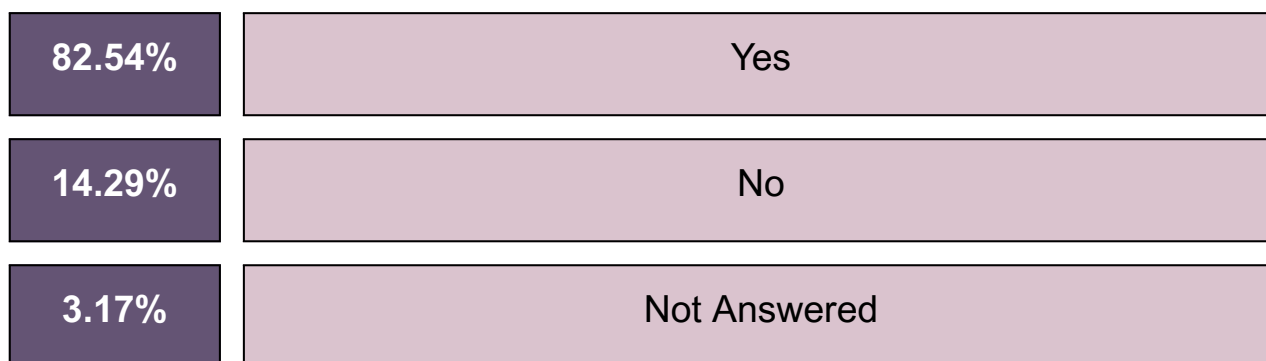
“

Need to consider again the issue of consent, victim and survivor choice about who can access what. Dedicated roles needed for this work to ensure it meets victims and survivors' needs and their privacy is respected

”

#### **Proposal 4: The Legislation Should Specify the Legal Basis on Which Access Will Be Allowed to the Archive's Holdings.**

When asked if they agreed with our proposal for how the records in the Permanent Archive should be accessed, people answered as shown below.

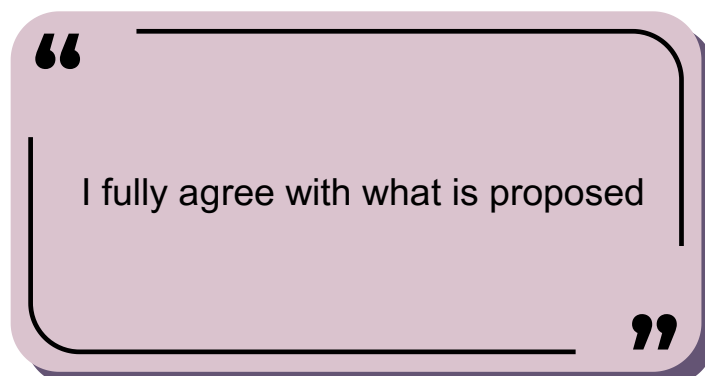


Most people who responded to this question strongly felt that people should have access to their own personal information, with little restriction and without fees or charges.

Many people who responded were happy to allow their family members to have access to their personal records with their consent and in certain situations that would be clearly set out.

Everyone who responded felt that access to their records by anyone apart from themselves or certain family members, needed to be tightly controlled and carefully managed. For example, they were happy for their records to be used for research, but with clear rules in place, that included strong protections for their personal privacy.

#### **Quotes:**



“

Nothing less would be good enough

”

“

I do not want my private life exposed. Again, I personally want my information to be protected until I pass from this world

”

### **Proposal 5: The Archive Should Be Established and Should Operate Under the Auspices of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)**

When asked if they agreed with our proposal that the Permanent Archive should work within PRONI, people answered as shown below.

87.3%	Yes
7.49%	No
4.76%	Not Answered

People who answered ‘Yes’ to this question felt confident that they could trust PRONI and believed that having the Permanent Archive work under PRONI made sense and was an appropriate approach.

People who answered 'No' did not highlight any concerns about PRONI, but felt that the Permanent Archive should be a separate specialist centre, fully independent of all other organisations.

#### Quotes:

“ PRONI have the knowledge, experience and trained staff to oversee this Truth Recovery Archive ”

“ They have the experience, the ability to conserve and to create a database and they are used to helping people to access records ”

#### **Proposal 6: The Archive's Operations Should Be Overseen by an Executive Council, Including Victim-Survivor Representatives and Other Individuals With a Range of Relevant Skills and Experience.**

When asked if they agreed with our proposal that the Permanent Archive should be managed by an Executive Council, people answered as shown below.

