

Volume 1

Introduction, Approach
and Recommendations



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

- “ *It was cold. There was no warmth, there was no nothing, and you were made to feel just a dirty, wee girl.*
- “ *I felt like I had been silenced, and my rights as a mother were stripped from me from the very beginning. The same was true for [child's father's name], he was stripped of his rights as a father and he was not allowed any voice in what was happening.*
- “ *My personality, my character, my life choices all shaped and influenced by another family who raised me...not my mother.*
- “ *My heart broke into a million pieces as I handed him over – no words could describe how I felt. I was given no alternative, and it was the only route out of that place.*
- “ *We arrived in Belfast, arriving at a mid-terrace house on Antrim Road. My mother told me to get out of [the] car and come with her...It was at this stage I realised we were not just going for a drive out, I was in shock, I was being abandoned because I was pregnant, out of sight, out of mind.*
- “ *I've had two very successful careers, but that drive to prove yourself never goes away because your birthmother put you in an orphanage, gave you away, and that drives you all the time. And I'm, I am 79 years of age. I will be 80 next year, and that has never left me for a minute.*

- “ I basically hated the world, but it was simply the fact that my son, when he was taken off me, the void and the pain that that had left behind...
- “ My mum wasn't a bad person, she was a good woman but she was indoctrinated by the Catholic hierarchy and the teachings of the Church. She was insistent in the thinking that it was wrong for two people to physically show love to each other outside marriage. She was wrong. She should have been stronger to stand up to criticism from society around her for the sake of looking after her own daughter properly, but she just wasn't.
- “ But it's just a chapter in my life that I cannot get closed, if you know what I mean. And from her letters she says it's closed, and her chapters are closed, and know, just know, just a lack of hope, that's the thing that's really killing me...
- “ It would be seen as an act of great ingratitude to loving adopted parents for a person to make such enquiries, a betrayal in fact.
- “ Uhm knowing that she was going to go at some stage, and feeding her, bathing her. By the time she left she knew me, she was smiling, she could see. It was hard.
- “ I, I didn't feel that where I, in Marianville at that time, with those particular staff members that it was anyway cruel or nasty, that it was more of a sanctuary really.

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Foreword from Co-Chairs

As Co-Chairs of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel (the IP) we are immensely privileged to introduce the IP's final report. Working collaboratively over the past three years since our appointment on 27 April 2023, we have examined both institutional records and the experiences of individuals affected by mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and their associated pathways and practices.

The IP acknowledge the tenacious campaign for truth that so many victims-survivors, their relatives, and advocacy groups continue to fight. Their contribution to the IP work has been immense. Contributions were offered formally and collectively through the Victims and Survivors Consultation Forum and the IP's own events with victims-survivors and their relatives. Their collective experiences and concerns around issues such as access to records and how they wished to engage in the testimony process have been invaluable. The IP listened carefully to their views, and their input has contributed significantly to our work.

The report contains analysis and interpretation of almost 300 testimonies:

- 238 testimonies collected during the work of the Independent Panel
- 46 testimonies accessible from the Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University research report, *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1990* (January 2021).

This represents the largest ever collection of lived experience through testimony, in Northern Ireland, connected with these issues. The IP acknowledge the bravery of those who came forward to share their lived experience with our testimony facilitators. We recognise how difficult this was for some of you and want to assure you that your words form the heartbeat of this, our final report. On behalf of the entire IP, we want to say a huge thank you to each and every one of you who found the courage and strength to share your experience and to those who engaged in other ways.

This report also includes analysis of the largest number of institutional records ever made available to researchers, over 5,500 institutional records, many of which have never been accessed before. The IP has benefited from the assistance and professional expertise of staff at the Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI). They meticulously carried out visits to institutions and identified historical records that required conservation, preservation and digitisation. As part of the wider Truth Recovery Programme, the PRONI project team have been instrumental in negotiating vital data-sharing agreements with the institutions. The importance of the work undertaken by PRONI cannot be understated. Without their technical expertise and tenacity, the IP researchers would not have gained the necessary access to analyse this comprehensive set of historical records. Furthermore, the conservation and digitisation process has ensured that these important historical records are now preserved as high-quality digital copies, which not

only supports the important work of the IP but enables the upcoming public inquiry and Redress Service to access these records. The IP would like to record our thanks to the PRONI project team and to those institutions who engaged in a positive and constructive manner with our work.

The IP also wishes to recognise the co-operation of several agencies who have provided advice and assistance to our work. In particular, we thank the Victims and Survivors Service, WAVE and Adopt NI, who ensured that support was in place for those able to share their lived experience and attend the IP's outreach and engagement events. Additionally, they continue to advocate tirelessly on behalf of many victims-survivors as they try to navigate the often complex and frustrating journey in accessing their records. We are also grateful to the Police Service of Northern Ireland Non-recent Abuse Team, who worked collaboratively with the IP to establish a protocol for the reporting of any allegations of abuse and/or illegal activity raised during testimony sessions.

The IP would also like to recognise and extend our thanks to those who have been part of our support teams. This includes testimony facilitators and researchers who worked with dedication and diligence. The IP's work was commissioned and funded by the Executive Office and we acknowledge their support. The IP is also extremely grateful to our Secretariat who have worked with us over the past three years to bring this work to successful completion. It has been a complex and challenging task that could not have been accomplished without support from the Secretariat.

The Co-Chairs would also like to place on record our particular thanks to the three Victim-Survivor Representatives on the IP, Maria Cogley, Roisin McGlone and Paul McClarey. Their valuable insight through their personal lived experience and interactions with other victims-survivors across the community has significantly contributed to the IP's work. They also brought a huge wealth of professional experience and expertise from their own career specialisms.

The IP ways of working were bolstered by the establishment of four key working groups (WGs), drawing on the individual expertise of various IP members. Within the report there are dedicated chapters written by each of the WGs, providing a comprehensive review of the work undertaken. The highlights include the publication of comprehensive access to records guidance, the development of a robust trauma-informed testimony collection process, consultation and proposals for legislation for a permanent archive, numerous engagement events with victims-survivors and other relevant stakeholders, development of a legacy website, international outreach, and a major call to action through a leaflet drop to every household in Northern Ireland.

At the IP's first meeting in May 2023, we developed a vision statement which has remained front and centre throughout our tenure in the important work we have completed.

“

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.

The Co-Chairs would like to acknowledge the contribution of all IP members, who, despite working in a part-time capacity, have shown tremendous dedication and commitment to ‘getting the job done’. There were many challenges along the way but working collaboratively and supporting each other with a genuine passion helped us achieve what we set out to do.



Professor Leanne McCormick



Professor Sean O'Connell

Language and Terminology

The Panel have considered carefully the language used in the report and have consulted with victims-survivors about their preferred terminology. It is understandable that participants will have different preferences for specific terminology. The Panel recognise that not all victims-survivors will agree with all the terminology used in this report. We respect that diversity of opinion, and where any participant expressed the right during testimony to make their own choice about terminology to describe themselves and their experiences, we ensured their language choices were respected and included.

We recognise that language is constantly changing and terminology is evolving to reflect societal, cultural and legal shifts. We endeavoured to use language and terminology that above all is respectful and appropriate. We acknowledge the dismissive and stigmatising language used in the past and recognise the hurt, lifelong trauma and impact the use of that language had and continues to have on affected people and their families.

While the Panel have taken great care with terminology and language throughout this report, we recognise that in a document of this scale there may be occasions where word choice is upsetting for some readers. We apologise for any distress this may cause.

At the beginning of each of the institutional chapters the Panel have advised a content warning to remind readers about the language used, as follows.



Readers of this chapter are reminded that when quoting from historical records, newspaper reports and other contemporary sources, it is necessary to use the terminology and language that was used at the time. The Panel is aware that such terms can be upsetting and unacceptable and that they would not be used today. These terms are used as little as possible in all the chapters of this report but may appear in quoted sections. It is important to make the point that institutional records and reports are reflective of the creator's viewpoint and should not be considered conclusive nor definitive of the practices and processes of the institution. Nor should they be considered to be evidential or impartial in relation to the institutions themselves or the girls and women who were admitted to them. This report discusses issues that readers will find upsetting. These include subjects such as incest, rape, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, family separation and poor mental health.

In terms of testimonies, when speaking about their personal history, some individuals quote the terms that were derogatorily used about them or their children in the past. We will quote these terms as they appear in the testimonies cited.

The Panel have chosen to use the word 'institution' rather than 'home' as we recognise that to many victims-survivors, these were not environments that could be considered in any way 'homely'.

We have avoided where possible the use of the term ‘unmarried mother’ unless it was used, for example, within historical and official documents that are being quoted.

The term ‘birth mother’ is used in the report. We recognise that there is considerable discussion and diverging views around the use of the term; however, ‘birth mother’ is the term used by many of those who gave testimony to the Panel as well as by two activist groups in Northern Ireland.¹ We do recognise that some victims-survivors may prefer, and use, a different term, but we have used the terms that the majority of participants used to refer to themselves. We appreciate this does not reflect every person’s preference.

We have used the term ‘girls and women’ with reference to those admitted to institutions. If someone was a minor, we use the term ‘girl’ or ‘teenager’.

The terms ‘child, now adult’ and ‘adopted adult’ are used throughout the report. Many people feel upset when referred to as ‘the babies’ or ‘birth mothers’ babies’, as they feel unrecognised as adult individuals affected by these institutions and practices in their own right. We have used the two separate terms, partly because not all children, now adults, were adopted.

Many adopted adults also express dislike of the term ‘adoptee’, as they feel the word as a noun defines identity and an inherent state of being. Other adopted people feel the term ‘adoptee’ labels and minimises them to an object with lesser rights than non-adopted people. We have also avoided the use of the term ‘put up for adoption’, using ‘placed for adoption’ instead.

We have avoided use of the terms ‘illegitimate’ or ‘legitimate’ as far as possible, as we affirm that no child should ever be considered to be what was termed ‘illegitimate’. The terms are used on occasion and only if necessary in historical and legal contexts.

We have used the terms Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (RoI) for the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

The term Derry/Londonderry is used for references to the city and county.

Chapter 1

Introduction



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

This introduction provides the background to the establishment of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel. As is the case with each chapter of this report, it is written in the knowledge that there will be significant public interest in its content. For this reason, every effort has been made to avoid using overly academic or complex language.

Chapter content

This chapter discusses:

- 1.0** Examining the past
- 2.0** Magdalene laundries: Historical background
- 3.0** Workhouses and Mother and Baby Institutions in NI
- 4.0** Baby institutions
- 5.0** Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry
- 6.0** 2013 – United Nations Committee recommendations
- 7.0** 2016 – Establishment of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse
- 8.0** January 2021 – Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University research report on mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries in NI
- 9.0** October 2021 – Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability Report
- 10.0** April 2023 – Truth Recovery IP
- 11.0** IP Terms of Reference
- 12.0** Non-adversarial testimony process
- 13.0** Preservation, cataloguing and analysing accessible records
- 14.0** Access to records
- 15.0** IP ways of working
- 16.0** IP Interim Report
- 17.0** Further extension of the IP’s tenure
- 18.0** Who are the members of the IP

1.0 Examining the past

The Independent Panel (IP) was tasked to investigate and publish findings regarding human rights violations experienced by individuals and families in mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and their pathways and practices (including the adoption system, related institutions such as ‘baby homes’ and private nursing homes, and cross-border and international transfers of children and women).

This section will provide a brief historical contextual background to these institutions. A more detailed background to Magdalene laundries is provided in the chapter introducing those institutions. The Serious Human Rights Issues chapter will discuss the legislative background and social and historical context in further detail. Background histories of each institution discussed appear in the opening to each relevant chapter.

All of the institutions, as well as the wider pathways and practices, are framed within the historical context of a patriarchal society with high levels of church attendance and adherence. The Protestant and Catholic Churches promoted a ‘conservative view on social issues, particularly in relation to family and sexuality’¹ and articulated shared perspectives in relation to female sexuality and the moral policing of women’s behaviour.² The very existence of institutions that aimed to ‘rescue and reform’ girls and women or that were established for unmarried pregnant women reflected a sexual double standard and gender discrimination. No equivalent institutions existed for men and boys: there were no ‘father and baby homes’, and men and boys were not stigmatised or shamed for having sex outside marriage or for ‘immoral’ behaviour. Thousands of girls and women who were deemed to have contravened societal norms and threatened the ‘respectability’ of their families, and often the religious denominations to which they belonged, were placed in an institution in Northern Ireland (NI).

2.0 Magdalene laundries: Historical background

Magdalene laundries were known by a variety of names in the past, including ‘Magdalene asylums’, ‘female penitentiaries’ and ‘rescue and refuge homes’. The first ‘Magdalene asylum’ was established in Ireland, in 1767, by Lady Arabella Denny in Dublin and there was an emergence of similar lay and religious institutions in the nineteenth century. The reference to Mary Magdalene in their name reveals the initial focus, which was to rescue and reform ‘fallen’ women, those involved in sex work and considered to be living a life of sin.³ Magdalene laundries were a response to growing concerns about sex work in expanding cities and were intended to ‘rescue and elevate’ the ‘fallen woman’ to an ‘acceptable level of womanhood’.⁴ For example, in 1851, Rev. John Edgar of the Ulster Female Penitentiary in Belfast described its purpose as being to remove from society ‘a class of its worst tempters and nuisances’ and to afford ‘to those bent on reformation, a refuge and means of improvement’.⁵ There were at least 41 ‘asylums of refuge’ established in Ireland by the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶

These institutions were established by Protestant churches and Catholic religious orders as well as groups who were not affiliated to specific denominations. In the second half of the nineteenth century there was a growth and expansion of the Magdalene laundries

operated by Catholic religious orders with an ‘extensive and organised network of refuges which operated throughout the country’.⁷ There were some differences between these institutions and the lay-run institutions. Catholic-run institutions were often larger with no defined limit on the periods of time for which the girls and women sent to them would have to remain. In contrast, many lay institutions believed that two years was an ideal period for the reform of women and to prepare them for domestic service roles back in the outside world.⁸

Maria Luddy states that in the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century there was a high turnover of women entering and leaving the institutions. She suggests that between 1912 and the 1920s they appear to have become ‘less flexible institutions, or at least acquired this reputation’, with it becoming more difficult for women to leave as they wished.⁹ These institutions were not unique to Ireland, with similar establishments across Europe, Australia, USA, Canada, as well as across the UK.¹⁰ By the 1890s most towns in Britain contained at least one ‘Magdalene asylum’, with ‘many boasting three or four competing Refuges and Homes’.¹¹ What sets both NI and the Republic of Ireland (RoI) apart is the continued operation of these institutions into the late twentieth century.

Several Magdalene laundry institutions were established in what, after Partition, became NI. These included:

Catholic institutions

- Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS) St Mary’s Institution and Laundry, Belfast (1867–1982)
- GSS St Mary’s Institution and Laundry, Derry/Londonderry (1922–82)
- GSS St Mary’s Institution and Laundry, Newry (1946–84)

Protestant institutions

- Belfast Midnight Mission, also known as the Rescue and Maternity Home or Malone Place (1860–1948: non-denominational)
- Salvation Army Rescue, otherwise known as Thorndale Industrial Home, Belfast (1886–1965)
- Ulster Female Penitentiary, or Edgar Home, Belfast (1819–1928: Presbyterian)
- Ulster Magdalene Asylum, Belfast (1842–1916: Church of Ireland)
- North-West of Ulster Women’s Home (1829–1911: non-denominational)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, most of these institutions had changed their focus and the girls and women admitted were not generally involved in sex work but may have been perceived as leading lifestyles that were seen as going against social norms; this could include those who had been pregnant outside of marriage, had been in trouble with the police, or who were considered to be in 'moral danger'.¹² Institutions also declared a preventative focus, which was 'not only to rescue the fallen, but to save from falling those who may be tempted to walk in forbidden paths'.¹³ Others, such as the Belfast Midnight Mission (later Malone Place), which continued operation into the mid-twentieth century, became more focused on maternity work with girls and women pregnant outside of marriage rather than their rescue and reform work.¹⁴

The Annual Reports of the Edgar Home, which closed in 1928, recorded in the 1920s how the institution was finding it increasingly difficult to get girls and women to enter. It noted that 'younger women and girls living lives of sin in our city' were resisting 'all efforts to draw away from a life of freedom and lawlessness', and when they did enter the institution 'they are more difficult to control than they used to be'.¹⁵ By the time that NI was created, 'refuge' or 'rescue homes' were in decline, with the exception of those operated by the GSS, the Salvation Army's Thorndale Industrial Home, and to a lesser extent, Belfast Midnight Mission.

Many of the institutions, both Protestant and Catholic, had a laundry attached. In the view of those who managed these institutions, laundry work provided essential income and also ensured that women were 'kept fully employed in helping towards their own support'.¹⁶ The Belfast Edgar Home Annual Report of 1911 described how the laundry enabled the women 'to earn their bread by working with their hands' and while 'occupied making soiled linen clean and white they have been taught higher things as well'.¹⁷ Historian Peter Hughes has argued that, in the minds of those operating the laundries, there was a symbolic link between the 'fallen woman and the dirty linen' and close connections between transforming dirty washing into something clean and the transformation of penitents (a term used to describe the women) from their sinful ways.¹⁸ The GSS in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry retained their laundries into the 1970s and 1980s.

The history of Magdalene laundries gained increasing public attention in RoI in the 1990s with the removal and reburial of human remains discovered in grounds of the Convent of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge at High Park, Dublin, in 1993. The public was shocked to learn that women who died in the laundries had been buried in unmarked graves, and not afforded the customary rites that Catholic Ireland usually offered its dead.¹⁹ As the remains were exhumed it was evident that not all deaths in the High Park laundry had been properly recorded, raising new questions about the treatment of the Magdalene women and adherence to all relevant legal requirements about registration of death and burials.²⁰ The heightened public awareness of the laundries drew attention to the closure, three years later, of the last 'Magdalene asylum', operated by the same religious order, in Dublin's Sean McDermott Street.²¹

Numerous historians have examined the role of the Magdalene laundries following the partition of Ireland. Significant attention has been paid to what is described as their more coercive nature and reputation in the twentieth century, in comparison to their functions in the nineteenth century.²² They have been identified as having been a significant part of what has been called the newly independent Irish Free State's (later RoI) 'architecture

of containment', alongside other institutions such as 'mother and baby homes, industrial and reformatory schools, mental asylums, adoption agencies'.²³

In 2013, an Inter-departmental Committee, which was set up to establish the facts of state involvement with the Magdalene laundries, published its report in 2013.²⁴ The report (widely known as the McAleese Report) was criticised heavily by victims-survivors, lawyers, academics and activists who argued that its conclusions did not reflect strongly enough its own evidence that the 'state colluded with the laundries, provided the religious orders with support, and failed to supervise the running of the laundries'.²⁵ Critics have disputed the McAleese Report's calculations of the numbers of girls and women sent to the Magdalene laundries, which it suggested was '10,012 or fewer'. There were also concerns that the report did not fully identify the length of confinement within the Magdalene laundries experienced by the women sent to them and the manner in which they were admitted, as well as failing to probe fully death and burial records. Particular criticism has been directed to the report's reduction of survivor testimonies to 'stories' from which they 'did not make specific findings'. The report was also criticised for its lack of discussion of human rights and social justice.²⁶ While the report was followed by an official apology from the Taoiseach in the Dáil, in 2013, and a redress scheme, it has been argued that the Irish state 'formally insists on not acknowledging the abuses experienced by girls and women in the Magdalene Laundries'.²⁷

There has been less public or academic attention focused on Magdalene laundries in NI and no specific victim-survivor support groups have been established specifically for women who had been in the institutions there.

The three Magdalene laundries in NI were operated by the GSS and were located in what they called their St Mary's 'homes'. The Salvation Army operated its Thorndale Industrial Home in Belfast, although work carried out by girls and women sent there did not involve a commercial laundry. Girls and women were sent to these institutions for a variety of reasons and through state and non-state referrals. The courts sent significant numbers to them as an alternative to prison, on probation, or on Fit Person Orders or Place of Safety Orders. Social workers, welfare committees, and health and social services were all involved in how girls and women were admitted to the institutions. Clergy and religious organisations, families, employers and other individuals were also instrumental. As discussed more fully in the individual institution chapters and the Serious Human Rights Issues chapter, these institutions received remarkably little inspection or attention from the state authorities. This is partly explained by the reliance in NI on voluntary organisations.

From its establishment, NI 'lagged behind the rest of the United Kingdom' in terms of services such as housing, public health and education.²⁸ Health and welfare were largely underfunded and the voluntary sector played a crucial role in welfare, 'indeed philanthropy was the main mechanism for poverty relief in the first two decades after partition'.²⁹ There was a long established tradition of separate Protestant and Catholic voluntary organisations and these continued into the twentieth century in NI. Financially challenged local authorities and government departments were content to allow religious and voluntary agencies to continue to provide services.³⁰ There was also a desire from the Northern Irish government not to interfere in the operation of Catholic institutions for fear of causing further alienation from the state on the part of the Catholic community.³¹

3.0 Workhouses and Mother and Baby Institutions in NI

3.1 Workhouses

There was a stigma attached to unmarried motherhood in both NI and RoI across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The infant mortality rate for children of 'unmarried mothers' was higher than for children born to married parents, and a mother who was not married 'once her status was known, found it difficult, if not impossible to find respectable employment and was often shunned by her family'.³² The wider context for mothers who were not married, in the period around Partition, has been described as 'acute poverty, mortality among infants due to starvation and disease and the near impossibility of raising a child as a single mother in so conservative a society as Ireland'.³³

For many 'unmarried mothers', from the mid-nineteenth century, the shame and lack of support networks ensured that many ended up in the Workhouses which were established in Ireland by the Poor Law (Ireland) Act of 1838. The Workhouse authorities in the nineteenth century were concerned about the presence of 'unmarried mothers' in the Workhouse because they were viewed as 'immoral and their children a drain on the rates': a view which continued into the twentieth century.³⁴ The stigma attached to 'illegitimacy' also had an incremental element, as is seen by the fact that the Workhouse authorities categorised women who had more than one child born outside of marriage alongside sex workers and separated from those they labelled as the 'more respectable poor inmates'.³⁵

While it has been argued that the Poor Law in Ireland at least offered a 'safety net' for the single mother that had not existed before,³⁶ there were contemporary concerns that the Workhouses encouraged the birth of children outside of marriage by offering this limited form of support.³⁷ In Ulster Workhouses in 1859, the percentage of children being born to mothers who were not married was higher than in other provinces, suggesting that there was a higher rate of pre-marital sex in Ulster counties and possibly even less support for single mothers within local communities.³⁸ Examining the Belfast Union Workhouse as an example, it has been argued that an analysis of the indoor registers 'provides striking evidence of the economic and social precarity of poor single mothers, and the importance of the Workhouse for some of them as a last resort'.³⁹ In the early twentieth century, 'large numbers of young single women either with children or in various stages of pregnancy' were admitted to the Workhouse. They were 'deemed "immoral" and ostracised by family and community' and the Workhouses 'represented one very important option as a source of shelter, healthcare and food' for these women. Moreover, women may have chosen the Workhouse rather than other religious or philanthropic institutions to avoid their 'overtly religious ethos or their attempts to exert moral control'.⁴⁰

For other women, their situation may have led them to more drastic action. Research on infanticide has drawn attention to the plight of the 'unmarried mother' and the tragic consequences which were associated with the stigma of 'illegitimacy'.⁴¹ Elaine Farrell has shown the contemporary association between infanticide and 'illegitimacy' and demonstrated that in infanticide cases in the nineteenth century the perpetrator was typically unmarried.⁴² This profile continued into the twentieth century across the island of Ireland, and Cliona Rattigan argues that 'material circumstances militated against the

‘unmarried mother’. The sense of shame attached to premarital conception should not be underestimated.⁴³ As Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart contend, in the first half of the twentieth century for many women, ‘there were limited options when facing an unwanted pregnancy: infanticide; concealment of birth; the abandonment of a child; adoption, or an illegal abortion at home or in Britain’.⁴⁴

Research on abortion has revealed the array of methods used by women to self-abort a pregnancy, including ‘pills, herbal remedies, douches, physical exercise, syringes and salt baths’.⁴⁵ It is unclear what the rates of induced abortion were, as the cases which came to public attention tended to be when the woman involved had tragically died carrying out the procedure. However, there is evidence from the early twentieth century of networks of knowledge across the island about how to access illegal ‘backstreet’ abortions.⁴⁶ Other options involved migration to Britain, or further afield, to escape the shame attached to unmarried motherhood and the threat of having to enter an institution. Emigration also offered to ‘unmarried mothers’ greater options for adoption or for keeping their baby.⁴⁷

Following Partition, in NI the Poor Law and Workhouses continued to provide the bulk of free health care and accommodation and aid to the destitute.⁴⁸ Through the 1920s and 1930s, a number of Workhouses underwent a change in their functions and they became local hospitals. From 1948, with the end of the Poor Law, many of the Workhouses became National Health Service (NHS) hospitals. Between 1922 and 1948 girls and women who were pregnant outside of marriage continued to give birth in the institutions and babies and children were nursed or boarded out (forms of fostering) through the Boards of Guardians, who managed the Workhouses.

3.2 Mother and Baby Institutions

Catholic-run institutions

- Mater Dei Hostel, Belfast (1942–99: Legion of Mary)
- GSS Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast (1950–90)
- GSS Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution, Newry (1955–84)

Protestant institutions

- Belfast Midnight Mission, also known as Malone Place or the Rescue and Maternity Home (1860–1948)
- Church of Ireland Rescue League Home, also known as Kennedy House, Belfast (1912–56)
- Hopedene Hostel, Belfast (1943–85: non-denominational)
- Thorndale House (1920–77: Salvation Army)

Health and social services, and charities

- Clogrennan, Larne, Co Antrim (1970–75)
- Mount Oriel Hostel, Belfast (1969–80s)
- Deanery Flats, Belfast (1973–91)

In both NI and RoI, ‘shame and secrecy formed fundamental bulwarks’ that in both of the new states ‘placed a high premium on sexual “purity”’.⁴⁹ Across the island of Ireland there was ‘stigmatisation of birth outside marriage’ which caused ‘familial ostracisation’.⁵⁰ The birth rate outside of marriage in NI was higher than in the rest of Ireland throughout the twentieth century. In 1944, there was a spike in rates of babies born outside of marriage in NI, up to 5.6% of births. The equivalent figure in the Irish Free State was 3.9% in the same year. The figure for NI dropped to under 4% in the late 1940s and to under 2.5% by the late 1950s. The average figure for the 1960s was 3.01%, rising to an average for the 1970s of 4.77%.⁵¹ These rates can be compared with the figure for the end of the twentieth century, when 31.8% of births in NI were to mothers who were not married.⁵²

From the early twentieth century, discussions concerning the comparatively high rate of births outside marriage in Ulster suggested it was related to the fact that, as a manufacturing centre, its major towns attracted inwards migration of large numbers of young female textile workers.⁵³ Undoubtedly, many young women were vulnerable to pregnancy outside of marriage when living outside family bounds and paternalistic supervision, in new homes in Belfast or one of the other larger urban areas.⁵⁴ It is also unsurprising that the institutions which were established to cater for unmarried pregnant girls and women were mostly in Belfast, which offered the anonymity of the city for the many pregnant girls and women who travelled there from more rural areas to conceal their condition from family or neighbours.

Across the twentieth century, religious authorities – both Protestant and Catholic – were vocal in their concerns about the behaviour of young women and their fears of declining morals. This was frequently articulated in connection with changes in leisure activities.⁵⁵ Alcohol, dance halls and the cinema all featured prominently in moralised concerns about how young women could be led astray.⁵⁶ The upheaval caused by World War Two exacerbated many of these anxieties, in particular the presence of large numbers of military personnel in NI including thousands of US troops.⁵⁷ The Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association, which was closely involved with two mother and baby institutions (Kennedy House and Hopedene), was concerned that young people wanted to ‘grasp life while they had it’ and that the inevitable result of this would be a ‘lowering of [moral] standards’.⁵⁸ Similarly, the Rev. Neil, delivering the Home Mission Report to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in June 1943, stated that ‘the number of girls running through the streets of Belfast and Derry today is staggering’.⁵⁹ Catholic clergy expressed similar concerns, with the Bishop of Derry, in 1944, appealing for stricter parental controls on young women as ‘Irish parents have always regarded the purity of their daughters as a very important thing’.⁶⁰

While the rates of births outside of marriage fell after World War Two it is clear that ‘the stigmatisation of birth outside marriage which caused ostracisation continued into and beyond the 1950s’.⁶¹ The fact that four mother and baby institutions – Mater Dei, Hopedene, Marianville and Marianvale – were established in the 1940s and 1950s illustrates this. It should be noted that mother and baby institutions developed differently in NI compared to RoI.

Belfast Midnight Mission (or Malone Place), which was a Protestant non-denominational institution, was the first institution in Belfast to specifically focus on those pregnant outside of marriage as it developed its work as a maternity institution from the early twentieth century. The Church of Ireland Rescue League operated a small mother and baby institution from 1912, which subsequently became Kennedy House. The Salvation Army’s mother and baby institution, Thorndale House, was established in 1920. The first Catholic mother and baby institution was Mater Dei, which opened in 1942, operated by the Legion of Mary. This was followed in 1943 by Hopedene (Protestant non-denominational) and in 1950 by Marianville and 1955 by Marianvale mother and baby institutions, which were operated by the GSS. As discussed above, the long tradition of separate Protestant and Catholic charitable organisations is evident in the separate provision of mother and baby institutions. Even after the establishment of the welfare state and the health and welfare reforms introduced by it, there continued to be voluntary organisations which offered social service provision. Several institutions operated by the state emerged in the 1970s, including Clogrennan in Larne, Co Antrim, and Mount Oriel in Belfast. They functioned as mother and baby institutions for five years and nine years respectively.

It has been acknowledged that not all women who had children outside of marriage entered a mother and baby institution.⁶² During the years when the numbers passing through the mother and baby institutions peaked, in the late 1960s, the proportion involved was never more than 25% of all babies born outside of marriage in NI. For women who found themselves pregnant and unmarried, there were alternative possible options, some of which remained unchanged from the nineteenth century. For many, the solution was a quickly arranged marriage to take place prior to the birth. Alternatively, a marriage might take place soon after the birth.⁶³ In other situations, babies were brought up as part of a wider family, sometimes passed off as the younger sibling of the mother and with the grandparents acting as ‘mother’ and ‘father’. Another option was taken by women who travelled to stay with relatives or friends (often outside NI) for the duration of their pregnancy and had the baby adopted or placed in an institution before returning home.

In some situations, women brought up children on their own, with or without family support. By the early 1970s, two-thirds of ‘unmarried mothers’ were opting to do so according to the *Belfast Telegraph*.⁶⁴ Unlike women in earlier generations they encountered a more favourable environment in terms of finance from the state, the provision of housing for single-parent families, and more liberal and progressive attitudes generally. However, as many of the testimonies about the 1970s and 1980s that feature in this report reveal, great care must be taken in assessing the extent to which liberal and progressive attitudes spread through society. Gender discrimination and the shame attached to single motherhood reduced at a very slow rate in what continued to be a conservative and religious society.

In the 1970s, newspapers were engaging in more open discussion of the issue and of the economic and social problems that women faced when they found themselves in this situation. In 1974, *Belfast Telegraph* readers learnt of the *Single Woman's Guide to Pregnancy and Parenthood*, which addressed the 200,000 single women in the UK who had a baby each year. It covered everything from morning sickness through to supplementary benefit and listed organisations that could help single mothers, including those in NI.⁶⁵ By 1978, these included Gingerbread Northern Ireland.⁶⁶ Moreover, it appears that the creation of the Housing Executive benefited 'unmarried mothers'. It claimed to treat 'unmarried mothers in the same way as all single parents in terms of accommodation'.⁶⁷ However, the IP recognise the continued economic and social difficulties that single mothers experienced, which are discussed more fully in the Serious Human Rights Issues chapter and in all of the institutional chapters.

Most of the women who entered mother and baby institutions did so because there was no backing from their family and they were unable to locate support and accommodation during their pregnancy. For many families, pregnancy outside of marriage was seen as shameful and the source of social stigma. When a pregnancy became obvious and if marriage was not an option and/or the family would not support the woman in maintaining the child herself, placement in a mother and baby institution for the duration of the pregnancy was regarded as a solution. In some cases, women were involved in consensual relationships which could not be formalised in marriage. This may have been because a partner was deemed unsuitable by a family. In NI this was very often due to religion (one partner being Catholic and the other Protestant). However, this could also relate to social class and relationships which upset a family's sense of their social station. In other cases, marriage was ruled out because the baby's father was already married or because the individual concerned had simply disappeared and could not be traced. In yet other cases, the young age of some girls or women deemed marriage an unsuitable option.

A significant number girls and women who were admitted to institutions had become pregnant due to rape. This is an issue that is discussed in the relevant institutional chapters within this report. If the rape was the result of incest, being removed from a family home and having the baby adopted was considered a necessity. In some situations, the authorities (health and social services, the police) were involved and facilitated the placement in a mother and baby institution. In other cases, it seems likely that the authorities were not involved in these situations, and rape or incest were not reported as crimes and the perpetrators were not brought to the attention of the authorities. Unfortunately, secrecy, shame and silence may well have enabled abusers to continue their behaviour in such cases. It is also to be acknowledged that the reporting of rape or sexual assault and how this was dealt with by the authorities, as well as the persistence of myths around rape and sexual offences and a lack of understanding around issues of consent, may well have led to many girls and women not reporting crimes.

One of the other important differences between mother and baby institutions in NI and RoI was the length of time for which women remained. In NI, mothers and babies rarely stayed more than a couple of months following a birth. Mothers left at the same time as their baby, whether the baby was to be adopted, fostered, placed in an institution, or if mother and baby left together. As there was a minimum of six weeks before a mother

could consent to her baby being adopted, some girls and women remained for this period and then the paperwork was completed for adoption and both mother and baby left. In other situations, women did not return to the mother and baby institution from hospital following a birth, and babies were placed with a foster family or in a baby institution. They may have been subsequently adopted. One exception to this pattern was Hopedene, which provided a nursery for babies and the possibility for mothers to remain in the institution for longer periods while they went out to work. In the 1970s, with a slow thawing of censorious attitudes towards 'unmarried mothers', Deanery Flats (operated by Barnardo's and other health and social service organisations) provided accommodation for mothers and babies.

3.3 Locations of birth

Thorndale House and Belfast Midnight Mission (later Malone Place) were the only two mother and baby institutions that had a maternity unit on site where mothers gave birth. These were two of the mother and baby institutions to be established before the NHS provided free maternity care. Prior to 1948, women from Hopedene often went to Belfast Midnight Mission (or Malone Place) to give birth and women in Mater Dei often either to the Belfast Board of Guardians-operated Jubilee Maternity Hospital or to private nursing homes. With the establishment of the NHS, the majority of women gave birth in the hospital closest to the mother and baby institution. After 1948, some women from mother and baby institutions continued to be sent to private nursing homes although this had become very unusual among the general population. For example, in 1955, 3.7% (397) of all births in Belfast were in a nursing home and by 1968 this had dropped to 0.8% (80).⁶⁸ In cases where pregnant girls or women from the mother and baby institutions continued to give birth in private nursing homes, it was often the case that they were from Rol and could not access the free services offered by the NHS. In other cases, private nursing homes were used as de facto mother and baby institutions, as locations where a pregnancy was concealed and from where babies were adopted after the birth. This report discusses a number of the private nursing homes and private family homes that were involved in this respect, both in terms of being part of the networks of a number of the mother and baby institutions – such as Hopedene, Marianville and Mater Dei – and as stand-alone institutions independently involved in adoptions.

4.0 Baby institutions

The most high-profile mother and baby institution in Rol has been the one in Tuam, Co Galway that was operated by the Bon Secours Sisters. The discovery of an estimated 800 babies and young children for whom burial records do not exist was one of the key stimuli for the creation of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes in Rol. The Tuam institution, like other mother and baby institutions in Rol, continued to keep children (and often their mothers) for several years after their birth. This is one reason why child mortality rates in these institutions were significant. The same is not the case in NI because as noted above, mothers and their children often left soon after the birth. Indeed, in many cases they did not return from the maternity ward.

Many of the children who were separated from their mothers after birth were placed in baby institutions and for this reason, baby institutions are an important pathway that must be considered thoroughly. It was already recognised that infant mortality rates at one of NI's baby institutions was very high between the 1920s and the 1950s.⁶⁹ This was the St Joseph's Babies' Home, which operated in a number of different locations in Belfast as it moved premises on a number of occasions between the 1920s and 1950s. It was under the supervision of a combination of the Diocese of Down and Connor and the Sisters of Nazareth. This report offers further analysis of this institution and places it in the context of a series of baby institutions on both sides of the border.

As was the case with mother and baby institutions and children's institutions, the state relied on a number of voluntary religious organisations to provide residential care in this sector. This included the Sisters of Nazareth and Barnardo's. Following the emergence of the welfare state, there were also a small number of baby institutions opened by local welfare committees.

There was significant movement of infants and young children back and forth across the border between baby institutions, children's institutions and, in many cases, into adoption.

Among the baby institutions discussed in this report are:

Catholic voluntary institutions

- St Joseph's Babies' Home, otherwise known as Nazareth House, Belfast (1912–83: Diocese of Down and Connor, and Sisters of Nazareth)
- Our Mother of Mercy Home, Newry (Sisters of Mercy)
- Nazareth House, Portadown (1953–84: Sisters of Nazareth)
- St Joseph's Baby Home, Stamullen, Co Meath
- Nazareth House, Fahan, Co Donegal (1939–95: Sisters of Nazareth)

Voluntary institutions

- Manor House, Ballycastle (Barnardo's)
- Glendhu Children's Hostel, Belfast

State institutions

- Brefne Residential Nursery, Belfast
- Coleshill, Enniskillen

- Coneywarren, Omagh
- Clogrennan, Larne
- Dhu Varren, Portrush
- Gleneyre, Portadown
- Mourne Drive, Derry/Londonderry

5.0 Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

The NI Executive established the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI), which investigated abuse of children under 18 who were living in an institution in NI between 1922 and 1995.

The inquiry, chaired by Sir Anthony Hart, sat between 2014 and 2017 and was the largest inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse in NI's legal history. The inquiry investigated 22 institutions in NI: 15 state-run children's institutions, 13 institutions run by Catholic Church orders, and four borstals or training schools. It also examined the circumstances surrounding the sending of child migrants from NI to Australia and the activities of the late Fr Brendan Smyth.

The Terms of Reference for the HIAI stated that the inquiry would examine if there were systemic failings by the institutions or the state in their duties towards children in their care between 1922 and 1995. A 'child' was defined as anyone under 18 years of age and an 'institution' meant 'any body, society or organisation with responsibility for the care, health or welfare of children in NI, other than a school (but including a training school or borstal) which, during the relevant period, provided residential accommodation and took decisions about and made provision for the day to day care of children'.

The Terms of Reference excluded victims of clerical child abuse, and former 'residents' of Magdalene laundries and mother and baby institutions who were over the age of 18.

This led to a campaign by those groups who were excluded from the HIAI.

6.0 2013 – United Nations Committee recommendations

In May 2013, the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture welcomed the establishment of the HIAI but expressed concern that the experiences of women over 18 who had been in Magdalene laundries and other institutions, and those who had survived clerical abuse, would not be investigated by the inquiry. The Committee recommended that all institutional abuse, regardless of the age of women or the status of the institutions, should be investigated and those responsible for criminal offences, if still

alive, should be prosecuted accordingly. The Committee also recommended that redress, compensation and rehabilitation should be assured for all survivors.

In July 2013, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed concern that limiting the scope of the HIAI would deny women an appropriate 'remedy'. It recommended that there should be no age restriction on the HIAI and that adequate redress should be provided for all women who were detained.

7.0 2016 – Establishment of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse

Following ongoing campaigning by victims-survivors, in 2016 the NI Executive established an independently chaired Interdepartmental Working Group (IDWG), jointly sponsored by the Department of Health and the Executive Office (TEO). The Department of Health led on the work on mother and baby Institutions and Magdalene Laundries, and TEO was lead department for the work on historical clerical child abuse.

The role of the IDWG was to guide and oversee two strands of work:

- work relating to historical mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries operating between 1922 and 1999, which were outside the terms of reference of the HIAI
- work relating to historical clerical child abuse.

The IDWG were tasked with obtaining further information in relation to these matters and providing advice to the NI Executive on the way forward.

This included:

- commissioning research
- engagement with victim-survivor groups and advocates
- monitoring and considering developments, relating to the two strands of work, taking place in other jurisdictions
- reporting on the group's progress to Executive Ministers and Assembly Committees.

8.0 January 2021 – Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University research report on mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries in NI

As lead department, the Department of Health commissioned research to examine the operation of these institutions from 1922 to 1999 and the wider historical and social context within which they operated over that period.

The research commenced in March 2018 and was led by Professor Leanne McCormick of Ulster University (UU) and Professor Sean O’Connell of Queen’s University Belfast (QUB), who were also the primary authors of the report.

The team was tasked with examining 14 identified institutions, and the research included:

- a literature review
- analysis of surviving institutional records along with relevant files and records from government departments
- an oral history project to include testimony of former ‘residents’ and other witnesses.

Specifically, the Terms of Reference for the research required the team to consider:

- oral and written accounts, evidence and testimony from former ‘residents’, wider family, and employees of the institutions or laundries
- information in relation to other relevant matters identified during the course of the research which may warrant further investigation in the public interest
- the entry and exit pathways of women and girls in respect of the institutions
- the living conditions and care arrangements experienced by ‘residents’ during their period of accommodation in these institutions and a comparison with other groups of women and children during the period
- the mortality among mothers and children residing in the institutions, including information on general causes, circumstances and rates of mortality compared to other groups of women and children during the period
- the post-mortem practices and procedures in respect of children or mothers who died while ‘resident’ in these institutions, including the reporting of deaths and burial arrangements.

For children separated from their mothers, to examine the exit pathways regarding:

- the extent of mothers' involvement in decision-making
- procedures in place to obtain consent from mothers in respect of adoption
- whether the procedures were adequate to ensure consent was full, free and informed
- practices and procedures for the placement of children.

The research report was published in January 2021.

9.0 October 2021 – Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability Report

Following the publication of the QUB and UU research report, in January 2021, the IDWG noted that while comprehensive research had been conducted, many unanswered questions remained and recommended that the NI Executive consider the establishment of a further investigation.

Following all-party agreement in January 2021, the NI Executive invited victims-survivors of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries and Workhouses to contribute to designing the framework for an independent investigation into the institutions.

The Truth Recovery Design Panel (the Design Panel) was set up for this process and included the appointment of a Chair, Deirdre Mahon (Director of Women and Children's Services and the Executive Director of Social Work in Health and Social Care in NI), along with Dr Maeve O'Rourke (Lecturer in Human Rights, University of Galway) and Professor Phil Scraton (Professor Emeritus, QUB).

The Design Panel's primary focus – through a process of extensive engagement with victims-survivors, relatives and affected individuals – was to co-design an investigation into mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries in NI. Soon after its appointment, and following representations from victims-survivors, the Design Panel added Workhouses to its scope.

Following a six-month period of extensive engagement and work by the Truth Recovery Design Panel, the Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability (TAA) Report was published in October 2021.

The TAA Report contained five core recommendations and 77 sub-recommendations.

The five core recommendations focus on:

- adoption of guiding principles
- responsibility of TEO

- an integrated truth investigation
- access to records
- redress, reparation and compensation.

The Truth Recovery Design Panel report is available at: <http://truthrecoverystrategy.com/reports/>

On 15 November 2021, the NI Executive accepted all of the recommendations and agreed to their implementation in full.

TEO established the Truth Recovery Programme to lead on implementation of the Design Panel's recommendations in collaboration with victims-survivors.

10.0 April 2023 – Truth Recovery IP

Many victims-survivors explained to the Truth Design Recovery Panel that they wanted the opportunity to present their testimonies in a non-adversarial forum. This meant being able to provide testimony in a safe way that did not involve legal cross-examination. Many victims-survivors were keen to avoid the negative experiences suffered by some of those who engaged with the HIAI.

Taking these expressed views into account, Recommendation 3 was to establish an integrated truth investigation with two distinct, but integrated phases:

- a non-statutory IP
- a full statutory public inquiry.

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel (TRIP) was appointed by TEO on 27 April 2023. The ten-person Panel comprised professional expertise in six key areas and Victim-Survivor Representatives with experience of institutionalisation and the adoption system. The IP was initially expected to complete its work within 24 months. Following a series of extension requests, due to factors outside the control of the IP, the IP completed its work in April 2026.

The Terms of Reference for the IP are set out below.

11.0 IP Terms of Reference

An IP will be guided by the following principles:

- respect for the human rights of victims-survivors and relatives and a commitment to protecting and fulfilling human rights

- full access to information for victims-survivors and relatives of the deceased
- central involvement of, and accountability to, victims-survivors and relatives
- accessibility, particularly to persons with disabilities
- inclusion of victims-survivors and relatives affected by cross-border practices and in the Diaspora, and relatives of the deceased.

An IP will:

- gather, preserve, catalogue, and digitise relevant records and archives, engaging with authorities and institutions, organisations and individuals in NI and RoI and across jurisdictions
- provide archival, genealogical, advocacy and any other necessary assistance, to victims-survivors and relatives to seek and obtain information from records and archives relating to the institutions and practices under investigation, including information about the fate and whereabouts of deceased children and women
- commission geophysical surveys and archaeological investigations at former institutional sites to ascertain the presence or otherwise of unmarked graves
- record testimony through a non-adversarial, disability-aware and trauma-sensitive process, ensuring informed choice in giving testimonies (confidential or in public; oral or written) and how testimonies are used (restricted to the IP, forwarded to the inquiry or preserved in a permanent independent archive)
- ensure personal support enabling participation in the IP's investigation, including psychological services, independent advocacy, disability-related support services and access to a legal information service
- investigate and publish findings regarding human rights violations experienced by individuals and families in mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and their pathways and practices (including the adoption system, related institutions such as 'baby homes' and private nursing homes, and cross-border and international transfers of children and women). The investigation should include in its examination:
 - the harms suffered at the time of the institutions' operation and those continuing to the present, including gender-based harms and harms recognised in international human rights law
 - how violations were inflicted and persisted
 - the institutional and societal causes of the violations

- the impact and consequences of the violations and harms experienced
- the responses of involved institutions, organisations and agencies to individuals and families affected
- make recommendations regarding measures necessary to respond to, and prevent recurrence of, the human rights violations experienced, including periodic recommendations to the public inquiry, Ministers or any other state authority
- secure the maximum possible publication of records and documentary material while protecting human rights, including the publication of personal testimonies with informed consent
- establish and publish a protocol for discharging its duty to disclose certain information for criminal investigation
- preserve its archive in full to be deposited in a permanent independent repository, ensuring informed consent for the deposit of witness testimony and compliance with data protection law
- contribute to the drafting of legislation to establish a permanent independent archive of historical institutional and adoption records, and other records relating to children in state care
- review and analyse implementation of the Truth Recovery Design Panel's recommendations; victims-survivors' and relatives' access to civil proceedings, criminal justice investigation and inquests; and implementation of data protection and freedom of information laws
- publicise its work widely to encourage participation, including of people with disabilities and those across the Diaspora
- initiate events to encourage public engagement in its work.

The three core imperatives of the IP were:

- non-adversarial testimony process
- preservation, cataloguing and analysing accessible records
- access to records.

12.0 Non-adversarial testimony process

It was recommended that an integrated truth investigation should include a truth-telling first phase of an overarching truth recovery process that would gather testimony in a non-adversarial forum. It was agreed that the process through which someone would give their personal testimony should be trauma-informed, and disability- and gender-aware.

Testimonies gathered by the IP have informed the IP's final report, which in turn will guide the work of the statutory public inquiry. Where consent has been given, extracts from testimonies are included in the IP's report.

13.0 Preservation, cataloguing and analysing accessible records

It was recognised that the IP could begin work in advance of the public inquiry and assist the integrated investigation by progressing the gathering and cataloguing of historical records. Working alongside the Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), the IP has been able to access over 5,500 institutional records. The upcoming public inquiry will be able to use its powers of compulsion to gather records from any institution, organisation or public body that has not made records available to the IP for its investigation.

The IP therefore relied on 'goodwill' from the institutions and a guiding framework established under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022: 'An Act to make provision for the preservation of documents relating to certain institutions and residents of those institutions between 1922 and 1995 to certain children of those residents.'

14.0 Access to records

The Design Panel report identified the need for a coordinated, fully resourced, expert mechanism to assist victims-survivors and relatives in accessing personal information. One of the important functions of the TRIP was to identify barriers in accessing records and to provide guidance to people searching for records about themselves and their lived experience while in mother and baby institutions; Magdalene laundries and Workhouses; and associated pathways and practices including the care system, fostering and adoption. Access to personal records will also enable full participation in the integrated truth investigation process.

The IP's role was to advise on best practice and develop processes allowing individuals to apply for records. This included giving clear direction on potential appeal mechanisms and encouraging all record holders to adopt best practices that comply with all legal and ethical requirements. The intention was that access to personal records and unredacted copies of all records pertaining to them would assist victims-survivors to participate fully in the integrated investigation by informing their testimony to the IP (and/or the public inquiry, and/or providing information for their applications to the Redress Service), and

that agencies holding those records would have full knowledge of their responsibilities to make them available and awareness of all current data protection legislation and policy.

15.0 IP ways of working

The IP established four working groups (WGs) to deliver its Terms of Reference:

- WG 1: Testimony Gathering and Analysis
- WG 2: Records and Archives
- WG 3: Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy and Legal Services
- WG 4: Communication and Engagement.

Full reports from each of the WGs are contained within this report.

The IP also hosted engagement events and update sessions with victims-survivors, discussed in detail within the Communication and Engagement WG chapter.

The IP, and its individual WGs, met regularly both in person and online throughout its tenure.

16.0 IP Interim Report

In May 2024 the IP published its Interim Report.⁷⁰ It focused on the achievements after the initial 12 months, the learning at that point and plans for the remainder of the IP's tenure.

The IP made the following five recommendations in its Interim Report:

1. The IP asked Ministers to consider the early appointment of the Chair of the public inquiry. This will allow the IP to support the work of the public inquiry more effectively. It will also enable the Chair to engage in foundational planning for the public inquiry. In hindsight, providing a similar opportunity for the IP's Co-Chairs to take up post ahead of the rest of the IP would have enabled them to oversee planning for the IP's most significant workstreams. This could have included: securing access to institutional records before the IP began its work, ensuring processes had been completed to recruit testimony facilitators early in the IP's work, and securing administrative support and suitable accommodation for the taking of testimonies.

- **At the time of writing the legislation for the public inquiry was about to be debated in the Assembly with an expectation that it would become law by autumn of 2026.**
 - **At the time of writing the Chair of the public inquiry had not been appointed.**
2. When employed in future truth recovery exercises, we recommended that any future Panel is given greater control over its own budget. A truth recovery process of this type requires agility and innovation if we are to make a case to victims-survivors that the process is truly designed in their own interest. Bureaucracy should be at an absolute minimum, while also ensuring clear auditing of expenditure and the decision-making behind that expenditure.

A full recommendation in this regard is contained within this report.