88.89%	Yes
6.35%	No
4.76%	Not Answered

Most people agreed with our proposal that the Permanent Archive should be managed by an Executive Council with decision-making powers.

People who responded shared different thoughts about how many Executive Council members there should be, and how many of these members should be Victim-Survivor Representatives. Some people suggested an open recruitment process, with set time periods for how long someone can be in the role.

Those who answered 'No' to this question did not have any concerns about the proposal of an Executive Council, but did provide feedback about what they felt the Executive Council should be responsible for and who could become members.

#### Quotes:

“

As well as those involved it's best to have people included who understand the way the system works. I think it's a good idea to have people like me who have worked with friends and relatives affected to help find the answers

”

“

VS must be central in any executive Council. There should be a formal recruitment process and include an equal range of at least 2 x birth mothers and 2 children now adults. Other members should include at least one PRONI senior manager, an archivist with skills or experience relating to archives; privacy and access barrister/solicitor, a museum curator with experience in exhibition/education/outreach; a specialist in trauma-informed practice possibly from VSS

”

## Proposal 7: The Archive Should Be Provided With Dedicated Staff and Other Resources in Order to Carry Out Its Functions

When asked if they agreed with our proposal about the dedicated staff and resources that would be needed to manage the Permanent Archive, people answered as shown below.

90.48%	Yes
3.17%	No
6.35%	Not Answered

People who provided comments in response to this question agreed that the Permanent Archive needed to be properly funded and staffed. They felt that the Permanent Archive should have staff with a range of skills, including archival, data protection, digital record-keeping and counselling skills.

### Quotes:

“

In order for the Archive to establish itself and to operate successfully, providing information and support to those looking to access and use it then it is of vital importance that trained, qualified and experienced staff are employed from the outset to ensure the success of the Archive

”

“

Funding is paramount to create and maintain the ongoing operational requirements of the archive and any exhibitions / educational activities

”

## **Proposal 8: Other Suggestions**

We made a number of suggestions about other matters to do with the Permanent Archive which will not be included in the legislation. We asked people for their thoughts on our suggestions and they answered as set out below.

### **Suggestion 1: Location**

We suggested that the Permanent Archive should be based in Belfast. Most people who responded agreed with us. Some people felt that the city / town did not matter as long as the Permanent Archive was close to good public transport and had free parking.

### **Suggestion 2: Online Service**

People who responded to this suggestion felt strongly about the need for the Permanent Archive to have an online presence to help people, no matter where they are, to access their records. They highlighted that appropriate rules would need to be in place to protect personal privacy.

#### **Quote:**

“

Absolutely. So many children have ended up abroad. A helpline with email address, telephone number. Facebook page. The widest possible publicity to encourage people to come forward to discuss their lives

”

### **Suggestion 3: Ongoing Collection of Records**

We suggested that the Permanent Archive should continue to collect relevant records, including testimonies. Everyone who responded to this suggestion agreed.

## Quote:

“

Tapes and videos. Written testimonies about how they felt and their lives before, during and after. Basically the impact on their lives

”

## Suggestion 4: Facilities

Most people who responded to our suggestion agreed that the Permanent Archive should be a space that includes research areas and areas where people can look at their records in private and talk with support staff in a safe environment.

## Quotes:

“

I think this is very important to help those who have little or no information to start with. Having the assistance of staff would make the process a lot easier

”

“

Regarding myself, after all these years I still find it extremely difficult to talk about my story. But having places where we could consult our own records in private and have support staff there I think it would make it easier

”

## **Suggestion 5: Exhibitions and Events**

We proposed that exhibitions, performances and other public events should be held at the Permanent Archive to continue to educate the public on what happened at these institutions and their related pathways and practices.

Some people suggested that the exhibitions, performances and other public events should take place inside and outside of Northern Ireland.