3. The IP asked Ministers to consider extending its working remit by six months. In the IP's view, this was necessitated by several factors:
- Our ability to move forward at pace had been delayed by the constraints involved in having to work within public sector procurement procedures that are not designed for a time-limited body such as this Panel. The impacts of these restraints included: the appointment and training of testimony facilitators much later than was desirable due to the length of the procurement process, and the need to appoint testimony facilitators on a part-time rather than a full-time basis due to issues related to the financial limits placed on differing procurement processes.
 - The requirement to continue negotiations on access to several of the institutional record sets slowed the pace of digitisation and shortened the time that the IP has in which to analyse those records both for its own final report and for the benefit of the public inquiry and the Redress Service.
 - There has been a recent realisation that government departments and public bodies need time to carry out thorough searches for records held that relate to the institutions and related pathways and practices. Assurances given to McCormick and O'Connell in 2018 that no records existed outside PRONI were inaccurate in the case of at least one of the institutions. It is not yet clear when these searches can be completed.
 - **An initial request was granted by Ministers to extend the tenure of the IP by six months to 31 October 2025.**
4. The IP asked Ministers to continue to support efforts through appropriate channels to secure access to relevant records in RoI.
- **The IP acknowledges that cross-border co-operation on the provision of records and information on mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries was discussed at a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, held in Dublin Castle on 13 September 2024.**

A commitment to work collaboratively by both jurisdictions was reaffirmed by the Taoiseach:

“

We also had an important discussion on Mother and Baby institutions and Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses. There is work underway in the North in relation to this, and for our part we remain committed to working closely and cooperating and collaborating in any way we usefully can.

First Minister Michelle O’Neill emphasised the importance of collaboration on mother and baby institutions:

“

This is one of those crucial areas that we need to cooperate on in terms of sharing records and ensuring there is protection of those records and ensuring that when it comes to redress payments, that these do not impact on other incomes people have.

5. The IP recommended the removal of means testing on legal aid for access to records requests by victims-survivors of these institutions. The IP is concerned that the low income and capital threshold limit applied to eligibility for legal aid is an unfair barrier to access. We recommended review and amendment of the relevant legislation.
- **Despite formally writing to the Department of Justice, the IP await an outcome on this issue.**

17.0 Further extension of the IP’s tenure

On 21 July 2025, the Co-Chairs wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister to ask for an extension of our term until 31 March 2026. This extension was granted on 5 September 2025.

This request for an extended time period was due to two important developments that would help us produce a stronger and more meaningful final report. Firstly, the IP received an incredible response to our leafleting and social media campaign that took place in February and March 2025. Over 350 people got in touch, and 238 went on to share their testimony with us. We are truly grateful to everyone who took the time to engage with the IP. In addition, the IP made use of 46 testimonies from those who shared testimony for the QUB-UU Report of 2021.

Preparing transcripts of these testimonies is a careful and respectful process. The IP worked closely with each participating person to ensure they were fully comfortable and content with what was included in their agreed transcript. This took time, but it was important to do it properly. Secondly, PRONI received important records relating to some of the institutions. These records are very significant and required digitisation before the IP could analyse them. As a Panel, we have been trying to access these records for two years and it was important that an analysis of them was included in our final report.

The IP were delighted with the success of these aspects of our work. To ensure the IP's findings and recommendations to the forthcoming statutory public inquiry were fully informed and as detailed as possible, careful study of both the testimonies and the archival records was essential.

The IP believe this extra time was critical to allow us to deliver a more comprehensive report – one that truly honours the voices of victims-survivors and reflects the depth and importance of their experiences.

18.0 Who are the members of the IP

Professor Leanne McCormick

IP Co-Chair and specialist in social and oral history



Leanne grew up in NI before going to Cambridge to read History, and after a year teaching in India, returned to complete a PGCE there. She taught History for several years in Edinburgh before returning to NI, where she completed a PhD at UU.

Along with Professor Sean O'Connell, Leanne was the co-author of the *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1990* research report, published in 2021. Leanne led on the archives and records aspect of the research for that report. Leanne is the social and oral history specialist on the IP, leading on the archival research for the IP, working very closely with the IP's specialist archivist Mark Farrell.

Her research expertise is in women's history, the history of sexuality and medicine in the north of Ireland and NI, and the Irish diaspora in North America. She has published widely in these areas. Leanne is the co-creator of the 'Bad Bridget Project', which looks at Irish women who committed crimes in nineteenth and early twentieth-century North America. She is also currently working on the project 'Queer Northern Ireland: Sexuality before liberation'.

Professor Sean O'Connell

IP Co-Chair and specialist in social and oral history



Sean O'Connell was born in Manchester. His parents hailed from Tuam, Co Galway and Castletown Geoghegan in Co Westmeath. He is a Professor of Modern British and Irish social history at QUB and has lived in NI since 1999.

In January 2021, alongside Professor Leanne McCormick, he published the research report entitled *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1990*. Sean took the lead in the collection and analysis of oral testimony that was used in that report. Together with our trauma-informed specialist, Beverley Clarke, and our linguistic analysis specialist Patricia Canning, Sean is leading on the IP's collection and analysis of individual testimonies.

Sean has been an oral historian since 1992 and is an editor of the journal *Oral History*. He is the founder of Quote Hub, QUB's oral history website, which is home to some of the testimonies on mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries and Workhouses that featured in the 2021 research report.

Dr Patricia Canning

Sociology of discrimination and gender-based violence



Patricia Canning was born in Belfast and has spent many years working in and for the wider community in a range of roles (including as an adviser with the Citizen's Advice Bureau, as manager of an outreach advice centre, and as an NVQ teacher and Internal Verifier of community work qualifications). She received her first-class honours degree, master's and PhD at QUB, where she taught Linguistics and Literature before moving to the Netherlands as an Assistant Professor at Utrecht University and then to Northumbria University in Newcastle.

Patricia has extensive research experience in linguistics – specifically, forensic linguistics – in which she examines police documents and the language choices made by officers, prosecutors, and victims-survivors of gendered violence. Patricia has published work on disparities between official and personal accounts of traumatic events, including the Hillsborough Disaster. She works with survivors of domestic abuse, domestic abuse charities, and several UK police forces to improve routes to justice for girls and women. Patricia used her important skillsets to enable the IP to carry out thematic analysis of the large number of personal testimonies that we collected, which forms the centrepiece of our final report and recommendations.

Patricia is the author of over 20 articles, book chapters and reports. She has published two books and is the co-author of an independent panel report into what went wrong at the Champions League Final in Paris in 2022.

Patricia currently lives in Durham with her two whippets and 50,000 bees.

Beverley Clarke

Trauma-informed practice



Beverley studied for a degree and qualification in Social Work over 30 years ago. Her career in social work has involved working in statutory and voluntary services in London and across the south-east of England. Beverley has also worked for the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office as a Child Protection Advisor.

Beverley was also employed as a Child Welfare Worker, working with indigenous communities in Alberta, Canada, where she also became a Commissioner of Oaths. Beverley is a qualified expert witness. In 2015, she was appointed as a Panel member

to the Acknowledgement Forum in the independent HIAI. The Acknowledgement Forum engaged with victims-survivors who were abused as children in residential institutions. She continues to sit as a Non-Judicial Panel member in the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Scheme.

Beverley was a Truth Facilitator in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales for the duration of the Truth Project. The Truth Project met with over 6,000 victims-survivors who shared their lived experiences of childhood sexual abuse.

Drawing on all of these experiences, Beverley has been central to developing a trauma-led approach to the collection of personal testimonies by the IP.

Maria Cogley

Victim-Survivor Representative



Maria Cogley was born in Belfast and grew up in the north of the city. She left NI to attend university, followed by teacher training college in England. She has an extensive and vastly experienced background in education, with over 25 years' primary school classroom teaching experience. She now lives in Norwich and is married, with two grown-up children.

Maria was actively involved with the Truth Recovery Design Panel throughout its investigation period. She is a member of the Victims and Survivors Consultation Forum, working with TEO to implement the recommendations of the TAA Report. Recently, she was part of a small WG, established by the NI Department of Health, tasked with developing and writing guidance for adoption agencies (including Health and Social Care Trusts) relating to the disclosure and release of birth records and adoption files.

Maria's own mother was sent to Marianville in Belfast in 1969 when her pregnancy was discovered. Ten days after her birth, Maria was removed from her mother in Marianville and placed with adoptive parents. Fifty years on, Maria still does not know the full details of her birth and subsequent adoption.

Maria is not only advocating for her now deceased mother and adoptive brother, but also for the thousands of people, like herself, who have been and continue to be affected by all the institutions under scrutiny.

Dr Mark Farrell

Archiving

Mark Farrell is an archivist and records manager. He holds an MA in Ethics from Dublin City University and in 2024 he completed a PhD on the role of records and archives in accountability, human rights and social justice. Mark has worked closely on records and archives with PRONI throughout the lifetime of the IP, and also developed policies and procedures for the storage and safeguarding of records created and received by the IP in the course of its work. He also contributed to the thematic analysis of testimonies received by the IP.



Mark was co-founder of Rol's first archives consultancy company. In that role, he has established and managed many projects in a variety of contexts, in both the public and private sectors. He has extensive experience of assessing, cataloguing and safeguarding records of residential institutions, religious orders and care homes, as well as government and public sector agencies. Mark is also an experienced trainer and has designed and delivered a range of courses on freedom of information, data protection and related issues. He has also been a lecturer and tutor on a range of postgraduate courses at Maynooth University, University College Dublin and the University of Dundee.

Paul McClarey

Victim-Survivor Representative

Paul is a Victim-Survivor Representative. In 1963, his mother, an 18-year-old girl from Derry/Londonderry, was sent to Marianville in Belfast when she was five months pregnant. After giving birth, she was sent directly to the St Mary's institution, which was next door to Marianville, where she worked in the laundry without pay. She remained in the Magdalene laundry for a further three months.



Paul was taken away from his mother at 18 days old and was in the care system for 13 months before being boarded out with a view for adoption. Paul was finally adopted when he was six and a half years old. As a young man in his twenties, he traced his mother only to discover she had tragically passed away some ten years earlier, aged 29. She would have been 40 years old on the day he went looking for her. Paul's sense of abandonment has never left him, and he still struggles with the trauma of forced separation from his birth mother. In recent years he has become a campaigner and advocate for other affected individuals. He continues, through peer support networks, to develop relationships with other victims-survivors, as they support each other on a difficult journey.

Paul has appeared on the ITV documentary *An Island's Shame*, and has given evidence, alongside other victims-survivors, to the Committee for TEO. He is a member of the Victims and Survivors Consultation Forum, working alongside others to ensure implementation of the 77 recommendations contained within the TAA Report, October 2021. In his professional career, Paul has worked as a Marketing Manager for a global drinks company and currently holds a senior management role for one of the Health and Social Care Trusts within Health and Social Care NI.

Roisin McGlone

Victim-Survivor Representative



Roisin McGlone is an experienced human rights activist and independent consultant with a long-standing commitment to peacebuilding, reconciliation and social justice. She previously served as Senior Project Manager at the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and Chief Executive Officer of Interaction Belfast, where she worked closely with the police, and with republican and loyalist former combatants, to promote meaningful intercommunity and interagency dialogue in a deeply divided society.

Her work in Belfast has informed her contribution to conflict transformation initiatives internationally, including in Croatia, North Macedonia, Guyana, the USA and South Africa. Roisin has held several significant public appointments, including membership of the Civic Forum, serving as an Assistant Boundary Commissioner for Belfast, and acting as an independent member of the NI Policing Board.

Roisin holds a master's degree in Philosophy in Reconciliation Studies from the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin. Alongside her professional and academic experience, she brings important lived experience to the TRIP's work, including her experience as a birth mother, having spent time in Marianville during her first pregnancy.

This combination of professional expertise and personal insight continues to inform her passion, and commitment to highlighting complex and sensitive issues, which are part of our country's dark past.

Colin Smith SC

International human rights law and domestic law



Colin Smith BL is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and the Honourable Society of King's Inns. He practices as a barrister in the field of human rights law. He is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the School of Law at Trinity College Dublin, where he is joint co-ordinator of the Human Rights Clinic. He is a member of the Human Rights Committee of the Bar of Ireland. He is taking a lead role on the IP in relation to access to records and legal issues.

Steven Smyrl

Genealogy



Steven Smyrl has practiced as a specialist in legal and probate genealogical research for over 35 years. He was admitted as a member of his professional association, Accredited Genealogists Ireland, in 1991, and served a three-year term as its president from 2012 to 2015.

He is the current chairman of the Irish Genealogical Research Society, a learned society and registered charity founded in 1936, with a worldwide membership dedicated to the study of Irish family history. He is a founding member of the Council of Irish Genealogical Organisations, serving twice as its chairman. In 2012, he appeared in *Dead Money*, a six-part RTE series based exclusively on research undertaken by his legal genealogy firm, Massey & King. Each episode told the story of searches for relatives of a person who had died intestate.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Steven led a long running and ultimately successful campaign calling for the improvement of biographical data noted in death registrations in NI and RoI. Beginning in 2006 in RoI, and later in NI in 2012, his work ensured that death registrations began recording each deceased person's date and place of birth and parents' names.

In December 2009, Steven's extensive and ground-breaking research on the history of the congregations (and the records) of Dublin's Protestant dissenters was published under the title *Dictionary of Dublin Dissent – Dublin's Protestant Dissenting Meeting Houses 1660–1920*. He writes a regular column for *Irish Roots* magazine.

Currently, Steven is working on a detailed guide to the holdings of the National Archives of Ireland, with a particular focus on identifying and drawing together references to alternative sources for material destroyed in the conflagration of 1922, which destroyed the holdings of the Public Record Office of Ireland (the precursor to the National Archives of Ireland).

Chapter 2

Testimony Gathering and Analysis Working Group



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Chapter content

This chapter discusses:

- 1.0** Background
- 2.0** Membership
- 3.0** Purpose, aims and objectives
- 4.0** Guiding principles for collection of testimony
- 5.0** Initial planning
- 6.0** Testimony facilitators: Preparation and training
- 7.0** Ensuring support was in place for those who wanted to share testimony: Working with VSS, WAVE and Adopt NI
- 8.0** Planning a schedule for the collection of testimony
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- 12.0** The individuals who shared testimony for this report
- 13.0** Participants' experience of sharing testimony
- 14.0** The importance of testimony as evidence: Learning from recent inquiries
- 15.0** The legacy of the QUB and UU truth and acknowledgement reports of 2021
- 16.0** Testimony in this report

1.0 Background

The Independent Panel (IP) established a Testimony Gathering and Analysis Working Group (WG) to contribute to the delivery of the following key elements of its Terms of Reference:

- record testimony through a non-adversarial, disability-aware and trauma-sensitive process, ensuring informed choice in giving testimonies
- ensure personal support enabling participation in the IP's investigation
- investigate and publish findings regarding human rights violations experienced by individuals and families in mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and their pathways and practices
- establish and publish a protocol for discharging its duty to disclose certain information for criminal investigation.

2.0 Membership

Supported by six testimony facilitators, two analysts and the IP's secretariat, members of the WG included:

- Beverley Clarke – WG Co-Chair and trauma-informed practice
- Sean O'Connell – Panel Co-Chair, WG Co-Chair and social and oral historian
- Patricia Canning – sociology of discrimination and gender-based violence
- Mark Farrell – archiving.

3.0 Purpose, aims and objectives

The core purpose of the Testimony WG was to support delivery of the IP's Terms of Reference. In particular, the aim was to collect testimonies in a non-adversarial fashion to meet the aims of providing truth recovery in advance of the public inquiry. The Testimony WG also had the task of creating an archive of testimonies to educate the public about the institutions and related pathways and practices.¹

4.0 Guiding principles for collection of testimony

- A comprehensive approach to good practice in relation to ethics, privacy, data security and trauma-informed testimony gathering was followed by the WG.
- An overarching road map towards testimony gathering was developed. It was understood from the outset that the WG would need to be ready to respond to unforeseen developments as we moved through different stages and key milestones.
- The WG was proactive in addressing as wide an audience as possible, including those who are unfamiliar with digital technology or may only have seen our call for testimony via more traditional media formats.
- The WG was committed to collecting testimony in a non-adversarial manner and to train all testimony facilitators to enact and adhere to this principle.
- The WG was committed to collecting testimony on the principle of consent and to provide those giving testimony with a full explanation of the different forms of consent that they could give in relation to the various uses of testimony by the IP.
- The WG was committed to ensuring that all those who engaged in the testimony process had access to support from Victims & Survivors Service (VSS), WAVE and/or Adopt NI, if they wished it, at each stage of the process.
- The WG was committed to working with VSS, WAVE and Adopt NI to ensure that working practices were adapted and refined as and when needed as greater numbers of individuals came forward.
- The WG was committed to working closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to establish and maintain a line of communication that enabled appropriate and effective reporting of any allegations of non-recent criminality and abuse.
- The WG was committed to following the recognised welfare principles of child and adult safeguarding.

5.0 Initial planning

The IP was committed to recording testimony in a non-adversarial way using trauma-aware principles, enabling participants to make an informed choice on how their testimonies were shared and how they can be used now and in the future. Our aim was to be responsive and flexible and to meet the needs of all participants. The first task related to testimony, and the most important one, was to engage in discussion with the Victims and Survivors Consultation Forum about the plans for the collection of testimony.

This was particularly the case around the development of participant consent forms and participant information documentation. In addition, a series of small group and individual meetings were arranged with victims-survivors in which they shared their preferences for testimony formats, engagement styles, and testimony session or interview structure formats. Considerable discussions took place within the IP around the issue of testimony and its related process, which led to many adjustments in our information sheets and processes.

The IP learnt many significant things from these meetings and discussions that informed how we organised the testimony collection. Among the additional initiatives that emerged from our engagement with the attendees at the Consultation Forum and with other victims-survivors were:

- workshops on preparing written testimony
- protocols on how to submit personal documents to accompany a testimony.

The IP's ethics, consent and participant information documents were also scrutinised and agreed by the Ulster University (UU) Ethics Committee. This process arose following the appointment of UU as the approved provider of the IP's testimony facilitators.

6.0 Testimony facilitators: Preparation and training

The IP was fortunate to secure the services of several experienced individuals who were employed as testimony facilitators. This process was managed by Adrian Grant, UU, after a procurement process. The initial appointees were Lorraine Dennis and Megan Kelly, who are both very experienced in recording personal testimonies and working with people who have been impacted by trauma. Lorraine previously managed the Prisons Memory Archive, and Megan's doctoral research focused on the experiences of nurses during the Troubles. As testimony collection increased during late 2024 and early 2025, several other experienced individuals joined as testimony facilitators. They were:

- Livi Dee (previously an oral testimony researcher on the Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and UU report, and a leading researcher on the theme of the history of pregnancies of unmarried women)
- Ruth Duffy (whose previous experience of collecting testimony around traumatic themes includes work on Covid-19 and mixed marriage in Ireland)
- Sam Manning (whose experience includes a period as Chairperson of the Oral History Network of Ireland and a decade of recording oral testimony in Northern Ireland)
- Lucy Newby (an editor of the journal Oral History with expertise on collecting testimony on the Troubles).

Before any of the testimony facilitators embarked on their work, they attended training workshops designed to prepare them for the complexities of working with testimonies of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and associated pathways and practices. The workshops were facilitated by Panel members Beverley Clarke, Patricia Canning, Sean O’Connell and Colin Smith. There was also participation from clinical psychologist Danny Taggart, who has extensive experience of working in the area of survivor participants in non-recent institutional abuse inquiries. This includes work with the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Redress Board, the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales, the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and Redress Scheme, and the Jersey Care Inquiry Citizens Panel.

The training workshops included:

- insights from previous testimony-related work with victims-survivors
- disability-, gender- and trauma-informed approaches to testimony collection
- human rights and legal issues related to the institutions and pathways and practices
- dealing with safeguarding concerns
- policy on referrals to PSNI of non-recent criminality or abuse
- active listening.

Before they took the lead testimony facilitator role with any participant, each testimony facilitator was required to sit in on three testimonies led by the most experienced members of the testimony team. This meant joining either Beverley Clarke or Sean O’Connell in a testimony session. Having two testimony facilitators in a session was relatively common and was mandatory whenever someone shared their testimony in their own home or at a hotel.

Training and learning did not end once the initial workshops and observation sessions were completed. The full testimony team met weekly to discuss all the issues related to testimony. These meetings involved full discussion about themes that were emerging from testimonies and allowed the whole team to learn from the experiences of each individual team member and further develop sensitive and trauma-informed practices.

7.0 Ensuring support was in place for those who wanted to share testimony: Working with VSS, WAVE and Adopt NI

Collecting testimony should never be a transactional process. Instead, it should employ a gentle but inquisitorial and non-adversarial form of engagement. It should make use of specialised support services now available when participants who have suffered trauma do come forward to engage in testimony. We know that when participants engage and

share critical information about their lived experiences, we must ensure they are fully supported pre-, during and post-testimony by experts in the field of trauma.

With this in mind, the IP liaised closely with VSS to ensure that they (along with their partner agencies WAVE and Adopt NI) were able and prepared to support the needs of those who came forward to offer testimony. We met to discuss how the IP could schedule its testimony collection (and other initiatives) in such a way as to ensure that VSS, WAVE and Adopt NI had the resources to meet any new demands that the IP's work created, such as when the media campaign for participants to engage in testimony with the IP began. It was essential for the IP to communicate its workplan to these agencies to ensure that the participants could avail of the support they offer. The IP also established a referral process whereby victims-survivors who were not aware of the supports that are available to them could, if they wished, be formally referred to VSS, WAVE or Adopt NI after they made contact. This was available during all stages of the testimony process, at the participant's request.

8.0 Planning a schedule for the collection of testimony

The IP undertook testimony collection carefully and cautiously. A schedule was devised that began with relatively small numbers of participants having their testimony recorded. The plan was that the testimony team would then build its capacity gradually and safely. Taking this approach allowed for the following:

- to embark on a trauma-informed, gender- and disability-aware programme of workshops for the testimony team
- to build in time before the scheduling of testimony for a participant to ask questions about the work of the IP
- to build in time to allow participants to consider what form of testimony they wished to share and to consider which type of consent they wished to give
- to ensure that the testimony collection process was properly managed so that there were minimal delays between initial contact and testimony sessions that might cause frustration or distress to participants waiting to share their testimony while demonstrating understanding that some participants may need space and time between initial contact and testimony sessions (at all times the IP were guided by the wishes of the participant.)
- to enable newly appointed testimony facilitators to accompany experienced Panel members to observe testimony sessions
- to allow time for VSS, WAVE and Adopt NI to build their own capacity to respond to increased demand for their vital services as the IP expanded its testimony collection capacity, particularly once the media campaign gathered pace with leafleting and wider advertising promotion

- to allow the IP to train additional testimony facilitators as more people came forward to share their testimony.

The IP planned three phases of testimony collection. It was necessary to change the timeline for these phases in response to events beyond our control. Initially the three phases of testimony collection were:

- Phase One: March–April 2024.

Throughout the process, the IP prioritised participants in advancing years and those with health issues that might restrict their ability to participate if they were expected to wait longer.

- Phase Two: May–September 2024.

The IP worked with the remainder of participants who had already registered and expressed an interest in giving testimony.

- Phase Three: October 2024–April 2025.

The final cohort included those who came forward following the communications, outreach and advertisement campaign that the IP had planned to begin from summer 2024. However, the introduction of Phase Three was delayed while the IP awaited ministerial sign-off on the budget for our leafleting and advertising campaign. The delayed campaign began in February 2025. Its late start, together with its success in reaching large numbers of individuals who wished to share testimony, necessitated an extension of the IP's tenure beyond the anticipated deadline of October 2025.

9.0 Planning each individual testimony

The testimony process was designed to consider all the requirements of participants who wished to share their testimony. Once an individual contacted the testimony team, they had the opportunity to:

- talk to one of our testimony facilitators about how the process would work
- discuss how the IP would secure the privacy and security of the testimony a participant was hoping to share
- discuss any requirements they may have for support, with the team making referrals on behalf of a participant to the VSS if requested
- discuss the level of consent that they wish to apply to the uses of their testimony in the future.

The IP offered a great deal of flexibility on how testimonies were shared. Testimonies were recorded in a range of formats and circumstances:

- audio-recorded, in-person session
- video recorded online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom (using secure account with only audio retained)
- written testimony submitted
- family member or friend in attendance to support the person sharing testimony
- member of staff from WAVE or Adopt NI present to offer support.

Testimony was shared in a variety of locations:

- at the IP's dedicated testimony room in Belfast
- at the person's home
- in a hotel close to the person's home
- at a WAVE office close to the person's home.

The IP prepared outline testimony formats for use with people with a variety of experiences of the institutions and pathways and practices. These formed the basis for the questions that testimony facilitators might ask. However, we often took our lead from the participant sharing their testimony. For example, on numerous occasions individuals opted to read from a pre-prepared testimony before then answering questions on their experiences. Schedules of possible questions and themes were prepared for:

- birth mothers
- children, now adults
- victims-survivors of Magdalene laundries
- those who wanted to prepare a written testimony.

The weekly testimony facilitators' meetings reflected on anything new that emerged in relation to any of the listed institutions, private nursing homes or other locations, as well as the related pathways and practices. For example, some discussions focused on testimonies that had been scheduled with individuals not included in our broad testimony preparation sheets. These included:

- family members with no lived experience of the institutions or pathways and practices
- current or retired professionals such as midwives and social workers.

10.0 Safeguarding

The IP is not a statutory body bound by the legal framework and the statutory guidance relating to the safeguarding of children and adults. However, the IP adopted the principle of ‘safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility’ to ensure participants’ needs were met and protected.

This safeguarding guidance we adhered to aimed to create and maintain the safest possible environment for all children and adults.² The IP committed to take all reasonable steps to prioritise needs and prevent harm to all participants who engaged with its work. We committed to an approach to safeguarding that recognised a responsibility to the protection of participants’ health, wellbeing, and right to live in safety, free from harm, abuse and neglect. Protecting and safeguarding all participants was a priority for the IP.

The IP acted on the presumption that there may be occasions when we heard of concerns that relate to a child who may be at risk of suffering or had suffered significant harm. It was also possible that an adult participant might disclose information about their personal circumstances or emotional wellbeing that caused the IP to consider the participant’s own safety and welfare. On such an occasion the IP was mindful that it might have been necessary to report the safeguarding concern to the relevant social services team. For this reason, everyone involved in the work of the testimony team was introduced to the safeguarding protocols. In cases where anyone in the team had concerns, they were directed to take them immediately to Beverley Clarke, who is experienced in this area. In conjunction with one of the IP Co-Chairs, a decision would then be made as to what action should be taken.

11.0 PSNI referral protocol

The IP was committed to fulfilling its responsibilities to make police referrals when issues of concern arose around current safeguarding issues, non-recent sexual abuse and the reporting of serious criminality. This information was to be forwarded to the PSNI even if the person who had given the testimony thought that the person named is deceased.

The testimony facilitator explained this necessity to the person sharing testimony and that if they named or identified a perpetrator of abuse or serious crime, the IP was legally bound to report it to the police.

Before a referral to the PSNI was made, the testimony facilitator involved discussed the process with the person who had given the testimony concerned. They explained how the process worked and that it would be handled with discretion and sensitivity.

In making a referral, the IP provided the PSNI with the name, date of birth, phone number and address of the person who had given the testimony.

When a referral was made to the PSNI, it was sent via a Co-Chair (Sean O’Connell). He informed the PSNI of any requests made by the participant who had given their testimony, such as how and when they wanted to be contacted by police and if they wanted an officer of a particular gender to make that contact.

The IP’s policy was to make a referral in the following circumstances:

- (1) The IP believe there is a current child protection concern (in other words, that a child/children may be suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm).
- (2) The IP believe that a person is at risk of serious harm.
- (3) Information is disclosed about any person who was engaged in a criminal activity that might be expected to attract a custodial sentence of five years or more.

12.0 The individuals who shared testimony for this report

Tables 1, 2 and 3 provide some statistical information on the individuals who shared their testimony for inclusion in this report. It includes details of the 238 participants who shared testimony with the IP and signed off their final consent for its inclusion in this report. In addition, a further 46 testimonies were available from those who shared testimony for the QUB/UU report that was published in 2021 and who had consented to its use in what was then a potential public inquiry. The public inquiry is now part of the integrated truth recovery process of which the IP’s report forms the first part. This means 284 testimonies have informed the writing of the IP’s report.

Table 1: Total participants based on their relationship to the institutions and their pathways and practices

Type of participant	No.
Birth mother	81
Birth father	1
Adoptive mother	1
Woman sent to a Good Shepherd Sisters St Mary’s institution	3 (there were also 4 birth mothers who shared testimony that included being sent to work in a laundry)
Child, now adult	130
Daughter/son of birth mother not directly linked to the institutions or pathways	20

Type of participant	No.
Other family member	21
Social worker	8
Doctor	2
Midwife	4
Priest	2
Nun	2
Other observer	9
Total	284

Table 2: Denominational* breakdown of testimonies shared by participants affected by the institutions, their pathways and practices (or their family members)

Religious background	No.	Percentage
Testimonies of participants from Catholic backgrounds	195	75.9
Testimonies of participants from Protestant backgrounds	62	24.1

*The IP recognises that this is a clumsy measure of identity as many people no longer identify with forms of identity based on religion.

Table 3: Primary locations discussed within testimonies of those affected

Primary locations discussed in testimony of those affected*	No.
Clogrennan Mother and Baby Institution	2
Deanery Flats	1
Hopedene Hostel	13
Kennedy House	1
Malone Place	3
GSS Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution, Newry	64
GSS Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast	61
Mater Dei Hostel	16

Primary locations discussed in testimony of those affected*	No.
Mount Oriel Hostel	3
Private domestic residences ³	2
Private nursing homes	16
GSS St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Belfast	7
GSS St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Derry/Londonderry	3
GSS St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Newry	7
Thorndale House	16
Workhouses	7
Other locations/pathways and practices	15

*Note that some participants discussed more than one significant institution or location within their testimony. GSS: Good Shepherd Sisters.

13.0 Participants' experience of sharing testimony

The IP conducted anonymous online surveys with those who shared their testimony. The results are set out in **Figures 1–4**.

The replies were overwhelmingly positive. Indicative examples of the written comments that were returned were as follows.

“

I appreciate the sensitivity and understanding shown by those that worked with me to take my testimony. They made the experience as easy on me as they possibly could.

Another participant expressed a similar opinion.

“

It was a very emotive and yet cathartic experience. I felt wholly supported throughout the whole process. I am so glad I did it.

Figure 1 sets out how testimony was shared by participants.

Figure 1: How testimony was shared by participants



Figures 2–4 set out the responses to the survey questions.

Figure 2: Participant feelings of dignity and respect

Did you feel you were treated with dignity and respect throughout your engagement with the testimony team in the Independent Panel?

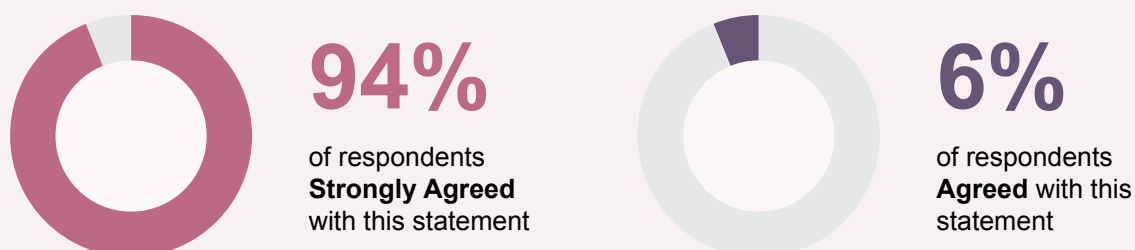


Figure 3: Participant feelings of safety and support

Did you feel safe and supported throughout your engagement with the testimony team in the Independent Panel?

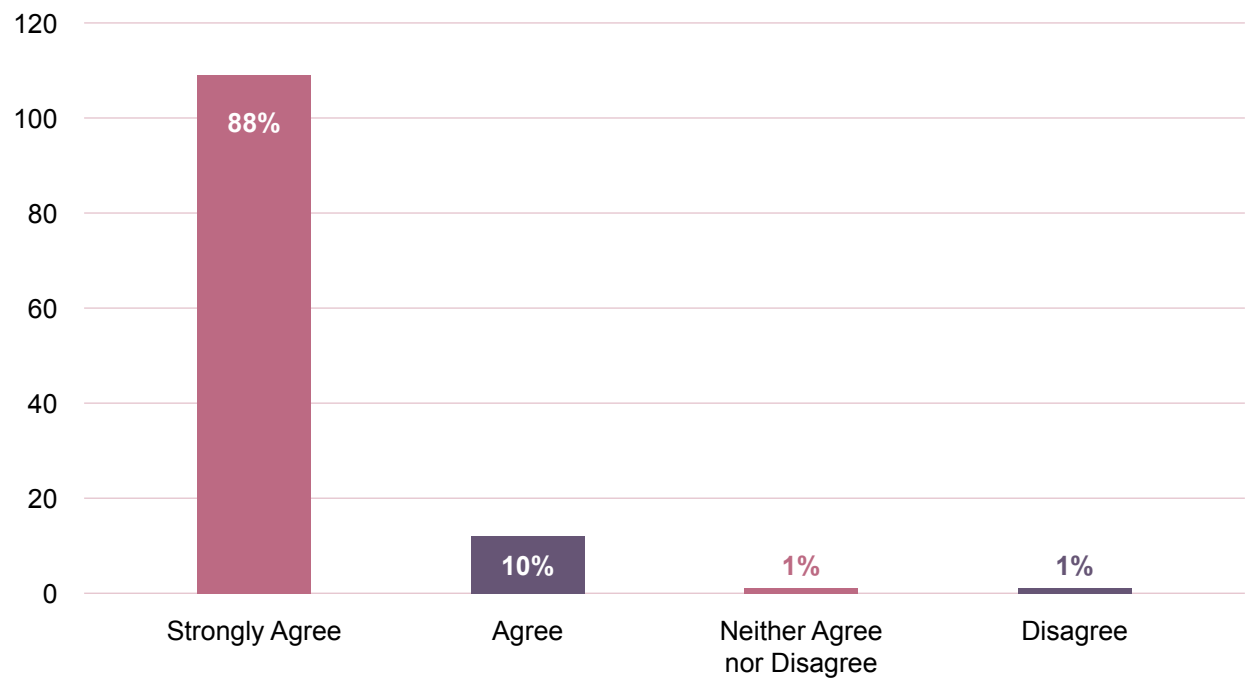


Figure 4: Testimony WG

What was your overall experience of your engagement with the testimony team in the Independent Panel?



14.0 The importance of testimony as evidence: Learning from recent inquiries

The Truth Recovery Design Panel (TRDP) report outlined a clear vision for the role testimony would play in the work of the IP. It also indicated the broad methodological and ethical approach to deploy when using testimony in a truth recovery process with victims-survivors. The IP members strongly align themselves to that vision and to those approaches. The necessity of these approaches has been underlined by responses to the use of testimony in three recent and related inquiries on the island of Ireland, two of which relate directly to the IP's work. The remaining one is significant because it is the most similar recent Northern Irish inquiry.

The first of these reports was the McAleese Report (*Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee Report to Establish State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries*, 2013)⁴. On its publication, it was criticised heavily by victims-survivors, lawyers, academics and activists, who argued against its findings and methods for several reasons. To begin with, a fundamental issue was the McAleese Committee's use of the testimonies it heard and how it lacked transparency. There were major concerns about how testimony had been collected from survivors, and the process was described as adversarial and interrogational with no trauma-informed awareness of the lived experiences of survivors. Survivors who met with the Committee in groups did not receive any audio recordings or anonymised transcripts to enable public scrutiny of those encounters and what was said. There was no consultation with survivors about how their testimony was to be used, and they had no right to review any notes or transcripts that were created to check for accuracy or to ask for deletions of content that, on reflection, they wanted removed.

Critics of the McAleese Report maintained that one of its flaws was that it purported that it had established 'the facts', such as its calculations of the numbers of girls and women sent to the Magdalene laundries, rather than engaging more deeply with survivor testimony.⁵ In other words, it valued the basic statistical numbers that could be found in institutional records over the richly detailed information supplied by survivors. The McAleese Report described testimony from Magdalene laundry survivors as 'stories' rather than evidence. Moreover, in a structural decision that betrays a lack of victim-survivor-centred and trauma-aware focus from the Committee, the women's testimonies did not feature in the report until Chapter 19, even though their experiences were the reason for the Committee's existence and the commissioning of the report by the Irish government. When the women's testimonies did finally appear towards the end of the report, they were presented in a disjointed style which made it difficult for the reader to process their overall meaning or to contextualise them amid the previous 18 chapters. Critics noted that in contrast to the women's testimony extracts, male witnesses from professional backgrounds, such as GPs, were quoted in longer passages of testimony, which had the impact of making their perspective look more significant: not least because greater detail increased the reader's ability to contextualise what they were saying.⁶

Only presenting the women's testimony as very short extracts – often with each successive quote contradicting the last one – served to effectively make their collective voice confused and inarticulate. With no identifying code given to any 'voice', it was not possible to follow anyone's description of their lived experience in a coherent way through

the institution and their life thereafter. It was also not possible to identify which voices were consistently offering testimony that might be labelled 'negative', 'positive' or a mixture of the two about their lived experiences. As no ages for the women or approximate dates of their institutionalisation were attached to quotes, it was not possible to see any evidence of change over time. Did, for example, women speaking about the 1940s have different perspectives to those speaking about the 1980s? Did the significant number of women who came forward to share their testimony while still remaining in accommodation alongside the nuns who had operated the laundries have different experiences to those who were there for a shorter period of time and left to live independently? These decisions about where to place testimony within the report and how to present it to readers effectively deprived the women of an articulate voice. Compared with the information presented earlier in the report about the number of women in each institution, their ages, etc., the testimony looked to be beyond interpretation. Indeed, as no one working with the McAleese Committee appears to have had any experience of collecting testimony from victims-survivors who had experienced trauma, the engagement with the women occurred in an environment that was not conducive to meeting their psychological needs and the staff were not qualified to interpret the narrative of the women's lived experience. The task of actively listening to and interpreting the testimony of an individual traumatised by non-recent experiences is difficult even for those who are trained to carry out this role. Researchers have noted that 'trauma makes the process of remembering more complex than in other situations' and that survivors 'are more likely to narrate in stories containing elements of disjointedness and symbolism'.⁷

It is in this context that the next criticism of the McAleese Report arises, which is its decision not to make any findings based on the testimony of the large number of women who shared their actual lived experiences of the laundries. Instead, the report relied solely on the institutional and state records, which themselves feature very many gaps and inconsistencies. In summarising the testimony that was shared with the Committee, McAleese categorised the 128 survivors who shared testimony as 'a small proportion', 'not representative' and 'not randomly selected'. Chapter 19 concluded on the available testimony.



Although this chapter identifies several patterns among the stories shared with it, the Committee did not make specific findings in relation to this issue, in light of the small number of women available.

This was an extremely impactful conclusion. It identified the testimony evidence as of secondary importance and of no value in coming to the important conclusions about the experience of institutionalisation in the Magdalene laundries. Any researcher given an opportunity to make conclusions from the testimony of 128 individuals (representing more than 1% of all those institutionalised between 1922 and 1998 and a much greater proportion of those who were still living and well enough to share testimony in 2013) would have little reluctance to do so. To argue that the 128 women were not representative or randomly selected placed impossible standards on the work of the Committee; standards which also left the women that did come forward without a voice in the report's conclusions.

A model that the McAleese Report could have followed was that used by the Commission into Child Abuse, commonly referred to as the Ryan Inquiry, which was established in the Republic of Ireland in 2000 and investigated 150 institutions where children had suffered abuse.⁸ The inquiry had an Investigative Committee that could compel individuals to give testimony, as well as a Confidential Committee where victims-survivors could relate their lived experiences in a confidential setting. The Confidential Committee hearings were conducted in an informal, private setting in recognition that this would assist the victim-survivor in feeling more at ease in a more relaxed surrounding. The approach by those in the Confidential Committee was about helping to empower participants to talk about the experiences of childhood abuse and to ensure they were treated with care and compassion. This at the time was innovative as, before this, survivors of church abuse explained that they had been silenced by the church and state and not been able to talk of non-recent sexual abuse, as this was seen as a taboo. The approach taken at this time by the commissioners was to gather evidence without scrutiny or 'testing', as to do otherwise would have deterred many victims-survivors from coming forward to share their truth. There was, therefore, a tried-and-tested model for hearing testimonies that had the approval of victims-survivors. However, this was an approach that the McAleese Committee did not take. In addition, assessments of the McAleese Report note that the testimony of the 128 women was overshadowed by that from religious sisters, doctors and other officials who had visited the laundries, often only in their final years from the 1970s onwards when conditions were somewhat better than in earlier decades.⁹

The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI), which examined institutional childhood abuse in NI, also heard a great deal of testimony from victims-survivors. In the aftermath of its work, there was also criticism. The inquiry investigated 22 institutions as well as former child migrants and the notorious paedophile priest Brendan Smyth. The public hearings began in January 2014 and concluded in July 2016. The HIAI had two different functions, the first being the Acknowledgement Forum where victims-survivors could come and share their experiences in confidence. The second function of the HIAI was to hear evidence from 333 former 'residents' of the institutions. Additionally, 194 witnesses who were not former 'residents' such as institutional staff, police and officials also appeared before the HIAI.

As the TRDP report noted, this experience has left those victims-survivors it met anxious about how the public inquiry on mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and related pathways and practices will handle this issue, with a fear 'that family members could be compelled to give evidence and be subjected to questioning by lawyers representing institutions'.¹⁰ Many of those individuals are aware of the findings of research on the HIAI legal process, which identified negative impact on mental health and well-being. Research with a small sample of those who gave oral evidence to the HIAI indicated that the experience left them feeling retraumatised or abused due to their adversarial encounters with lawyers for the institutions and the formal settings in which this took place. Patricia Lundy has concluded that for those who appeared formally before the inquiry and faced the lawyers for the institutions, the experience failed to meet the assurances they had received that it would not be adversarial and potentially harmful to them.¹¹

The most recent use of testimony in a report that is highly relevant to the work that the IP was tasked with carrying out is the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, which began its work in 2015 and published its findings in 2021. Like the McAleese Committee before it, the Commission received heavy criticism for its use of testimony as evidence in its final report.¹² In particular, its use of testimony led to widespread upset. It decided that the vast majority of testimony it heard could not be formally used as ‘evidence’ in its final assessments of the institutions and practices and pathways it had investigated. This outcome had its origins in the Commission’s concern that victims-survivors be ‘spared’ from an adversarial hearing. The Commission established a Confidential Committee, which was intended as the place testimony would be taken in an informal manner. At the same time, an Investigative Committee took testimony that was sworn under oath in a more formal cross-examination style. Based on this distinction between the two ways in which testimony was shared with the Commission, only the testimony submitted to the Investigative Committee was ruled admissible as ‘evidence’ within the final report. Testimonies that were shared with the Confidential Committee were summarised only in the form of an additional volume. Those giving evidence were apparently never informed of the legal distinctions that would be made around the form in which they shared testimony and did not realise that they might be sharing testimony that would not feature in the main body of the final report.¹³ Why all of this matters is because a large number of the 532 people who shared testimony with the Confidential Committee were dismayed and confused to read the Commission’s final report, and read its conclusions to see that it had found ‘no evidence’ of many of the harms and abuses that they had painstakingly outlined to the Commission.

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...the Commission found ‘no evidence’ that women were forced to enter institutions by church or State authorities; ‘no evidence’ of gross abuse equivalent to that suffered in industrial schools; ‘no evidence’ that women were denied pain relief in labour; ‘no evidence’ that children were injured in vaccine trials; ‘no evidence’ that women did not fully consent to their children’s adoptions; ‘no evidence’ of discrimination against disabled or mixed-race children in adoption decision-making and ‘very little evidence’ of physical abuse.¹⁴

Essentially, survivors and their testimonies had been silenced again, as they had been in the McAleese Report. The Commission also indicated a degree of scepticism towards testimony as a form of evidence, suggesting the individuals coming forward might have had their accounts ‘contaminated’.

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This report outlines the experiences of those who chose to recount their experiences. They are not a representative sample of the residents of the institutions under investigation. The Commission has no doubt that the witnesses recounted their experiences as honestly as possible. However, the Commission does have concerns about the contamination of some evidence. A number of witnesses gave evidence that was clearly incorrect. This contamination probably occurred because of meetings with other residents and inaccurate media coverage.¹⁵

What the Commission's decisions about oral testimony did was to exclude the lived experiences of victims-survivors from having a central role when the Commission came to write its conclusions. Their reasoning for this was contested by the Oral History Network of Ireland (OHNI), which compiled its response in the knowledge that, as was the case with the McAleese Report, an official report examining historical institutional abuse had been written without the input of anyone with professional expertise of working with survivors to collect testimony about traumatic events.

OHNI countered what it labelled an 'inaccurate portrayal of oral testimony' by the Commission. OHNI argued that ethically informed, survivor-centred testimony-gathering projects 'have the potential to unlock missing evidence and stand as the only historical source which can truly illuminate the lived experiences of those for whom little documentary evidence exists'. This point was significant because, as was demonstrated within the Commission's final report, the records of the institutions rarely provided anything other than very basic, and often inaccurate, details about individuals. OHNI argued that recorded testimony 'gives agency to those who have been denied it, giving witness to unspoken experiences'. Furthermore, it concluded that a statement by one of the Commission's three members – 'that the oral testimony given to the Commission was of limited use in the crafting of its report'¹⁶ – speaks to the absence of oral testimony expertise among the Commission's researchers and an outmoded positioning of oral testimony that places it as less valuable than written sources. OHNI argued that this was a flawed perspective that failed to account for the fact that the documentary evidence that the Commission did use to reach its conclusions was also created by human beings with flawed memories who constructed the documents for their own administrative and institutional purposes. They were not created from some non-existent objective vacuum.

Another influential critique of the Commission's report was produced by a collection of legal scholars, led by Aoife O'Donoghue and Mairead Enright. They also rebuffed the decisions that the Commission took about oral testimony, which had served to expunge the victim-survivor voice from its final report. They rebuffed the Commission's negative commentary on oral testimony. Among important points they made in doing so was that there is often a vague or inconsistent quality to oral testimonies that are shared by people to explain traumatic experiences. Negative inferences should not be taken from any gaps that the Commission concluded existed in individual testimonies. In the context of the point about 'contamination' of memory, O'Donoghue, Enright et al. argued the value of testimony.

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...oral history evidence is not less credible merely because it draws on collective or public narratives, such as those developed in advocacy groups. An individual should be permitted to draw on wider cultural scripts in explaining their own direct experience, without this undermining the credibility of their testimony.

Testimony that reflects the argument of an advocacy group 'or indeed the arguments of a religious order' should not be disregarded, they argue. This point should be taken further: if a 'contamination' test is to be used to exclude any particular piece of evidence, the logical conclusion to that process is that our evidence locker will quickly become empty.

15.0 The legacy of the QUB and UU truth and acknowledgement reports of 2021

The OHNI response and that by O'Donoghue and Enright both identified the QUB/UU report on mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries in NI as an example of how a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach could be adopted to inform our understanding of non-recent harms and abuses.¹⁷ Using the 2021 report as a model, OHNI's critique of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes identified the requirements for an ethically responsible testimony collection as part of a truth recovery process:

- an interviewee-centred process which prioritises the wellbeing and dignity of those sharing their testimony and puts this at the heart of all project structures and methodologies, including providing supports for those giving their testimony
- specialised training for interviewers including an understanding of sensitive approaches to memory and trauma interviewing, relationship and trust building, and honouring commitments made to interviewees
- ensuring informed consent at all stages of the process so that interviewees are engaged with how their testimony will be used, stored and managed in the future
- robust legal and ethical structures to protect all participants in the project.¹⁸

Similarly, well-informed guidance was offered by the TRDP in the *Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability* report in October 2021. Their work had been guided by a period of co-creation with victims-survivors. The IP also engaged with victims-survivors to refine ethical and methodological approaches, as is discussed above.

The IP was also able to draw upon a total of 46 of the testimonies that were recorded in 2018–19 (for the QUB and UU 2021 report) having secured the consent of those individuals. Several other individuals who shared their testimony in 2018–19 opted to record updated testimony with the IP during 2024–25. A small number of individuals withdrew their consent for the use of their 2018–19 testimony in the IP's report.

One of the points made by O'Donoghue and Enright about the QUB and UU report considered how testimonies were presented.

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[The authors] preferred longer narratives to quotations in its presentation of oral evidence. The authors of the Northern Ireland report note that fragmented quotations – of the type published by the Confidential Committee – may be difficult to process or contextualise, so that they appear less credible than other forms of evidence, including the accounts of authority figures.¹⁹

The IP has endeavoured to repeat this approach where possible throughout its report. Not only does it make the participants who are quoted credible, it also humanises them by, at least partially, introducing elements of their life ‘story’ to readers.

The IP also shares the perspective on the central role of testimony that was advocated by OHNI, the TDRP and many others. The vital significance of testimony will become apparent to anyone who reads this report. Testimony is presented within this report as extensively and coherently as it is possible to do within the context of such a complex piece of writing which also employs numerous other sources of evidence alongside the testimony of 284 individuals.

It would be a gross error to relegate testimony to any kind of secondary position when engaged in a truth recovery process such as this one. While it is possible to cite extensive academic arguments about the flaws that exist within human memory – what is remembered, what is forgotten or how individual memory operates side by side with forms of collective memory – these arguments do not fundamentally undermine the value of testimony. Moreover, any attempt to pursue that line of argument would have to involve a parallel process that was equally critical of the records found in the archives of the state and the institutions. They were themselves produced, perhaps many decades ago, by an individual sitting down to write their own brief assessment – incorporating their personal values – of a pregnant woman or girl who had just been admitted to a mother and baby institution, for example. These written sources are often understood to be more reliable than oral testimony because of the flaws of memory. However, this is a contentious claim. Readers of this report must bear in mind that those who work with oral testimony regularly entirely disagree. The prominent oral historian Lynn Abrams makes this point most clearly.



Oral history was [formerly] positioned down the hierarchy of sources because it seemingly did not produce ‘data’ which could be verified and counted. In terms of their reliability, contemporary letters, reports and parliamentary papers were at the top and supposedly more subjective sources such as diaries and autobiographies at the bottom...[However] all evidence is socially constructed, all is a product of purpose, and many documents were deliberately shaped to present a particular picture or interpretation of a phenomenon or event. In this sense then, there is little distinction to be made between an oral history interview based on memory and record of a meeting, also reconstructed in part based on memory of what was said: in fact, the ordinary participant’s memory will likely contain a frankness of observation missing from the ‘contrived’ neutrality of the minute-taker.²⁰

It is important to note that archivists share the view that written records require cautious treatment by those seeking to use them as a form of evidence.