### **Quote:**

“

Yes. I think it's time to share how people felt and that there is no shame attached to pregnancy and babies

”

“

I agree with this suggestion and it is important that the stories relating to the 'Historical Institutions' are made public through exhibitions, performances and other public events including book launches relating to the story

”

## **Suggestion 6: Outdoor Space and Memorialisation**

We proposed that an outdoor space for reflection, remembrance and memorialisation should be part of the Permanent Archive. Most people who responded to our proposal agreed.

Some people felt that a memorial could be placed in a separate location to the Permanent Archive.

Everyone who responded agreed that any sculptures or memorials need to be considered carefully to ensure that they are respectful.

**Quotes:**

“ Essential ”

“ A Garden of Reflection and Remembrance should be established. A memorial should also be erected to the memory of all those who died in these institutions, those who were born or incarcerated in them and those who have suffered, were affected by or still carry the legacy of them ”

**Suggestion 7: Education and Research**

Most people who responded agreed with our suggestion that the Permanent Archive should build links with educational and research institutions to increase awareness and understanding of what happened in the institutions and their related pathways and practices.

Some people again highlighted the importance of protecting personal information if records are used for research.

**Quote:**

“ I think 6th form colleges and universities could be involved. This is important historical knowledge especially relating to women ”

## **Suggestion 8: Staff Skills**

Most people who responded agreed with our suggestion that all Permanent Archive staff need to have trauma-informed training and ongoing access to support services and assistance.

### **Quote:**

“

Training in this area is of critical importance given that staff will be dealing with issues and feelings that go to the very core of people's being and what happened to them when they were at their most vulnerable and helpless and which has been covered up for years

”

## **Suggestion 9: Future Management of Records**

We suggested that victims-survivors should have a say in shaping how records are collected, catalogued and managed in the Permanent Archive. Additionally, we suggested the Permanent Archive should help improve how records are kept in public and private organisations by working with these organisations to encourage person-centred approaches.

### **Quotes:**

“

I agree totally with this suggestion and with PRONI'S experienced staff they are ideally suited to undertake this task

”

“

100%, these records belong  
to the person

”

## **Suggestion 10: Funding**

Most people who responded agreed with our suggestion that there should be cross-border funding for the Permanent Archive. Some people felt that in addition to public funding, private institutions such as churches and adoption agencies should contribute to the funding.

### **Quote:**

“

The 'Historical Institutions' were all-Ireland bodies so it is important that cross-border funding is sought to support the Archive and its work

”

## **4 Summary and Next Steps**

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While we understand that people who have responded to our survey have different views, we are reassured by the strong support for our proposals and suggestions.

It is also clear that people need to know about, and be comfortable with, who can see records and how personal information will be protected. Our future recommendations for the Permanent Archive will make it clear that this needs to be clearly explained in the legislation for the Permanent Archive.

The main points we will focus on while updating our recommendations for the Permanent Archive are

- The Permanent Archive should be a centralised place for all records relating to the historical institutions and the people who spent time in them. It should also include adoption, fostering and boarding out records, along with other records relating to children in state care, social care records and medical records.
- Relevant records currently held by private agencies and institutions should be taken into public ownership and stored in the Permanent Archive. Public ownership does not mean that everyone can see the records. It means that the records are kept safe by the future Permanent Archive with controlled access to personal information.
- People should be entitled to access their own personal information, but clear controls must be in place if any other person requests access to the records.
- The legislation to create the Permanent Archive should clearly explain if family members can access records, and if they can, it should set out the rules for when and how they can do this.
- The legislation to create the Permanent Archive should clearly explain if others (for example researchers or historians) can access records, and if they can, it should set out the rules for when and how they can do this.
- A person's consent must always be the priority when deciding who can access their records.
- The legislation should allow Permanent Archive staff to create specific and clear rules for managing access to records as long as those rules follow what has been set out in the legislation.
- People must be able to access their records in a safe environment with available support and assistance.
- The Permanent Archive should be set up within PRONI.



The Permanent Archive should be managed by a decision-making body that includes a fair mix of victims-survivors as well as people with the right skills and experience.



The Permanent Archive must be managed in a way that understands the impact of trauma on affected people. This approach should shape and guide all decisions made about the Permanent Archive, including the buildings location and layout, who works there, who has access to records and how they access the records.

## **5 Acknowledgements**

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The responses we received to our survey have been very helpful in developing our recommendations for the Permanent Archive.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who who took time to complete our survey and provide additional comments and feedback.

Thank you.