Archives have their origins in the information needs and social values of the rulers, governments, businesses, and individuals who establish and maintain them. Archives then are not some pristine storehouse of historical documentation that has piled up, but a reflection of and often justification for the society that creates them.²¹

16.0 Testimony in this report

Having considered all the discussions outlined, what the IP has done is to take testimony respectfully and seriously, particularly when similar themes recur across multiple interviews and sometimes institutions or locations. The IP has attempted to build the aggregated truth rather than look for a small number of flaws and then decide people have given us ‘incorrect details’. That is a very significant conclusion to reach following assessment of someone else’s testimony, someone else’s lived experience. The IP accepts that all individual memory can be fallible. This might particularly be the case in the context of traumatic experiences. One of the birth mothers who shared testimony explained this in compelling fashion, describing a process that Olivia Dee has labelled ‘shuttering’.²² BC recalled the events that followed the birth of her child in the mid-1970s when she was a teenage girl. An adoption had been arranged in which she had no control.



But I remember very clearly, I was absolutely hysterical...I remember swallowing and thinking this is too painful...I just literally put up a shutter on it...Only way to function. It was the only way I was going to survive.

Reflecting on her experience of interviewing birth mothers, Dee noted ‘gaps in memory’ usually related to ‘the physical ramification of labour and the realities of the impending separation’. Dee assessed this as a ‘protective subconscious’ development.²³

However, it is possible to move beyond any obstacle created by gaps in individual memories through the analysis of multiple testimonies to identify repeated examples of the same or similar experiences to identify and chart examples of lived experiences that build the aggregated truth around different issues. Moreover, the same analysis of testimonies can also highlight different experiences within institutions or of their related pathways and practices and this is also a feature of this report.

One example from within the pages of this report illustrates a number of the issues being discussed here. A birth mother who shared testimony about her experience of the Mater Dei Hostel explained how her traumatic experiences – which included being raped, facing the anger and denial of this truth by her parents, and then the adoption of her son – left her with very limited memories of her time in that institution. One thing she did recall clearly was the car in which she saw her son being driven away from the institution by a social worker in the early 1960s. Those looking to find some kind of ‘flaw’ in the use of testimony as evidence might point to this and reflect that this is perhaps

evidence of ‘contamination’. After all, anyone among the millions who have seen the film *Philomena* will recall scenes featuring the cars that arrive to take babies away from the mother and baby institution. In this example, however, the institutional records from Mater Dei would save any testimony-sceptic from making a misjudgement. They clearly record that the birth mothers were struggling to capture the registration plates of the cars that took their babies away.²⁴ After 1950, adoptions were ‘closed’, and birth mothers were no longer told the identity of their child’s new family. A car registration number might be the only clue they had if they ever wanted to discover where their child had gone and how they were. Perhaps this birth mother remembered this because it was one scrap of memory that was so vital to her. It offered hope whereas other memories were of trauma and abuse and were repressed. The suppression of memory after traumatic experience has been well researched. This has been described as acting as a defence mechanism to provide shielding or shuttering as noted above, and acts to help avoid the recall and reliving of traumatic experiences.²⁵

There are important differences between some testimonies. The most striking example being between a minority of testimonies about experiences in the Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS) Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast and the GSS Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution, Newry that offer much more positive accounts of these institutions than were related in the majority of testimonies. However, the IP argues that it is possible to see areas of aggregated truth emerging across the testimonies. Identifying these elements was made possible by the observation of consistencies that emerged between many accounts from women who spoke about different time periods and different mother and baby institutions. Details narrated in their accounts indicate that elements of consistency across numerous transcripts were based on their lived experience of a mother and baby institution, rather than some subsequent process where collective memory has overridden their original individual memory. Individual memories of the past are never produced in isolation from broader, publicly shared narratives of contested or significant events. However, the IP argues that it is possible that testimonies can be narrated that draw both upon debates on issues on such as mother and baby institutions, adoption, or Magdalene laundries and Workhouses and situate those clearly within personal lived experience.

For children, now adults, it is also the case that elements of aggregated truth emerge in their testimonies. The most obvious example in this respect centres on the struggle to access records and to establish knowledge of identity and details of one’s birth family and origin.

The decision to place testimony prominently within this report also enables readers to appreciate the complex and, sometimes, contrasting testimonies that were shared with the IP. These range from testimonies that are highly critical of the institutions and the pathways and practices that were placed under scrutiny to others that offer more positive accounts. They include testimonies from women (and/or their family members) who were sent to a GSS St Mary’s institution and laundry (which some would call a Magdalene laundry), a Workhouse, a private nursing home, or to a private domestic residence to conceal a pregnancy. There is also significant testimony from social workers, midwives, nuns, priests and others who provide the perspective of those who either worked in one of these institutions or were associated with the pathways and practices of which they

formed a part. The IP is very grateful to all those individuals who shared their testimonies and assisted in building a much deeper understanding. One example of the value of this is in the testimony of midwives, which enabled us to develop a fuller understanding of the experience of childbirth for all women in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Another is the significant testimony produced here that raises concerns about some of the social work practices engaged in by some individual social workers.

However, despite a very significant communications campaign and direct contacts with various professional bodies, the IP recognises that further testimonies from former social workers, GPs, midwives, police officers, members of the clergy and others may well be required by the public inquiry to further deepen understanding of a variety of issues. In addition, the proportion of testimonies from individuals in relation to the Protestant institutions was much lower than would be anticipated if participants came forward in the types of numbers that represented the actual numbers involved in the listed institutions and the associated pathways and practices. Only one in four testimonies of those affected by the institutions or the related pathways and practices came from someone with a 'Protestant' background. If we were to look for a simple answer for this, it might be concluded that experiences in Thorndale House, Kennedy House, Malone Place and Hopedene Hostel were different from those in Marianvale, Marianville and Mater Dei. While our report does explain that there were indeed differences in aspects of testimonies along this religious divide between institutions, there were very many significant similarities when it came to testimonies discussing harms and their impacts. Moreover, there is no logical reason why someone who was separated from their birth mother in a Protestant institution and adopted by a Protestant family should feel any differently about their lived experience than someone adopted by a Catholic family having been separated from their birth mother in a Catholic institution.

A more realistic explanation for the under-representation of Protestant individuals within the testimony is that, for reasons that it is difficult to fully explain, the issues addressed by this report are currently viewed in NI as belonging more to a Catholic institutional legacy than to a Protestant one. This is despite the existence of campaigns for truth recovery and redress around mother and baby institutions and adoption that have operated in recent years in other parts of the UK. For example, in 2022 a joint committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons published *The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women, 1945–1976*.²⁶ The following year, the Scottish government issued a formal apology for historical adoption practices.²⁷

The more realistic explanations for the lower than anticipated proportion of testimonies from individuals from Protestant backgrounds include the very practical issue that the institutions that would have admitted most Protestant mothers all closed earlier than the Catholic ones. The Workhouses all closed in 1948. Malone Place, Kennedy House and Thorndale Industrial Home had all closed by the mid-1950s, Thorndale House followed in 1977 and Hopedene admitted very limited numbers in the final years before its closure in 1984. In contrast, Marianvale continued its work until 1984, while Marianville and Mater Dei continued until the 1990s. Inevitably, the impact of time and the ageing process created a propensity to produce more testimony about the Catholic institutions.

However, in the IP's view the most significant possible explanation for the smaller number of testimonies from those with a Protestant background is that media coverage about institutional abuse of all kinds has focused heavily on those that were operated by Catholic orders. One does not need to be a defender of the Catholic Church to acknowledge the point made by one Belfast-based priest that although the institutions include those operated by 'other churches and Barnardo's and state institutions – all of the imagery more or less was of Catholic statues, Catholic Rosary beads...as if this was about the Catholic Church'.²⁸

Moreover, the public understanding in Northern Ireland (NI) of the institutions and the associated pathways and practices is fed by what is now 30 years of significant publicity about the institutions in the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Thus, when mother and baby institutions or Magdalene laundries are mentioned to an NI audience the image that this conjures up are of excavations at the site of the former Tuam mother and baby institution, nuns overseeing women in laundries, or the film *Philomena* and its depiction of coerced adoption and transatlantic movement of babies from RoI to the USA. It is understandable that these very dramatic, and Catholic, examples of institutional historical abuses can lead some Protestants to question if a body such as the IP was interested in their lived experience. On several occasions (both in 2024–25 and in 2018–19), the IP, and before that the QUB and UU researchers, had to convince individuals from Protestant backgrounds that their testimony was significant even if it did not include references to nuns, laundries or the tragic deaths of young children. A number of individuals who shared testimony about Thorndale House or Hopedene made comments to the effect that what happened at the mother and baby institution at Tuam, for example, was a much bigger 'story' than their own experience entailed. This issue may well have caused many individuals to remain silent. Taking the decision to step forward and offer testimony was a courageous thing for all who did so, and it must have been much harder to do so if the person concerned felt that their 'story' might be viewed as less 'relevant' or 'important' compared to the incidents that the media have focused on.

It was in this context also that the IP has attempted to influence the Northern Irish media and religious leaders to accept that the institutions and the related pathways and practices are also a 'Protestant' issue impacting on women and their children (now adults) across all communities. We must report that there has been some resistance to that fact from some 'gatekeepers' who we approached in seeking to extend the IP's message to victims-survivors from Protestant backgrounds. An examination of the numbers of girls and women from Protestant backgrounds who were admitted to Kennedy House, Hopedene, Malone Place, Thorndale House and Thorndale Industrial Home should remove any doubts.

16.1 Anonymity or not

Everyone who shared testimony with the IP was given the option to have their name on their testimony transcript (and any use made of it in the report) or to have the IP create a code to use instead of a name. A significant number of individuals opted to be named in the report. In a small number of cases, the IP advised against this decision when, for example, it became apparent that doing so would infringe somebody else's right to privacy in some respect.

In the chapters on Harms and Impacts and Serious Human Rights Issues, everyone has been given a code, which meant the allocation of a second code for some participants. This is because the matters discussed in those chapters are so numerous and complex and involve so many different sets of individuals that it would be impossible to attempt any legal clearance of the content of these two chapters for publication without the anonymisation of both the individuals involved and any employer, organisation or institution discussed in the chapter.

16.2 The importance of written testimony

Offering the option to submit written testimony was one that the IP committed to from the outset. The significance of offering this means of recording a participant's lived experience cannot be better articulated than it was by 20250516BN in her written testimony. In a section she called 'Breaking the silence', she wrote the following.

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Now, through this written testimony, I have finally found a way to disclose my story in a meaningful way – one that allows me to share the truth without the pressure of spoken words. Submitting my testimony to the Truth Recovery Independent Panel has given me the opportunity to be heard, ensuring that my experience is acknowledged and recorded.

“

Unlike my previous failed verbal attempts, this process has allowed me to express the full extent of what I endured, contributing to a wider effort to uncover the truth and ensure that voices like mine are not lost. Though it has been extremely difficult, it is also a step toward recognition, understanding, and justice.

16.3 The analysis of testimony

Testimony was analysed in two ways. The first involved a straightforward reading of each testimony to create an abstract (a summary of the main themes in the testimony). This read-through also enabled the IP to establish the full context around each participant's testimony. These readings enabled the IP to comprehend the content of a testimony and where it sat in terms of other comparable testimonies: comparable in relation to whether or not a testimony was linked in a group such as 'birth mothers' or 'children, now adults' or, alternatively, was part of a collective of testimonies around a particular institution (e.g., St Mary's institutions, or private nursing homes) or around a particular pathway or practice (e.g., cross-border adoptions or use of someone else's family home to conceal a pregnancy). In numerous cases, testimonies sat within more than one category. As each chapter was written, testimonies were read again to inform chapter content and to identify particular quotations that would be used as examples to illustrate various points.

However, to analyse such a large amount of testimony (transcripts often ran to 60 pages or more) it was necessary to code them and to apply a rigorous analytical methodology. Panel member Patricia Canning led this element of our work and was joined by Mark Farrell. Together they were assisted by two other experienced coders, Graham Hall and Micheál Hearty. Additional assistance was provided by three of the testimony facilitators who moved to the coding analysis team once testimony collection was finished: these were Ruth Duffy, Megan Kelly and Sam Manning.

The coding and analysis team read and reviewed testimonies at least twice and composed a list of themes identified therein. Themes were then collated, checked for consistency and sub-classified. For example, a primary theme, 'institutional practices', contained sub-themes that included 'daily routine', which was in turn further sub-divided into 'work', 'meals', 'religious rituals', 'leisure time' and so on.

When the final classification of themes and sub-themes was agreed, spreadsheets were created for each participant group, i.e. birth mothers, children, now adults and others (e.g., family members, midwives or social workers). Separate tabs within each spreadsheet reflected the main themes identified in the testimonies by the coding team and, within each tab, column headings allowed the team to match specific testimony content to each sub-theme.

The testimony analysis team also utilised the text analysis software AntConc, which enabled searches for specific words or phrases in their original contexts across the entire set of testimonies. This allowed not only for specific words or phrases to be located within individual transcripts, but also for patterns to be identified across the entire set of testimonies.

The IP coded the testimonies to pull together patterns or themes in high volumes of testimony transcript text, to help build a comprehensive record of the themes and lived experiences shared. This was particularly important in preparing those chapters that needed to draw upon all the testimonies (Harms and Impacts; Serious Human Rights Issues).

Creating codes around themes enabled effective writing of our report because it allowed us to quickly identify sections of testimony that could be quoted to illustrate the findings that were being outlined in each individual chapter. It is a technique that is regularly used when a large amount of testimony is created. A recent example of the coding of testimony in this way was the report examining the disastrous policing of the Champions League Final of 2022 between Liverpool and Real Madrid.²⁹

Chapter 3

Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy
and Legal Services Working Group



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Chapter content

This chapter discusses:

- 1.0** Terms of Reference
- 2.0** Membership
- 3.0** Work
- 4.0** Access to records
- 5.0** Advocacy
- 6.0** Genealogy
- 7.0** Legal work

1.0 Terms of Reference

The Independent Panel (IP) established an Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy and Legal Services (ARAGLS) Working Group (WG) to deliver on the following key element of its Terms of Reference:



Provide archival, genealogical, advocacy, and any other necessary assistance, to victims-survivors and relatives to seek and obtain information from records and archives relating to the institutions and practices under investigation, including information about the fate and whereabouts of deceased children and women.

2.0 Membership

The WG comprised:

- Colin Smith SC WG Chair, international human rights law and domestic law
- Maria Cogley – victim-survivor representative
- Roisin McGlone – victim-survivor representative
- Steven Smyrl – genealogy.

3.0 Work

The work of the WG focused on:

- access to records
- advocacy
- genealogy
- legal work.

4.0 Access to records

4.1 Guidance on access to records

From the ARAGLS WG's very earliest engagement with victims-survivors through the Consultative Forum and from contact with victims-survivors outside the Forum it was very apparent that the issue of access to records was critically important to them. The Truth Recovery Design Panel, in their 2021 report, made recommendations that '[f]ull access to information for victims-survivors and relatives of the deceased' would be a guiding principle of the IP's work.¹

For this IP to progress its work effectively, 'individual truth narratives' or 'testimonies' were vitally important, and fundamental to the giving of testimony is access to the records of life events. These records are held by a wide variety of institutions and agencies.

One of the WG's priorities was to develop and publish comprehensive guidance for accessing records for victims-survivors to use. The aim was to empower victims-survivors and their advocates with the tools to overcome obstacles they might face in accessing information about themselves.

The first step was to map existing information on the institutions and agencies who hold records relating to the institutions within the remit of the IP. This information was collated into a standard format. Where gaps in the information were identified, information was sought from voluntary organisations and government agencies to fill them.

This allowed the WG to prepare, in relation to each institution, guidance on how best to access the different categories of records. This guidance was based on legal advice provided by the IP's solicitors. The guidance included step-by-step advice on how to make an application for access to records. Importantly, it also included suggestions on how to pursue remedies for refusal of access, such as internal reviews and appeals to the Information Commissioner's Office. Guidance on how to seek legal aid was also prepared.

Care was taken to ensure that the guidance was as straightforward and accessible as possible, and that the language adopted was appropriate and sensitive. In this context, we had regard to research done by scholars at the University of Galway on language, terminology and representation in the context of similar institutions in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), bearing in mind that preferences in terms of terminology in Northern Ireland (NI) are sometimes different.²

Drafts were shared with advocacy organisations and victims-survivors with experience of seeking records, and their feedback was then incorporated into the guidance. The WG worked in collaboration with the Communications and Engagement WG on the presentation of the guidance on the IP's website, including the design of appropriate graphics and icons to make the information more readily accessible.

The guidance was completed and published on the IP's website in October 2024. It has been subject to periodic amendment and revision since then.³

The new guidance was presented to victims-survivors who attended IP outreach events in person and online on 5 and 6 December 2024, on 27 March 2025, and on 18 and 19 June 2025. The WG also made a presentation including information on access to records to the Executive Office's (TEO's) Victims and Survivors Consultation Forum on 27 November 2025.

In addition to the guidance published on the IP's website, a printed version was designed for victims-survivors whose preference was for guidance on paper and as reference copies for advocacy workers. A competitive tender process was undertaken which led to the identification of a designer and printer. The printed version was designed and produced in loose-leaf format so that amendments and revisions could be readily included. One hundred copies were printed and made available to victims-survivors at all IP in-person outreach events and could be requested from the Secretariat. Copies were also sent to advocacy organisations for onwards distribution.

Further guidance was subsequently developed on access to medical records and access to court records. This advice is based on the advice of the IP's solicitors and includes templates for court applications drafted by counsel.

4.2 Consultation on access to records

During the process of preparing the access to records guidance we became aware that many affected people had suffered some profoundly negative experiences in accessing records and information about themselves and family members.

To ensure that the experiences of affected individuals was highlighted and to be able to inform any future recommendations that the IP would make to the public inquiry, the WG decided to collate these valuable experiences through a comprehensive survey of victims-survivors' efforts to access their records. We believed that it was important to gain insights into any challenges, difficulties, blockages and information gaps in accessing records and that we should investigate these on behalf of those impacted. We envisaged that this empirical evidence based on victims-survivors' first-hand experiences could inform any future policies and practices in accessing records. This resulted in a survey being developed and distributed to those involved in the truth recovery process and further afield. This research complemented the previous consultation carried out by the IP into the drafting and implementation of legislation to establish a permanent archive for victims-survivors, described in the chapter on the work of the Records and Archives WG.

A link to an online survey was sent to victims-survivors who had registered their interest with the IP between 8 May and 6 June 2025. A report on the survey was published on the IP's website in November 2025 and sent to victims-survivors by email. The results of the survey were also discussed at the IP's outreach events.

The survey received 78 responses, including responses from birth mothers, children (now adults), and former girls and women who were admitted to Workhouses and Magdalene laundries.

The first section of the survey gathered information about the respondents. As well as information from respondents on their age, ethnicity, religion and sex, respondents were asked if they wanted to remain anonymous and, if so, whether they permitted the IP to use quotes from their responses. Respondents were asked for information on the institutions and pathways and practices which had affected them, as well as how they described themselves in relation to the truth recovery process.

The breakdown of those who responded is set out in **Figures 1–5**.

Figure 1: Institutions and their pathways and practices that respondents' experiences were connected to

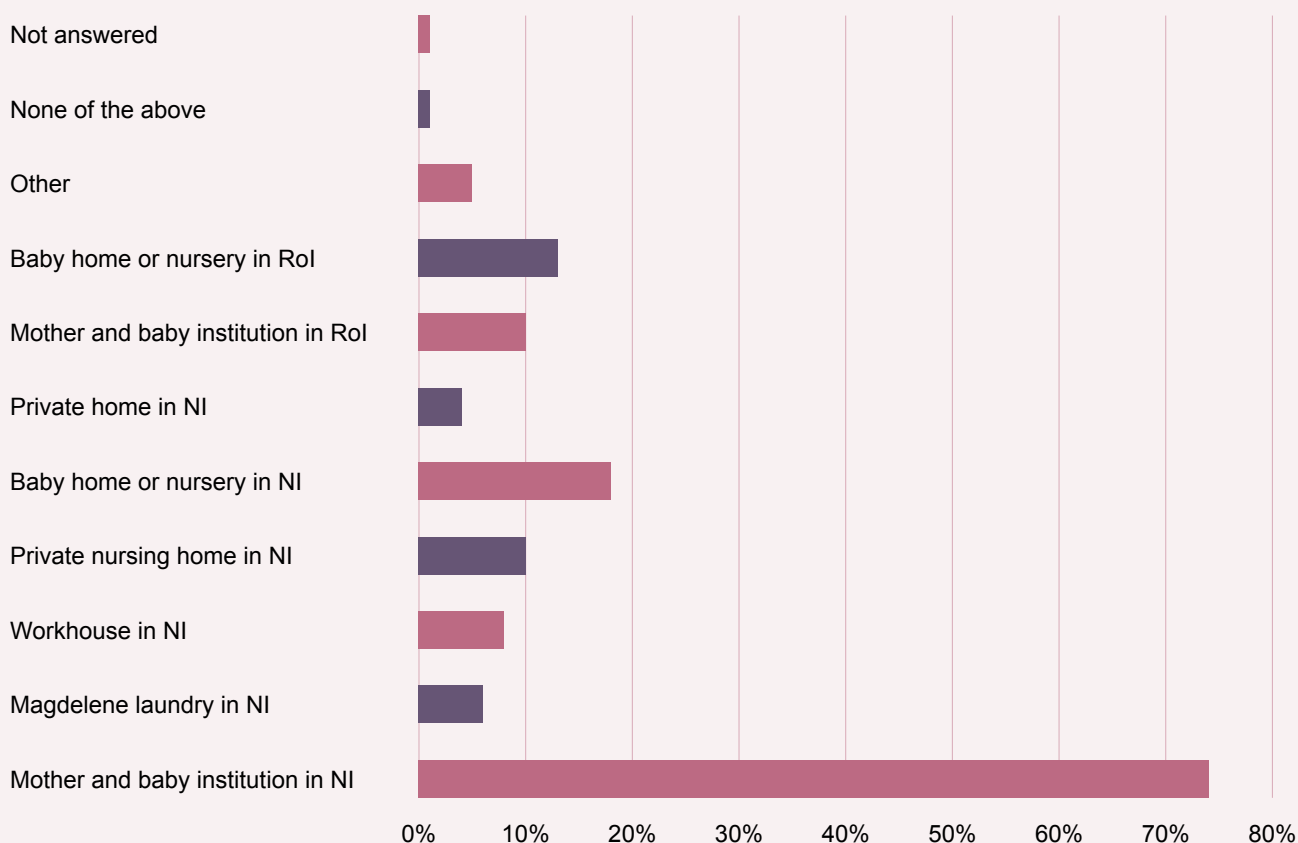
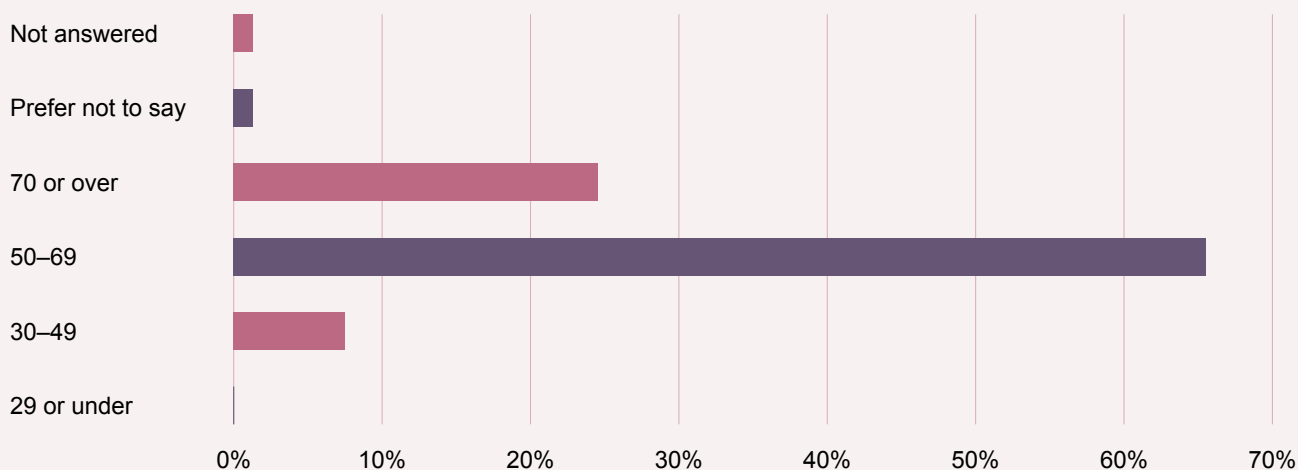
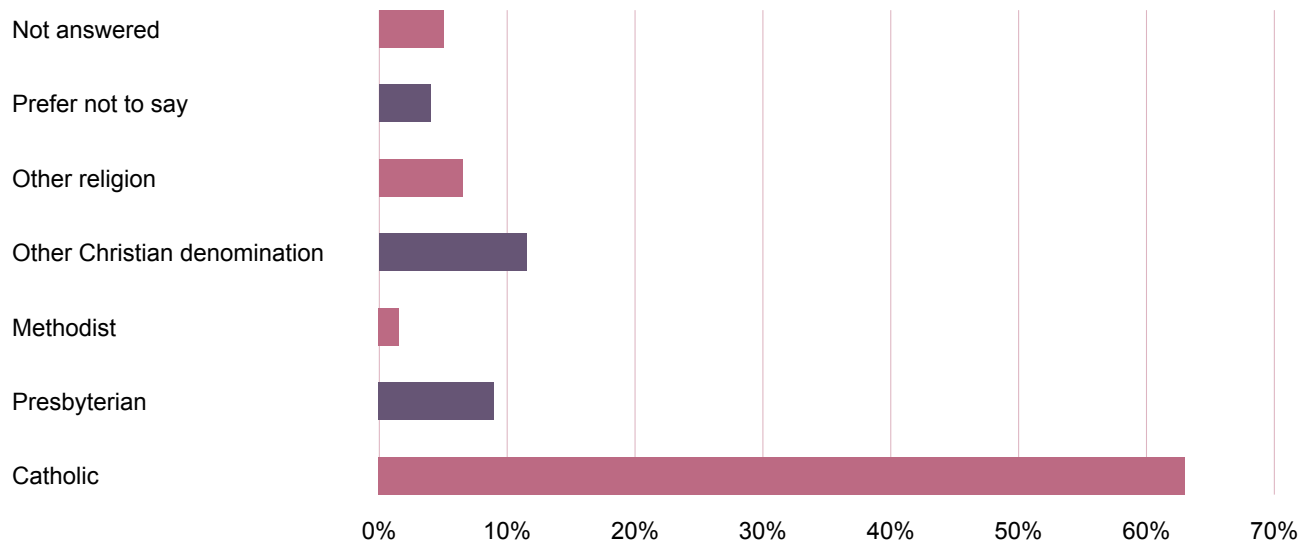


Figure 2: Age range of respondents



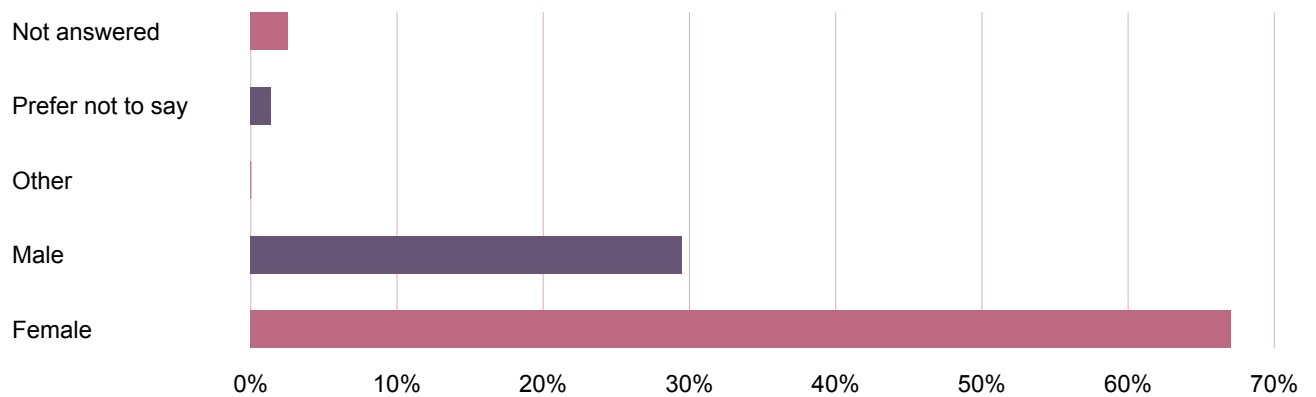
	29 or under	30–49	50–69	70 or over	Prefer not to say	Not answered
No. of respondents	0	6	51	19	1	1
%	0.0	7.7	65.4	24.4	1.3	1.3

Figure 3: Religious background of respondents



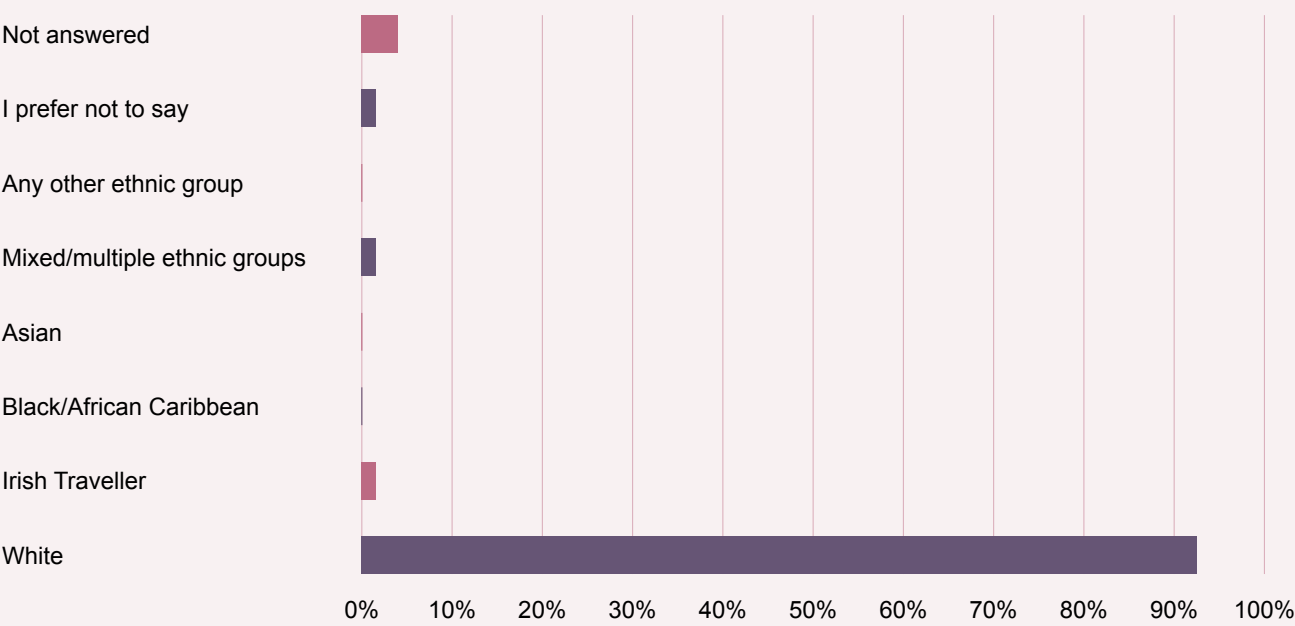
	Catholic	Presbyterian	Methodist	Other Christian denomination	Other religion	Prefer not to say	Not answered
No. of respondents	49	7	1	9	5	4	3
%	62.8	9.0	1.3	11.5	6.4	5.1	3.8

Figure 4: Sex of respondents



	Female	Male	Other	Prefer not to say	Not answered
No. of respondents	52	23	0	1	2
%	66.7	29.5	0.0	1.3	2.6

Figure 5: Ethnicity of respondents



	White	Irish Traveller	Black/ African Caribbean	Asian	Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups	Any other ethnic group	I prefer not to say	Not answered
No. of respondents	72	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
%	92.3	1.3	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.3	3.8

Respondents were asked how they would describe themselves in the context of the truth recovery process. It was important that respondents had agency to define themselves in their own terms. Seventy-three respondents answered this question. While many used terms in common use within the truth recovery process, and some identified with more than one description, some chose alternative ways to define themselves. In the interests of inclusivity, and to reflect the complexity of identity, the respondents’ self-descriptions are set out in **Table 1** and in the quotations below.

Table 1: How respondents described themselves in the context of the truth recovery process

Preferred description	No. of respondents
Adopted adult	26
Adoptee	2
Adopted	3
Adopted when ten years old	1
Adult adoptee	1
Birth mother	8
Mother and baby home inmate	1
Unmarried mother	1
Mother of adopted baby	1
Magdalene laundry victim	1
Fostered	3
Foster child	2
Fostered 2000 – then disowned	1
Long-term fostered	1
Foster family	1
Fostered then adopted	1
A trafficked child who is now an adopted adult	1
Trafficked as a baby from Northern Ireland to south of Ireland	1
An unwanted child	1
I'm an adult with dyslexia	1
Adopted adult from childbirth	1
Orphan adult	1
Born in a mother and baby home and adopted adult	1
Sibling of adopted adult & acting on behalf of a birthmother, birthfather & deceased adopted adult	1
Cousin of an adopted adult	1
Sibling of a baby who died in institutional care	1

The following quotes from the survey illustrate further both the complexity of identity and the limitations of some of the current terminology used to describe victims-survivors. They also highlight the potential harm that such labels can cause.

“

Illegitimate child adult. Un-wanted B_____ person.

“

Institutional survivor – Workhouse 7 months – Baby Home 2 years 2 months – Large Institution 15 years.

“

I am the daughter of someone who spent time in one of the homes. My sister was adopted a few days after her birth.

“

I was adopted just after birth and only recently discovered my Birth Mother...
I am 64.

“

I was adopted at about 3, now I am an adult age 76 so probably adopted adult is the best choice.

“

I am the eldest son of my father who was born in a mother and baby institution in Belfast.

“

Non-adopted/“kept” daughter of unmarried mother from the Workhouse and half-sister to her baby born there and subsequently adopted.

“

I was an unmarried mother who had a baby boy. Thirty years later, I found out he was adopted.

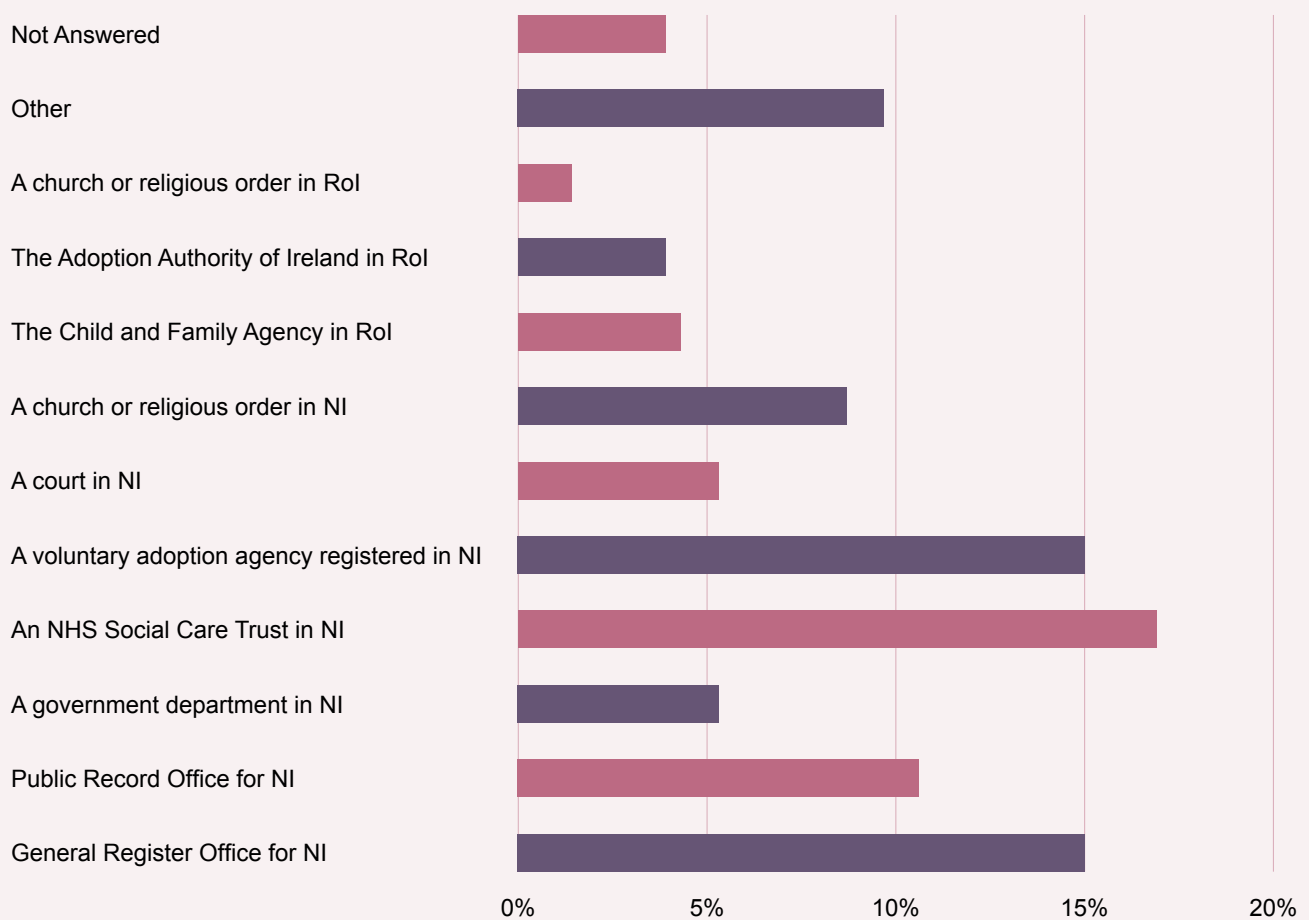
“

Adopted Adult. Son of an unmarried Mother who was placed in a Northern Ireland Mother and Baby Home at Marianvale, Newry, Co. Down and was then removed from her at 3 weeks old and taken into the Irish Republic and placed in the Nazareth House Baby Home at Fahan, Co. Donegal.

The second section of the survey focused on respondents' efforts to access their and their families' records and their experience of that process. We were interested in finding out the range of agencies and institutions which victims-survivors were having to apply to in order to gain access to records of their life events and those of their family members. The IP were also interested in whether respondents were satisfied with the records they received, if they believed the records were complete and if they had received all records held about them. Respondents were also asked how long it took from their first application to receiving records.

Most respondents who answered this question had submitted records requests to multiple agencies, as shown in **Figure 6**. The majority of these searches (140 in total) were directed to the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs), General Register Office Northern Ireland (GRONI), voluntary adoption agencies, the Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI), and various church and religious organisations in NI and RoI.

Figure 6: Who respondents had applied for access to records



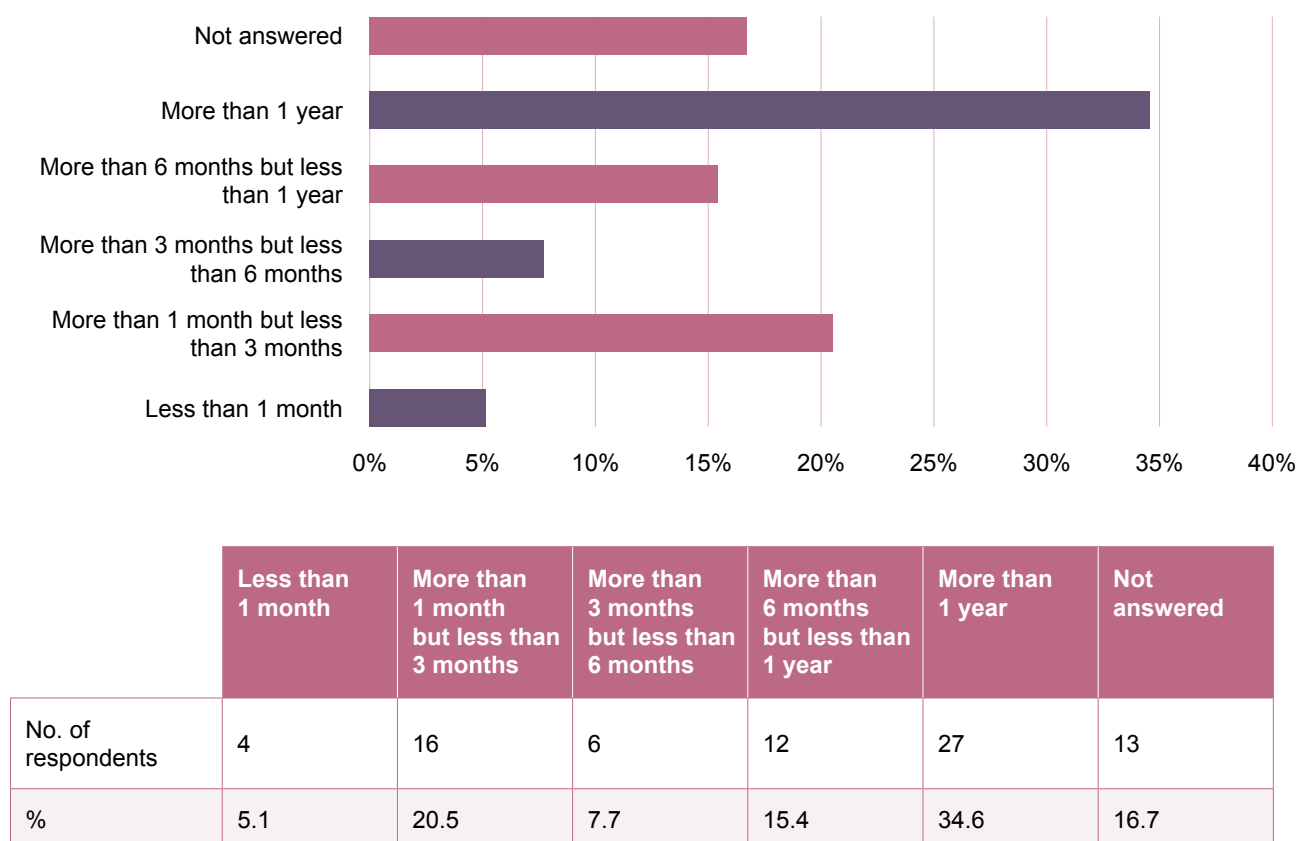
	No. of respondents	%
General Register Office for NI	31	15.0
Public Record Office for NI	22	10.6
A government department in NI	11	5.3
An NHS Social Care Trust in NI	35	16.9
A voluntary adoption agency registered in NI	31	15.0
A court in NI	11	5.3
A church or religious order in NI	18	8.7
The Child and Family Agency in RoI	9	4.3
The Adoption Authority of Ireland in RoI	8	3.9
A church or religious order in RoI	3	1.4
Other	20	9.7
Not Answered	8	3.9

The responses suggest that when applying for records, respondents were faced with enormous challenges. Many of the institutions who should have held their records no longer exist. Some had amalgamated with other institutions or evolved into entirely new agencies and organisations. Some respondents had experiences involving multiple institutions, and even those connected to a single institution had to contact multiple agencies to locate information about their time there or what others had recorded about them while they had been there. In total, respondents indicated 199 different searches or requests for information.

Those who were searching for records of deceased family members faced additional challenges, as they could not draw on personal recollections or ask their family member about their life experiences. Many of these life experiences had been shrouded in secrecy, stigma and shame. The determination and investigative effort shown by respondents was remarkable.

When asked what their experience of applying for records was and whether they were satisfied that they had been provided with all the records to which they were entitled, 49% of respondents had a negative experience with regard to seeking information, with only 21% describing their experience as positive. Respondents described being given records that were wrong or incomplete and having difficulty obtaining records. Some described uncertainty about entitlement and rights, while others reported frustration trying to access court records. Some spoke of receiving support, but more described lack of support. Many complained of the long delays in securing access to records after they had made their requests; as shown in **Figure 7**, 15% of respondents had to wait more than six months, with 35% waiting more than a year.

Figure 7: Length of time taken for respondents to receive records



This data does not fully capture victims-survivors' experiences or convey what 'over a year' actually means in terms of how long they have waited. There were many examples of 'over a year' answers indicating a much longer timeframe, sometimes across decades. Neither do these figures reflect what respondents told us about the consequences and the devastating impact waiting for records can have on those who are searching for loved ones. Respondents shared some of their experiences as follows.

“

I first applied for records in 1996 and received a page ripped out of a spiral notebook with two sentences handwritten on it. I tried again in 2022 and got no further.

“

It has taken many years to access the information that I was eventually given.

“

I started the process in 1997 and still am dissatisfied with the information provided.

“

The process was long and not made easy. Some records although my records were held back even though the other parties involved were deceased. I challenged this and eventually got what I needed but was long and stressful time.

“

If they had [told me] when I asked she would have still been alive, there may have been a chance I could have met her.

“

Then in 1991, I made contact with Church of Ireland again. I was provided with base information. It wasn't until the law was changed I once again approached Church of Ireland Adoption Society in 2016. This was when my details were put on the Adoption Contact Register.

“

The experience has not been so good with limited information available, and they failed to say my mum spent time in St Mary's Laundry straight after Marianville until I found a letter in my care file and approached them again.

“

I and my 3 brothers were given very limited information regarding our birth mother and her extremely difficult life experiences during her spells in Institutions and hospital.

These first-hand insights show access remains uneven, with redactions, lost files and conflicting decisions across agencies and trusts. Importantly, it demonstrates how the process is emotionally draining for victims-survivors and highlights systemic failures in record-keeping, transparency and empathy towards those seeking truth about their files.

The third section of the survey asked respondents how they felt about their experiences of accessing records and the impact it has had on their lives. In the 71 responses we received, overwhelmingly negative feelings were expressed. These feelings ranged from ‘emotional and stressful and sad’ to ‘upsetting and distressing’, and examples were given of how the process had impacted negatively on respondents’ mental health and wellbeing. Respondents also detailed how emotional resilience is needed, noting that they often had to take breaks from the process to regain the necessary energy and commitment to continue their search.

Respondents spoke of ‘powerlessness’ and the emotional burden of the process and the impact that it has had on family dynamics. They also told us about the longer-term impact this had on their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. Over half of respondents described long-term impact on their wellbeing, including depression, feeling inferior to others, humiliation, powerlessness, a lack of control in their lives and the emotional burden of shame. The following quotes provide an insight into these feelings.

“

I feel as I’m not good enough that every day I feel I have to prove myself.

“

It has made me feel “I don’t matter.”

“

It has made me feel like a second class citizen.

“

It has left me very depressed, and no one cares.

“

Strangers know more about my past than I know myself, obviously that affects your sense of identity and self-esteem, how could it not?

“

Devastating! Humiliating! Confused! Angry! I remain a No-one! Unheard!

“

I remain a non-person. I have no identity. I have no voice, no rights to my own information. I have a great gap in my life and no answers. I have a broken history.

“

I still have no control over my life, even now. I have no rights. Everything of my life there remains the control of non-people, who do not know me, nor are interested in me and my wishes.

“

My life consisted of other people's shame, so much so, I have told very few people of my past. The same shame given to my mother entering those institutions, and which is now being imposed onto me once more.

“

Emotional burden – the daunting search for the truth has led to feelings of defeat and isolation.

“

Shame, betrayal for the family who adopted me kept me from looking earlier at the end of the day I was led to believe by society I was someone to be hidden and ashamed of having.

“

It was important to access many details that had been hidden from me. I felt that I could understand more of the environment my birth mother faced, and this created a great deal of sadness which I hope will be part of a healing process. I was a little bit angry at some of the untruths that were told and recorded, which reminds me of the powerlessness I have felt for so long, and which my birth mother must have felt.

“

It affects me. I never feel good enough, unimportant, a nobody. No rights, neglected, forgotten, excluded, different, not entitled to anything, not wanted, no real identity. I was the hidden secret.

“

I have been receiving counselling for the past two years, which is still on going. The anguish and suffering of this whole process, continues on a daily basis, while trying to obtain some sort of justice for a deceased father and grandmother who was incarcerated in the same Mother and Baby Institution twice in her life, dying at 35 years old.

These quotations clearly highlight the prolonged and distressing struggle victims-survivors have endured to access their records. They have told us how over many years they have faced bureaucratic obstruction from multiple agencies compounding their personal grief. This indicates that the withholding of information can damage their self-esteem and their mental wellbeing.

The questions in the fourth section of the survey were designed to gather information on the advocacy and support that was available to respondents while accessing their records.

Respondents were asked whether they had had any support from advocacy services in relation to their requests for records. Thirty-one of the respondents said that they had, and the assessments of this support were generally positive.

Respondents were also asked whether they had made requests since the adoption in November 2023 by the Department of Health of new guidance on the processing of applications for access to adoption records held by HSCTs and voluntary adoption agencies, and what their experiences were. Twenty-four respondents said that they had done so and, importantly, seven said that when they had applied after the coming into effect of the guidance, they received more information than they had received when they had applied before the guidance had been adopted.

The survey also asked respondents whether they had used the guidance published by the IP itself, and whether they had found it useful. Twenty-four respondents said that they had used the IP's guidance, 21 of whom said that they had found it useful. The following observations were made.

“

The information now available at Truth Recovery Independent Panel is excellent, though I'm not sure how well known this resource is in England.

“

The guidance are an excellent start but there is still more work required which will need to be funded and protected specifically ring fenced.

“

I think that the advice given by the Truth Recovery Independent Panel should be made widely available and that help should be given, where required, to applicants.

The survey also contained a question about whether respondents had sought legal advice in relation to access to records. Fifty-one respondents said that they had not sought legal advice, with 16 saying that cost was the issue in preventing them from doing so. Only ten had sought legal advice, but none pointed to a positive outcome. The final section of the survey asked for the views of victims-survivors on improvements they believed could be made to the system for accessing records.

Almost every respondent suggested that a better way needed to be found to give victims-survivors access to records of their life events. One respondent's succinct response was 'anything would be an improvement'. The improvements suggested included more transparency in decision-making, better advocacy and increased resources so as to reduce delays and, perhaps most importantly, the consolidation of records in one repository independent of the organisations that ran the institutions. Some respondents expressed their views as follows:

“

A central repository is definitely needed. A one stop shop with professional advocacy to help navigate this complex process. In my experience there is a raft of records sometimes you don't know where to look.

“

Centralised system where I can go and with help and support access all my records. A one stop shop.

“

I think that there should be [a] one stop shop for victims and survivors to call upon and the work should be done on behalf of the victim or survivor.

“

All records relating to individuals should be properly filed, held and stored. Information about a child's adoption should be protected and easily accessed by the adoptee when requested.

“

To have a named department to access records on my behalf and to be support[ed] while reading and understanding of the documents.

“

Would be good to have a central place to access records or someone to help in the search process.

“

Quicker access and one central place to go to help co-ordinate access e.g. a key worker to co-ordinate and monitor.

“

Good support needed (with no obligation to use available support) before and after receiving records.

“

Have survivors more involved in process.

“

There should be total cooperation between AAI [Adoption Authority of Ireland]/Tusla [Child and Family Agency] and the record holders and one access point to search all records.

“

Centralised one stop shop with calming environment.

“

All records should be freely available to victims and survivors. They should all be housed/located at a central register rather than located in different places to help with access.

5.0 Advocacy

5.1 Engagement with advocacy organisations

Advocacy is the act of supporting, speaking or acting for individuals or groups of people, to assist them to speak out, protect their rights, or help gain access to services or resources. Victims-survivors and their relatives have long called for advocacy services to be provided for those impacted by NI mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses, and their pathways and practices.

Through engagement with victims-survivors the WG learnt of the barriers, distress and anxiety around gaining access to records and information for individuals and that this was being experienced differently among those impacted by the institutions. For those adopted as children, their journey towards the truth about their origins often starts without knowing basic information such as their name at birth, information about their parents' identities, and details about where they were born and the related circumstances. For those placed in care, information about their early life, childhood location and circumstances is important. For birth mothers, their memories of institutions may be traumatic, and they may be fearful of the retraumatisation of returning to an organisation for information that unfairly imposed shame and stigma upon them. Adopted adults, those who experienced a care setting and birth mothers frequently tell of how they have been told that no records exist relating to them and they have no means of verification, support or signposting as to how they can check or challenge that claim.

The WG recognised the evident importance of a bespoke, comprehensive, wrap-around advocacy service that would provide emotional as well as practical support to those who were seeking access to records and emotional and physical additional support services. Advocacy needed to involve education and support around the range of different experiences of the thousands of individuals and their relatives who were impacted by the institutions and pathways within the IP's remit. At the same time, it was apparent that it was neither possible nor desirable for the IP to duplicate services being provided by the Victims & Survivors Service and its community partner advocacy organisations, Adopt NI and WAVE Trauma Centre (WAVE). The WG engaged closely with these advocacy organisations and from them gained a better appreciation of the challenges faced by their service users, including:

- fear of judgment, stigma or shame
- fear of rejection when searching or trying to search for an adopted adult, birth parent or family member
- sense of being trapped and unable to access records for fear of the exposure of their hidden past to their current family
- not being validated or respected
- previous inconsistent practice across agencies or organisations in relation to support for birth mothers, adopted adults and/or family members
- expectations around accessing records (e.g., what may be available in records versus confidence in asking in the first instance, having support to help navigate the bureaucracy and attitudes of some social workers)
- importance of clear expectation management at the outset along with wrap-around support available.

The WG supported the advocacy work of Adopt NI and WAVE by providing feedback of job specifications for the hiring of new advocates, by providing guidance in relation to advocacy on access to records. At the same time, victims-survivors who came forward to the IP were provided with information about the services offered by the advocacy organisations and referred to them where necessary.

5.2 Advocacy on access to records

The WG also raised obstacles (including resource issues) encountered by the advocacy organisations at the highest political level.

In this regard, when the IP's *Interim Report* was being prepared in March 2024, the WG wrote to each of the HSCTs, to adoption agencies Family Care Adoption Services and Adoption Routes, and to the advocacy organisations to request information on the implementation of the guidance issued to adoption agencies in NI by the Department of Health in November 2023. Specifically, the following information was requested:

- Has the guidance been fully implemented by each post-adoption team?
- Has training been provided for relevant staff to implement the guidance?
- What difficulties (if any) have been experienced while implementing the guidance?
- What impact has the guidance had on practice?

Responses received confirmed the Department of Health guidance had been implemented within the HSCTs and voluntary agencies as of January 2024. The WG were informed that some staff from the post-adoption teams and agencies had attended two days of training in February and March 2024. The impact of the guidance on practice was reported to have noticeably increased applications for records and considerably stretched current resources. The work of fulfilling requests for information was described in one response as 'labour intensive requiring a degree of knowledge and expertise'. All responses highlighted the need for additional staff and administrative support critical to meet time frames and offer empathetic and trauma-informed support.

In August 2024, Adopt NI appointed three new advocacy workers to work alongside their existing advocacy worker and two researchers helping individuals navigate the complexities of access to records as part of their wider services, including DNA and family tracing. The WG met with the Adopt NI advocacy workers team and the researchers shortly after their appointment to discuss in detail the advocacy role, and what victims-survivors were telling the IP about their advocacy needs. The WG discussed with Adopt NI staff the main aspects of our ongoing work, our Terms of Reference, and our willingness to support Adopt NI and other community partners to continue to meet the needs of providing advocacy provision, DNA services and family tracing through our work and our engagement with TEO. The IP's access to records guidance was shared with Adopt NI to assist them in their work on behalf of victims-survivors.

In August 2024, two advocate workers were appointed by WAVE to further support advocacy provision.

In March 2025, the WG met with Adopt NI and WAVE to consult on the progress and development of the advocacy services and advocates' experience of carrying out their role, including:

- positive experiences of assisting people to access records
- challenges encountered by the advocate workers in gaining access to records
- experience of using the IP's guidance, and the guidance issued by the Department of Health to the adoption agencies
- changes suggested to guidance documents
- additional guidance needed
- issues Adopt NI and WAVE would like the IP to raise with the government.

The WG were also keen to learn where records were being requested from; how agencies, state departments, institutions and religious organisations were responding; and to what level they were co-operating. During consultation with Adopt NI, the WG further wished to learn how the extended DNA programme developed was progressing genealogical support provision.

In April 2025, following our consultations with Adopt NI and WAVE, and to support the provision of advocacy services and the timely release of records from HSCTs, the WG wrote to the Minister of Health seeking further information and understanding around delays in accessing records and asking for a meeting with him.

This request was granted, and members of the WG together with the Co-Chairs met with the Minister of Health in May 2025 to discuss the access difficulties both individuals and voluntary agencies offering advocacy services were reporting when trying to access records from the HSCTs' Post Adoption Teams. The Minister was provided with an overview of the IP's work in relation to access to records, and the IP outlined feedback received from individuals and advocates from Adopt NI and WAVE in relation to the lengthy delays, including waits of over a year, to receive information back from all five health trusts. It was stressed that victims-survivors will need their records to participate fully, if they wish, in the forthcoming public inquiry and redress scheme. The improper conditions in which some records were held was emphasised and it was suggested that an interim central index would be beneficial, speeding up the current difficulties faced in trying to locate records while plans were put in place for a central archive.

The Minister agreed that his department would take forward work in relation to developing an interim central index and would investigate the concerns around the storage conditions of the records held by individual HSCTs, including the employment

of additional staff as required. The IP suggested that additional administrative support could improve the current situation significantly and remove some of the burden from social workers. The Minister recognised this could lead to significant benefits in terms of accessing records.

In May 2025, the WG were invited to attend the Northern Ireland Adoption Practitioner Forum, comprising social workers from the adoption teams across the five HSCTs and voluntary adoption agencies. The forum meets regularly to discuss common challenges and best practice. For attendees at the forum, the WG outlined in brief the remit of the IP along with our proposals for a permanent archive containing the types of records the adoption practitioners work with daily. The IP's guidance on access to records was highlighted to ensure all participants were aware of it as a support resource.

In September 2025, the WG wrote again to the Minister of Health requesting an update on the commitments made during our meeting with him in May 2025, including any measures taken by the department to address lengthy waiting times.

In his reply, the Minister of Health reiterated his 'understanding of the complexities, importance and sensitivities associated with accessing adoption records, particularly for victims-survivors'. On the question of administrative resources, the Minister said that while the inclusion of additional administrative support would be a positive step, the nature of the information being considered and the sensitive nature of interactions with requesters meant that much of the work relating to requests for information had still to be carried out by social workers. The Minister assured the IP that the situation would continue to be monitored to ensure that the HSCTs could respond to requests in a timely manner and that the Department of Health was engaging with TEO to explore cross-departmental solutions to address waiting times.

The Minister also told the IP that departmental officials would liaise with relevant organisations to ensure that the recommendations from PRONI's Archival Survey of adoption and child welfare files held by statutory and voluntary sector adoption agencies across NI were being addressed, and that this would ensure that records were stored and preserved appropriately to support access in the future. The Minister stated that the department was working with TEO to identify funding which will enable the collocation of the records within a single repository and the development of an overarching index to all of the records.

At the same time, the WG wrote to the Post Adoption Teams at the HSCTs to request information in relation to access to records and the implementation of the Department of Health guidance. In reply, the Belfast HSCT's Post Adoption Team told us that since the implementation of the guidance 110 adoption file requests had been made, 105 had been completed and five were pending. A further eight requests were from descendants, with the Belfast Trust telling us they were unable to fulfil those requests for information. Over 60% of the requests had been processed within 30 days, and over 90% were processed within 90 days in accordance with the departmental guidance. Additional administrative support of 20 hours per week had been funded out of the Team's budget but no extra resources had been made available by the Department.

The South Eastern HSCT's Post Adoption Team told us that since the implementation of guidance it had received a total of 58 requests, only 29 of which had been processed. On average, applicants had to wait six months before their request was even allocated to a social worker, and the average processing time was 12 months. The Team had employed a retired staff member on a part-time basis to deal with the backlog but anticipated that further resources – at least one full-time social worker and one full-time administrator – would be necessary to ensure that deadlines were met.

The Western HSCT told the WG that it had received 58 requests since the department guidance had been issued, of which 31 had been processed. Processing times varied but could be as long as 18 months. Resources had been redeployed internally to improve delivery but again no additional resources were made available.

The Southern HSCT reported similar issues in relation to access to records; however, their response to the WG was marked 'Private and Confidential' and therefore we are unable to share findings in this chapter.

No reply was received from the Northern HSCT, which tells its own story.

On the basis of this information, the WG continued to raise the issue of access to records at the political level. On 8 October 2025, the IP attended a hearing of the Committee for the Executive Office to discuss the draft legislation on the public inquiry and the redress scheme. On behalf of the IP, Colin Smith SC told the Committee that delays in access to records had the capacity to negatively affect the work of both the public inquiry and the redress scheme. He said that if a person was evaluating whether to participate in the public inquiry, or trying to substantiate their application for redress, they would be hampered by delays. He said that if more resources were not directed at the issue, it would only get worse, and that there would be a log-jam of applications for records when the redress board and the public inquiry started looking for records too.

5.3 Advocacy on legal advice and assistance around access to records

NI is fortunate to have a well-established and, by international standards, highly developed framework for the provision of free legal advice and assistance. In principle, legal advice and assistance in relation to any aspect of Northern Irish law – including access to records – is available under the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, the Civil Legal Services (General) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Civil Legal Services (Financial) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

Nevertheless, the IP was made aware by victims-survivors that many people seeking access to records were slow to seek legal advice and assistance because of concerns around the application of a means test, which means that where a person's weekly disposable income exceeds £234 and their disposable capital exceeds £1,000, they are ineligible for advice and assistance. Although the means test is disapplied in certain circumstances, none of these cover access to records, and the Director of Legal Case Work has no power to disapply it even in exceptional circumstances.

The IP was and remains concerned that these are very low income and capital thresholds and that they have the potential to impede access for victims-survivors to necessary legal advice and assistance.

For that reason, the IP engaged with TEO and the Department of Justice to advocate for review and amendment of the relevant legislation to facilitate victims-survivors in accessing free legal advice and assistance in relation to applications for access to records.

To date, no such reform has been made and so the IP repeats its recommendation that victims-survivors should have free, non-means-tested legal advice available to them for applications for access to records.

5.4 Advocacy on the public inquiry and redress

In June 2024, TEO published a consultation paper on a statutory public inquiry and financial redress.⁴ The WG co-ordinated the IP's submission, which was published in September 2024.⁵

The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill was introduced in June 2025. When the Bill reached Committee stage, the IP was asked by the Committee for TEO for its observations on the draft legislation. These were provided in writing, and the Co-Chairs together with the Chair of the WG appeared before the Committee on 8 October 2025 to answer questions.

With regard to the public inquiry, the IP agreed with the proposal in the consultation paper that the focus of the public inquiry should be on systemic failings but that nothing in the legislation should prevent investigation of individual violations of human rights enshrined in the international human rights treaties to which the UK is a party. Moreover, these rights have long been protected by the common law and by laws enacted by Parliament. The IP also noted that the public inquiry will be a public authority for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998, and that it will be obliged to act in a manner compatible with the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to fair procedures and the prohibition of discrimination.

With reference to the institutions within the scope of the public inquiry, the IP agreed with TEO's proposal that the legislation should incorporate a mechanism to allow the list of institutions to be investigated to be prescribed by the NI Executive and amended in the event that such amendment is recommended by the IP or by the public inquiry itself. In this regard, the IP noted that on the basis of its own investigations, it was likely to recommend the addition of at least one more mother and baby institution to the current list – Clogrennan Mother and Baby Institution, in Larne – which was brought to our attention by a victim-survivor who gave testimony to the IP.

When the Bill was published, the IP was satisfied that Clause 3 on the scope of the inquiry was sufficiently broadly framed to allow regulations to be made which can

encompass the range of institutions which should be the focus of the investigation. It was observed that putting the list of institutions into regulations rather than the Act makes it easier to alter if that should be necessary.

With regard to the composition of the public inquiry, the IP disagreed with the statement in the consultation paper that '[i]mplementing the recommendation in the Report to include a victim and survivor representative on the public inquiry panel would conflict with the requirement of impartiality and may result in the inquiry being challenged once established, which could delay this important work'. The IP observed that, on the contrary, victim-survivor representation on the public inquiry panel would no more conflict with the requirement of impartiality than the appointment of a person (such as a judge) who is associated with the state. The public authorities were not neutral actors in the matters under investigation, but active participants whose actions will be investigated as part of the pathways and practices of the institutions. The IP expressed the view that the participation of victims-survivors on the public inquiry panel was essential to the credibility and integrity of the process and entirely consistent with recommendations made in academic research on the successes and failures of other similar inquiries in this and other jurisdictions.

When members of the IP appeared before the Committee for the Executive Office in October 2025 to discuss the Bill, the point was made again that the Design Panel had recommended that victims-survivors would participate in the inquiry panel itself, and not just in the Advisory Panel established under Clause 10. Given the participation of three victims-survivors on the IP itself, this is something it was felt necessary to raise again. In the IP's view, the draft legislation was broad enough to permit this, but whether it would actually happen or not is another matter. The point was made that the composition of the public inquiry panel would have a significant impact on how the inquiry operated.

Leading on from this, the Committee was referred to the positive practices of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry with regard to the treatment of vulnerable witnesses.

With regard to the proposals for a statutory redress scheme, the IP agreed with TEO's proposal that the standardised payment should be based on admittance to an institution or being born to a woman or girl admitted to an institution, and that the individually assessed payment should be based on an individual's experience. However, the IP cautioned that measures should be taken to make clear that both the standardised payments and the individually assessed payments were intended to acknowledge past failings and were not intended to be compensatory. The concern was expressed that making a direct connection between a sum of money and a person's experience risked compounding rather than redressing harm. The IP agreed with the Truth Recovery Design Panel that financial redress should not require waiver of legal rights.

As far as the scope of the redress scheme was concerned, the IP suggested that women who gave birth in Workhouses and were separated from their children should be included, as should the children separated from their mothers.

The IP also disagreed with the proposal to exclude from standardised payments any mother or child for whom a private fee-paying arrangement was reached with a mother and baby institution. The IP's view was that girls or women in this category whose baby was separated from them in the mother and baby institution should be included in redress arrangements.

On the question of posthumous claims, the IP expressed concern that the proposed 'next of kin' approach was unsuitable and unworkable. The IP suggested that the arrangement proposed would cause friction and trauma for many families that have already suffered extensively. The IP recommended that, instead of the next of kin approach, a system of standardised payments for the immediate families of deceased victims be considered.

When the Bill was introduced, the IP welcomed the provisions allowing for the future inclusion of other institutions based on recommendations by the IP or the public inquiry. It was also positive that there was no minimum stay requirement, thus ensuring that victims-survivors were not subjected to arbitrary eligibility conditions (e.g., the 180-day rule in RoI's Mother and Baby Institutions Payment Scheme Act 2023). The absence of any requirement to waive legal rights was also welcome, as was the decision not to adopt a next of kin approach to posthumous claims.

While the IP supported the Bill's provision for awarding of redress to individuals who were admitted to mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries between 1922 and 1995, concern was again expressed at the exclusion of women, and their children, now adults, admitted to Workhouses before 1948. The IP told the Committee for the Executive Office that this elderly and relatively small cohort deserved recognition, and that it was possible to create a fair and evidence-based mechanism to include them.

The IP disagreed with the decision to limit posthumous awards under Part 2 of the Bill to families of individuals who died after 29 September 2011. This date, tied to an unrelated decision on child abuse inquiries, has no bearing on the broader scope of the truth recovery process. For the IP, as for so many people from whom the Committee had heard, the 2011 date did not make sense and it was hard to see why in principle eligibility should not be backdated to the foundation of NI.

The IP concluded its submission to the Committee on the redress issue by raising the issue of acknowledgement, and the potential for compounding historic harms by conflating financial payment based on a notional date of expectation with acknowledgement of the suffering of people who are no longer with us, and its intergenerational effects. In the IP's view, much of the distress caused by the suggested date of eligibility seems to flow from the fact that payments are the only form of acknowledgement that the Act envisages. It was suggested that the possibility of conferring on the Redress Service a power to offer acknowledgement apart from financial redress could be considered and that this would be especially appropriate if a date other than 1922 were ultimately settled upon.

6.0 Genealogy

Genealogy is a discipline enabling systematic research to establish identities, trace relationships and reconstruct life events across generations. Its scientific dimension lies in the careful evaluation of evidence, the reconciliation of conflicting sources and the application of rigorous analytical methods to imperfect records. Genealogists draw upon a broad spectrum of material, including civil registration records of birth, death and marriage; parish and church registers; census returns; burial records; wills and other testamentary records; newspapers; institutional archives; and other documentary evidence. The field requires not only technical skill but also an awareness of historical context, local administrative practices and, with particular relevance to the island of Ireland, the limitations of surviving source material.

The WG's genealogical research focused on the deaths and burials of women who 'resided' in the various institutions and their children who were born and died there. Given the complexity and incompleteness of historical records, especially those related to mother and baby institutions and Magdalene laundries, genealogical methods played an important role in uncovering evidence and reconstructing historical events.

In addition, as part of the WG's contribution to compiling the IP's access to records guidance notes, extensive work was undertaken to describe and map the materials available to assist victims-survivors in conducting their own genealogical research.

Many of the mothers and babies who died in the institutions left only fragmentary traces in their records. By drawing together information from a range of sources, it is sometimes possible to identify specific individuals more clearly, establishing such details as their dates and places of birth and death, and their places of burial. This process allowed a more complete picture of deaths, burial practices and general record-keeping to emerge.

A central task of the WG involved tracing death registrations in both NI at GRONI and RoI at the General Register Office for Ireland. This process was complicated by the sometimes unreliability of institutional records and by limitations on how searches could be conducted in Belfast and Dublin. In many cases in the records of the institutions, the names of women or babies were recorded incorrectly or inconsistently, with variations in spelling and incomplete or jumbled information. Dates of death were sometimes only approximate or, on occasion, entirely incorrect, creating obstacles to identification, particularly where women's first names and surnames were commonly used.

To address these challenges, flexible search strategies were employed. These included broadening date ranges, using variant spellings, and cross-referencing dates drawn from institutional records and burial registers with civil records. Each potential match was assessed carefully, comparing biographical and contextual details to ensure the correct identification of the individual concerned.

A major component of the project involved identifying the burial locations of mothers' and babies' remains. This was one of the most sensitive and challenging aspects of the work. Much of the initial data had been compiled for the IP by colleagues at PRONI,

who consulted burial registers, cemetery records, and institutional admission and other records to gather information on deaths and burials. In many cases, institutional records provided little or no information about what became of babies after death, requiring careful cross-referencing of civil records and burial or cemetery registers to assemble credible evidence. Where clear burial information was unavailable, and where documentary evidence was incomplete or absent, additional sources were drawn upon. These included anecdotal accounts; contextual historical knowledge; and testimony from victims-survivors, priests and religious Sisters, and institutional staff. The information gathered was assembled in the tables contained in the substantive chapters of this report. The compilation of these tables involved creating anonymised lists of the women and babies who had died, along with details such as year, age, cause of death, and the existence or absence of burial information. Where burial locations or death registrations could not be found, possible explanations have been provided. These include incomplete institutional records, clerical errors, inconsistent spelling of names, the absence of formal death registration, or the loss or destruction of records over time.

Historical information was collected on all burial grounds associated with the institutions, including their operational periods, denominational affiliations, and the survival and accessibility of burial registers. This research encompassed both large municipal cemeteries and smaller parish graveyards. Understanding the administrative histories of these burial grounds was helpful in determining whether burial registers were likely to be complete or whether record-keeping practices may have contributed to gaps in the historical record. The information collected is referred to in the institutional chapters and has informed the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Serious Human Rights Issues chapter.

7.0 Legal work

7.1 Legal advice

In order to ensure that the IP had access to independent legal advice, the WG arranged a procurement process to identify a firm of solicitors. At this early stage, the focus was on obtaining advice in relation to access to records as the basis for the planned guidance for victims-survivors. In April 2023, Carson McDowell LLP were selected following a competitive tendering process. The firm provided detailed legal advice on a wide range of issues, including access to records, access to legal advice and assistance and access to legal aid.

In the meantime, a larger tender was prepared and following another competitive process, the tender was awarded to Cleaver Fulton Rankin LLP. Cleaver Fulton Rankin provided advice on many different subjects relating to the IP's work. Advice was also obtained from independent counsel instructed by Cleaver Fulton Rankin. The legal advice received informed the IP's access to records guidance, and its decision-making more generally.

It was not the function of the IP to replicate the legal aid system by providing legal advice to victims-survivors on an individual basis. Certainly, the IP's budget and Terms of Reference would have made any such provision impossible. Even so, the IP received frequent correspondence from a small number of victims-survivors containing many legal queries. Some were of a general nature, some very specific, but invariably, these queries related to very complex aspects of administrative law, data protection law and human rights law. Formulating accurate and accessible replies to these queries was time consuming and resource intensive. The WG nevertheless considered it an important part of its engagement with victims-survivors, seeking to engage with these queries as constructively as possible. The feedback received in relation to the IP's responses was generally positive.

7.2 Training for testimony facilitators

Testimony facilitators were engaged by the IP to take testimony from participants. Because the integrated truth investigation of which the IP was a part represented a new investigatory model, none of the facilitators had taken part in such an investigation before. The IP considered it appropriate to provide training for the facilitators on the legal aspects of the investigation, situating the work of the IP in the context of the integrated truth investigation designed by the Truth Recovery Design Panel. The facilitators were introduced to the international standards for investigations and to the human rights on which the work of the IP was likely to focus, including the right to respect for human dignity, the right to respect for family life, the right to security of the person, the right to liberty and the right to freedom from forced labour. The training, which was delivered three times, also included education in relation to good testimony gathering techniques. The performance of testimony facilitators, as reflected in interview transcripts, was consistently monitored and reviewed. While this was always of a very high standard, improvement and the implementation of good practice was observed following all training sessions.

7.3 Liaison with government departments

In order to assess compliance with legal standards relating to the institutions, pathways and practices under investigation, the WG obtained independent legal advice as to the evolution of Northern Irish law during the period covered by the Terms of Reference.

In order to ensure fairness, completeness and accuracy, the WG also requested this same information from relevant government departments. Although the IP found some departments to be more forthcoming than others, generally, the level of co-operation received was high.

It is notable, however, that, in one way or another, all of the departments struggled to accurately describe the evolution of Northern Irish law over the relevant period.

In this regard, the WG note that much important historic legislation relating to NI is absent from the UK's online legislation database, legislation.gov.uk, which is operated by the National Archives. For example, the following pieces of legislation are missing in whole or in part from the database:

- the Midwives and Nursing Homes Act (Northern Ireland) 1929
- the Adoption of Children Act (Northern Ireland) 1929
- the Mental Treatment Act (Northern Ireland) 1932
- the Factories Act (Northern Ireland) 1938
- the Public Health and Local Government (Administrative Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1946
- the Mental Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1948
- the Adoption of Children Act (Northern Ireland) 1950
- the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1950
- the Mental Health Act (Northern Ireland) 1961
- the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968
- the Nursing Homes and Nursing Agencies Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Even where legislation is available, it is often published in a format that is not searchable, making research more difficult and time consuming.

This legislation is an important part of NI's legal history. In the context of the right of victims-survivors to pursue legal remedies, the fact that so much of it is inaccessible to the public must be considered an access to justice issue. The IP recommend the UK's online legislation database be reviewed to ensure that it contains historic Northern Irish legislation.

The IP is grateful to the staff of the NI Civil Service Library for their patient assistance in locating and providing copies of historic legislation which was not otherwise available.

Chapter 4

Communications and Engagement Working Group



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Chapter content

This chapter discusses:

- 1.0** Background
- 2.0** Membership
- 3.0** Strategic approach
- 4.0** Engagement programme
- 5.0** Evaluation of the engagement programme
- 6.0** Conclusion

1.0 Background

The Independent Panel (IP) established a Communications and Engagement Working Group (WG) to deliver on the following key elements of its Terms of Reference:

- to publicise the Panel's work widely to encourage participation, inclusive of people with disabilities and those across the diaspora
- to initiate events to encourage public engagement in its work.

2.0 Membership

Supported by the IP's secretariat, members of the WG included:

- Beverley Clarke – trauma-informed practice
- Maria Cogley – victim-survivor representative
- Steven Smyrl – genealogy
- Paul McClarey – WG Chair and victim-survivor representative
- Sean O'Connell – Panel Co-Chair and social and oral historian.

3.0 Strategic approach

The Communications and Engagement WG adopted a phased and strategic approach to its planning and delivery, ensuring alignment with the Testimony Gathering and Analysis WG's timeline. This allowed appropriate time for the development of essential documentation, infrastructure and, importantly, the support mechanisms required for the testimony element of the Panel's work.

The Panel was clear in its intention that proactive communication and engagement activities should not take place until the foundational elements of the testimony process were in place. To align with this, the Communications and Engagement WG designed and implemented an engagement programme, which involved gradually increasing the frequency and volume of activity in coordination with the testimony team.

Key components of the programme included:

- development of a corporate identity and logo
- creation of a mailing list of registered interest from the victim-survivor community
- production of a bi-monthly newsletter to be issued to mailing list subscribers
- procurement of press and media relations specialists
- establishment of a dedicated website
- establishment of a social media presence
- direct engagement with victims-survivors
- delivery of outreach events
- targeted appeals
- stakeholder engagement
- public campaign highlighting closing date to register to provide testimony.

4.0 Engagement programme

4.1 Development of a corporate identity and logo

The Panel developed its logo, shown in **Figure 1**, in July 2023. The logo incorporates symbolic elements to reflect the Panel's mission. The 'I' in 'Independent' is illustrated as a key, and the 'P' in 'Panel' as a padlock, together representing the act of unlocking the truth. This aligns powerfully with the Panel's mission of 'Seeking the Truth'.

Figure 1: Independent Panel logo



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

4.2 Creation of a mailing list of registered interest from the victim-survivor community

In July 2023, in collaboration with the Executive Office (TEO), the Panel issued an invitation to an established mailing list of approximately 500 contacts. This included members of TEO's Consultative Forum and individuals who had previously engaged with the work of the Truth Recovery Design Panel. The Panel sought consent from these individuals to add their email addresses to their own mailing list so they could receive updates and information about their work. As the Panel's engagement efforts progressed, additional stakeholders subscribed to the mailing list, reflecting growing interest in its work.

4.2.1 How effective was this?

By September 2025, 220 people had subscribed to receive regular updates, and two victim-survivor support groups had also registered. Each new mailing list member received a welcome letter from the Co-Chairs, along with the most recent updates on the Panel's work.

This mailing list became the Panel's core audience, consistently engaging with its activities throughout its lifetime and demonstrating sustained interest and commitment.

4.3 Production of a bi-monthly newsletter to be issued to mailing list subscribers

The first edition of the Panel's bi-monthly newsletter was issued to mailing list subscribers in November 2023. Each edition was also published on the Panel's website so non-subscribers could access it. The newsletter featured key updates on the Panel's progress, spotlight features from individual Panel members and feature articles, such as key insights emerging from consultations carried out by the Panel.

4.3.1 How effective was this?

Over the course of the Panel's lifespan, eight editions were distributed to subscribers and made available online. This regular communication helped maintain transparency and engagement, ensuring that subscribers remained informed about the Panel's work.

4.4 Procurement of press and media relations specialists

The Panel recognised the need to engage press and media relations specialists to support its communications strategy. The primary objective was to appoint a firm to advise on and manage the Panel's proactive and reactive engagement, ensuring effective communication and fostering relationships with the media. The firm would also be responsible for delivering clear, accurate and timely information, and for promoting awareness of the role and remit of the Panel.

Following a successful tender process, Brown O'Connor were appointed as the Panel's press and media relations specialists in November 2023.

4.4.1 How effective was this?

Throughout their tenure, Brown O'Connor successfully gained media exposure for the Panel, including:

- opinion pieces by the Co-Chairs published in local, national and international titles
- press releases on the Panel's key milestones and ministerial meetings
- television and radio interviews with the Co-Chairs
- media coverage of the Panel's *Interim Report* launch
- logistical support, advertising and development of communication materials for the Panel's outreach events

- stakeholder segmentation and targeted outreach
- production of various ‘call-to-action’ videos.

This media engagement enhanced the Panel’s visibility and credibility, ensuring its work reached a wider audience and was communicated in a clear, professional manner.

4.5 Establishment of a dedicated website

Following a successful independent accessibility audit, the Panel launched its website in May 2024.

The website can be found at: <https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/>

4.5.1 Target audience

The Panel’s target audience for its website included:

- any person who had been directly impacted by mother and baby institutions, Magdelene laundries and/or Workhouses in Northern Ireland (NI) between 1922 and 1995
- any person who had been directly impacted by the pathways and practices related to one of these institutions, including:
 - the care system, fostering and adoption practices
 - related institutions such as ‘baby homes’
 - private nursing homes
 - cross-border and international transfers of women and children
- any family member intergenerationally affected by the experience of a loved one
- any person who had worked or volunteered in or lived in close proximity to the institutions who could share any relevant information, knowledge or memories about their practices.

The Panel took a flexible approach to its Terms of Reference, and also engaged with people whose experiences, while outside its formal remit, were considered important to the overall investigation. This included people impacted by forced family separation in a non-institutional setting.

The Panel also aimed to engage with the media and researchers.

4.5.2 Website development

The website was developed in three phases, outlined below.

4.5.2.1 *Phase One: Launch structure*

At this stage, the Panel's messaging aimed to be clear, concise and compelling, with a strong call to action for individuals to participate in the Panel's work.

- The WG informed the public about what the Panel was appointed to do, who individual Panel members were, the Panel's Terms of Reference, what their objectives were and what they had achieved so far.
- The WG provided information on how members of the public could become involved in the Panel's work – how they could engage with the Panel and how they could provide testimony.

4.5.2.2 *Key messaging*

Key messaging focused on:

- the purpose and values of the Panel
- the benefits to victims-survivors of engaging with the Panel
- the non-adversarial and trauma-sensitive design of the testimony process
- explaining the end-to-end process for an individual participating in the Panel's testimony process
- how to access existing support services.

4.5.2.3 *Videos*

In September 2024, promotional videos were produced and published on the Panel's website. These included:

- **What the testimony process looks like**
Testimony Facilitators Dr Megan Kelly and Dr Olivia (Livi) Dee talked about what the process of giving testimony to the IP involved.

- **Call to action from victims-survivors**

Victim-survivor representatives on the Panel Maria Cogley and Paul McClarey shared their lived experiences, perspectives on the testimony process and advice to anyone who was considering sharing their testimony with the Panel. A further video, 'Our Voices Must Be Heard', was recorded by a birth mother and adopted adult on her lived experience and the importance of sharing experience with the IP.

These videos can be accessed on the Panel's website.

4.5.2.4 Phase Two: Access to records and institutional guidance

In October 2024, the Panel published guidance to make the process of seeking records more accessible for victims-survivors. It also published guidance relating to specific institutions, with information about what records exist, what they contain and how best to access them. The guidance was produced by the Panel's Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy and Legal Services WG.

The guidance about accessing records can be found at:

<https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/access-records>

The guidance about individual institutions can be found at:

<https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/node/68>

4.5.2.5 How effective was this?

Website metrics following the launch of the Panel's 'Access to Records Guidance' and 'Institutions' pages demonstrated strong interest and usage from victims-survivors and others engaged with the Panel's work. Between 8 October and 27 November 2024, the site recorded 704 visits, including 613 new users. This indicates that the website was an effective tool for raising awareness and providing accessible information to victims-survivors and their relatives seeking access to records.

Table 1 breaks down the number of views on each of the Panel's 'Access to Records Guidance' and 'Institutions' pages.

Table 1: Number of views of ‘Access to Records Guidance’ and ‘Institutions’ pages

Webpage	No. of views
Access to Records Guidance pages	
Access to records landing page	406
Accessing your records and your rights	143
Adoption records	125
Institutional records	118
Where to start	84
Civil records	57
Church and other records	44
Language and terminology	17
Institutions pages	
The institutions landing page	297
Mother and baby institutions/homes	135
Marianvale Mother and Baby Home, Newry	125
Belfast Midnight Mission Rescue and Maternity Home/Malone Place	113
Thorndale Industrial Home	62
Pathways and practices	57
Marianville Mother and Baby Home, Belfast	56
Workhouses	50
Thorndale House	48
Magdelene laundries	41
Hopedene Hostel	37
Mater Dei Hostel	27
St Mary’s Home, Derry/Londonderry	22
Deanery Flats	20
St Mary’s Home, Belfast	19
Kennedy House	18
Mount Oriel	16
St Mary’s Home, Newry	13
Other institutions	3
Total	2153

4.5.2.6 *Phase Three: Legacy site*

The Panel recognises that many victims-survivors and others impacted by the issues under investigation may still be unaware of the Truth Recovery Programme. It is hoped that those who follow the brave individuals who have already shared their lived experience will find the website to be a valuable resource as they navigate their own personal journeys.

The Panel also anticipates that researchers examining the history and impact of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries and Workhouses, and their pathways and practices, will find the website to be a useful foundation for further study.

To support these future uses, the Panel's website will remain live in its current form throughout the duration of the Truth Recovery Programme including the statutory public inquiry and the redress scheme.

Following this, the website will be transferred to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) and, subsequently, to the Truth Recovery Archive once it is established.

This approach will ensure that key resources will remain accessible beyond the conclusion of the Panel's work, including:

- the Panel's 'Access to Records Guidance'
- findings from the Panel's consultations on the following key issues:
 - permanent archive
 - access to records
 - experiences of giving testimony
- the Panel's interim and final reports.

4.5.2.7 *How effective was this?*

Since its launch in May 2024 through to September 2025, the Panel's website attracted:

- 8,000 unique users
- over 13,000 individual sessions
- over 34,000 content views.

This demonstrates the website's success as a central resource for victims-survivors and others who are engaged in the Truth Recovery Programme

It is hoped that, in the years to come, the archival value of the Panel's website will serve as a resource for informing and educating the public about the operations of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries and Workhouses, and their pathways and practices, in NI between 1922 and 1995.

It is also hoped that the website will become a valuable educational resource, supporting schools across NI to teach children about this difficult piece of our history. It may also serve as a reference point for further academic research.

The Panel's final report, which will remain accessible on the website, is hoped to be of use in higher education settings. In particular, it may support the training of social workers, community workers, psychologists and other related professions.

4.6 Establishment of a social media presence

In July 2024, the Panel launched social media accounts across Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) platforms.

The primary objective was to ensure that high-quality, engaging content was published on a regular basis in order to:

- raise awareness of the Panel's work and how people could participate in it
- increase the number of people who provided testimony to the Panel.

4.6.1 How effective was this?

The Panel's social media platforms were actively supported, with regular sharing of content that contributed to increased visibility and engagement. The Panel attracted:

- 416 Facebook followers, with over 181,000 content views
- 238 X followers, with over 99,000 content views.

While reach was strong, follower numbers indicate that there was scope to deepen engagement and convert awareness into active participation.

4.7 Direct engagement with victims-survivors

The Panel acknowledged the establishment of a Consultative Forum by TEO as a valuable step towards engaging with victims-survivors. While regular attendance averaged around 15–20 participants, it was noted that many victims-survivors, though registered and receiving updates, had not been actively participating in meetings. Given that 220 individuals had expressed interest in the Panel by registering for updates, the Panel saw an opportunity to broaden its outreach by establishing its own engagement platform. This allowed Panel members to better connect with those who had an ongoing interest in its work and to foster more inclusive and meaningful participation.

This led to the development of a bi-lateral engagement process, which included:

- **Formal engagements with victims-survivors**
Between April 2023 and February 2025, the Panel held nine formal meetings with individual victims-survivors or groups. Victim-survivor representatives on the Panel also had small group or individual meetings with victims-survivors.
- **Engagement with TEO's Consultative Forum**
Between May 2023 and May 2024, Panel members attended 11 meetings with TEO's Consultative Forum. (Meetings occurred less frequently between late 2024 and early 2025 as the Consultative Forum conducted a review of their procedures.)

Victim-survivor representatives regularly attended Consultative Forum meetings in their personal capacity as victims-survivors, ensuring that the Panel remained informed about key issues impacting the victim-survivor community.

- **Engagement events**
The Panel organised a series of online and in-person engagement events to consult with and inform stakeholders throughout the course of its work. These included:
 - **PRONI engagement event**
In February 2024, the first in-person engagement event was held at PRONI. It featured presentations from the Records and Archives WG, the PRONI project team, and officials from TEO. Attendees also participated in a guided tour of the PRONI facilities, which included an overview of the conservation process.
 - **Consultation events**
In September 2023, a consultation event was held with victims-survivors to help shape the testimony process. In February 2025, two consultation events – one online and one in person – were conducted to seek views to inform the Panel's recommendations for a permanent independent archive.

- **Panel update events**

The Panel hosted regular update events to share progress on the work of each of its WGs. A combination of online and in-person events took place in December 2024, March 2025 and June 2025.

- **Early access to the Panel's report**

Victims-survivors received exclusive early access to this report at a private launch event.

4.7.1 How effective was this?

The Panel's consultation and update events, combined with attendance at Consultative Forum meetings, broadened its reach, encouraged meaningful dialogue and informed key areas of work. These included the testimony process and recommendations for a permanent independent archive. Despite strong engagement from a core group, overall participation was lower than anticipated given the 220 individuals registered for updates, highlighting the challenges of bringing individuals forward to engage on such a sensitive subject.

4.8 Delivery of outreach events

In October 2024, the Panel hosted a series of four outreach events in Newry, Omagh, Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. These events provided an opportunity for victims-survivors and others impacted by the issues under investigation to meet Panel members and testimony facilitators, and to engage in discussions about the testimony process.

The sessions also supported individuals seeking assistance with accessing records. Attendees were signposted to the Panel's 'Access to Records Guidance', which is available on the Panel's website. Where appropriate, consent was sought to share contact details with access-to-records advocates from Adopt NI and WAVE, enabling tailored follow-up support.

Each event was supported by counsellors from the WAVE Trauma Centre, who were available to provide emotional support.

The venues were thoughtfully prepared to encourage engagement. A series of ten A1 Foamex display boards showcased key aspects of the Panel's work, complemented by information packs for attendees to take away and review in their own time. Comment cards were also provided, allowing individuals to express interest in being contacted about sharing their testimony.

Promotion for the events was carried out through the Panel's social media platforms, which encouraged sharing activity. In addition, paid classified advertisements were placed in local newspapers, some of which were picked up and featured as editorial content in the local press, helping to further raise awareness and reach a wider audience.

4.8.1 How effective was this?

The outreach events successfully provided a safe and supportive space for victims-survivors to engage with the Panel and learn about the testimony process. Forty individuals attended across the four locations, and 20 expressed an intention to provide testimony by completing comment cards. This reflects a meaningful step towards participation, though overall attendance highlights the ongoing challenge of encouraging individuals to come forward to discuss such a sensitive subject.

4.9 Targeted appeals

In late 2024, the Panel increased its outreach efforts through press and social media activity. It also introduced new messaging to broaden the scope of individuals the Panel wished to hear testimony from. These targeted appeals aimed to reach under-represented groups and individuals with relevant lived experience, including:

- members of the Protestant community
- professionals such as social workers, GPs, midwives, members of religious orders, clergy, volunteers, tradespeople, laundry customers and individuals living near the institutions
- individuals affected by forced family separation in other settings; for example, private nursing homes and private addresses
- the wider diaspora.

To support the Panel's targeted appeals, a range of communication channels were used to reach specific audiences and encourage participation in the testimony process. These included:

- engagement with the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church and Catholic Church to secure agreement for including the Panel's call to action in their official publications
- distribution of posters to 300 GP surgeries and local libraries across NI
- press releases distributed to local, national and international media outlets
- placement of editorial content in the Salvation Army War Cry magazine
- tailored messaging across the Panel's social media platforms, including a video appeal from Co-Chair Professor Leanne McCormick.

Figure 2 is a copy of the poster distributed to GP surgeries and libraries.

Figure 2: Poster distributed to GP surgeries and libraries

Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

The Truth Recovery Independent Panel, appointed by the Executive Office, is carrying out an independent investigation into **Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland from 1922 - 1995**, and their related pathways and practices, including the adoption and care systems.

We wish to to hear from:

- Any person who has been directly impacted ✓
- Relatives of those directly impacted ✓
- Any person who has worked or volunteered in, or lived close to one of these institutions ✓

If you would like to share your experience, please get in touch by Thursday 1st May 2025

Phone us on: 028 9052 0263

Email us at: testimony@independentpanel.org.uk

Write to us at:
Truth Recovery Independent Panel, 4th Floor, Equality House
7 - 9 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast, BT2 7DB

Visit our website: www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk

Find us also on:

4.9.1 How effective was this?

While it is difficult to measure the full impact of these efforts, the engagement with churches, GP surgeries, libraries and tailored social media messaging represented key steps towards reaching individuals who might not otherwise have engaged.

4.10 Stakeholder engagement

As part of its engagement strategy, the WG identified a comprehensive list of 427 potential stakeholders. **Table 2** breaks down the geographical areas the list covered.

Table 2: Stakeholder breakdown by geographical area

Location	No.
Northern Ireland	220
Republic of Ireland	13
Great Britain	66
USA	25
Canada	20
Australia	28
Europe	25
Rest of world	30
Total	427

In February 2025, targeted communications were issued to these stakeholders to offer information packs, posters, social media assets and the opportunity to invite Panel members to attend relevant group meetings. The stakeholder list included:

- victims-survivors' peer support groups
- women's groups and networks
- age sector networks
- community groups and networks
- rights-based organisations
- government departments
- local councils
- public bodies
- legal organisations and associations
- health and social care organisations and associations

- religious orders
- adoption agencies
- research institutions
- over 300 UK elected representatives, including Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), Members of Parliament, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the Senedd.

Figure 3 is a copy of the leaflet distributed to stakeholders who indicated that they wished to receive further promotional materials from the Panel.

Figure 3: Leaflet used for stakeholder outreach



**TRUTH RECOVERY
INDEPENDENT
PANEL**

We have been appointed by the Executive Office to carry out an independent investigation into Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland from 1922 - 1995, and their related pathways and practices, including the adoption and care system.

Our 10-person Independent Panel includes practitioners who are experts in six important areas and victim-survivor representatives with personal experience of institutionalisation, the care system, fostering and adoption practices.

HOW WE CAN HELP

Share Your Lived Experience

We are collecting testimony from people affected by the issues under our investigation, in a non-adversarial forum without challenge and with confidentiality as an option. This means your experience will be on record.

Access Personal Records

We want to help people to get access to records which could hold valuable information about their personal experiences and identity, such as their birth or adoption records.

We are developing guidance to make this process easier. We are also engaging with the institutions and organisations who hold these records.

Website:
www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk

Find us also on:  

4.10.1 How effective was this?

Despite the number of stakeholders contacted, the overall response rate was lower than anticipated. However, there were some areas of positive traction. Notably, several Irish centres and community groups based in England shared the Panel's messaging across their social media platforms. Additional engagement was observed from local women's rural network groups, local councils and MLAs, who also helped amplify the Panel's messaging through their online channels.

4.11 Public campaign highlighting closing date for registration

By December 2024, it became evident that the number of individuals coming forward to give testimony had plateaued, with 77 testimonies recorded to date. Despite increased press activity, growth in digital engagement and a rising number of mailing list subscribers, these efforts were not translating into additional testimonies.

Recognising the need for a more ambitious and far-reaching approach, the Panel secured agreement and funding for the launch of a final public campaign from February to April 2025. The campaign was designed to significantly increase participation and was centred around a clear call to action: 1 May 2025 as the final date to register interest in giving testimony.

A multichannel strategy was developed to maximise reach and frequency of messaging, targeting both previously engaged audiences and new groups. This final push aimed to ensure that as many voices as possible were heard before the testimony process closed.

Co-Chairs Professor Leanne McCormick and Professor Sean O'Connell highlight the testimony registration deadline

Mother-and-baby home survivors advised of deadline



TRUTH RECOVERY INDEPENDENT PANEL

The co-chairs of the panel - Prof Leanne McCormick and Prof Sean O'Connell - are urging survivors and their families to register in time to ensure their voices are heard

The primary objective of the public campaign was to reach as wide an audience as possible, while ensuring that outreach remained appropriate and manageable in line with the infrastructure, resources and support systems available for participants.

Complemented by an increased messaging campaign across the Panel's social media channels and co-ordinated press releases, the public campaign was delivered through three key platforms:

- leaflet drop
- digital campaign
- classified advertising campaign.

4.12 Leaflet drop

A large-scale leaflet drop was carried out across NI, with leaflets distributed to over 845,000 households.

Phase One, which commenced on 17 February 2025, targeted households in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry, reaching more than 254,000 households.

Phase Two, which commenced on 3 March 2025, covered the remaining areas of NI, reaching more than 590,000 households.

The leaflet was designed to encourage individuals to register their interest to give testimony ahead of the deadline. It included key information on how to register, contact details for the testimony team and guidance on available support services.

Figure 4 is a copy of the trifold leaflet distributed to every household in NI.

Figure 4: Trifold leaflet distributed to every household in Northern Ireland



4.12.1 How effective was this?

By the end of March 2025, the total number of testimonies taken or scheduled had risen to 146, an 89% increase over the three-month period from January to March 2025. Feedback from registrants indicated that the leaflet campaign played a significant role in this surge, directly influencing both general enquiries and expressions of interest from individuals within scope.

4.13 Digital advertising campaign

The Panel commissioned the design agency Navigator Blue to develop and implement a targeted digital campaign.

The campaign ran from 17 February 2024 to 31 March 2024 and was delivered across multiple digital platforms to raise awareness and encourage registration ahead of the 1 May deadline.

A central element of the campaign was a digital carousel video featuring a clear ‘call-to-action’ message. The video directed users to the Panel’s website, where they could access detailed information about the testimony process and find contact details to register their interest.

4.13.1 How effective was this?

- Facebook advertisements were viewed 11,727,303 times.
- YouTube advertisements were viewed 6,041,233 times.
- Google display advertisements were viewed 8,047,548 times.
- Paid Google searches generated 3,491 ‘clicks’ on advertisements taking people through to the Panel’s website.

While these figures demonstrate significant reach and visibility, few testimony participants referenced the advertising campaign as the source of their awareness about the Panel’s testimony process. This indicates that, despite strong figures for reach and visibility, this campaign had a modest impact on the number of people coming forward to provide testimony.

4.14 Classified advertising campaign

To raise awareness among the wider diaspora, the Panel placed classified advertisements in selected regional and international publications.

In England, Scotland and Wales, advertisements were placed during the week commencing 31 March 2025. Internationally, advertisements were published in Australia, Canada and the USA during the week commencing 7 April 2025.

These placements formed part of the Panel's strategy to ensure that individuals living outside NI who may have been affected were informed and encouraged to engage with the Panel's work.

4.14.1 How effective was this?

While the campaign ensured visibility across multiple regions, its overall effectiveness is difficult to determine. Despite the reach of these advertisements, only a limited number of testimony participants referenced the classified advertisements as the source of their awareness about the Panel's testimony process. This suggests that, although the strategy broadened geographical coverage, its direct impact on engagement was modest.

5.0 Evaluation of the engagement programme

5.1 Introduction

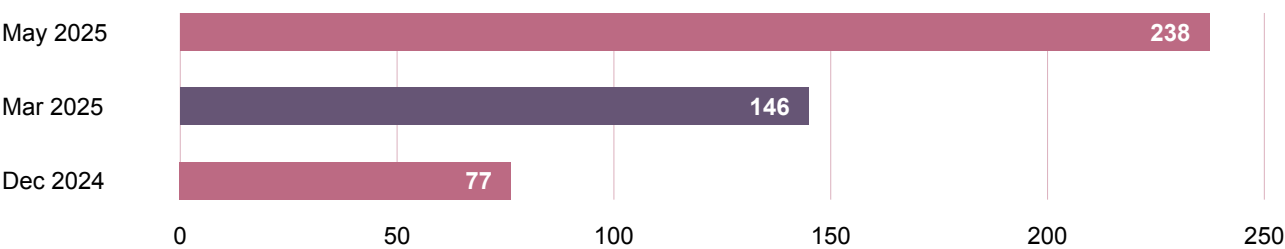
This section evaluates the effectiveness of the Panel's engagement programme against its two main objectives:

1. to publicise the Panel's work widely to encourage participation, including people with disabilities and those across the diaspora
2. to initiate events that foster public engagement in its work.

5.2 Overall impact

The programme delivered a significant increase in participation, particularly during the final campaign period. Figure 5 shows the number of testimonies taken or scheduled at key milestones since the testimony gathering process began in March 2024. The number of testimonies increased from 77 in December 2024 to 238 by May 2025, representing a 209% rise in just four months. This highlights the effectiveness of targeted, deadline-driven messaging in encouraging participation.

Figure 5: Number of testimonies taken and scheduled since March 2024



The leaflet drop to every household in NI emerged as the most effective activity, directly linked to the increase in registrations and enquiries. Many participants confirmed that this physical outreach was their first point of awareness about the Panel’s work.

Foundational tools such as the website, mailing list and newsletters played a vital role in maintaining transparency and building trust throughout the Panel’s term. The website attracted 8,000 visitors and over 34,000 views, while eight newsletters kept subscribers informed about the progress of the Panel’s work. Press and media engagement boosted the Panel’s credibility and extended the reach of their messaging both nationally and internationally.

Digital advertising achieved over 25 million views but had limited impact on the number of people providing testimony, a trend also seen with classified advertisements. Social media generated strong engagement but also did not convert into participation. Outreach events and targeted appeals broadened inclusivity and provided safe spaces for dialogue, though attendance remained modest. Despite these challenges, efforts to engage under-represented groups and diaspora communities were vital in promoting inclusivity.

5.3 Constraints

Diverse audience: The victims-survivors and others impacted by the issues under the Panel’s investigation span across multiple generations, backgrounds and locations, including those in the wider diaspora. This made it challenging to tailor activities and messaging to target specific groups without risking exclusion.

Time-limited mandate: As a time-limited body, the Panel had to balance inclusivity with the need to deliver its work within a fixed timeframe. This required broad and accessible messaging that could resonate widely while remaining sensitive to individual experiences.

Budget and approvals: The Panel initially requested £250,000 for the public campaign, including the leaflet drop, in March 2024. Approval was granted by TEO in January 2025, with a final budget of £80,000. While it is not possible to know exactly what impact an earlier campaign or a larger budget might have had on the number of people coming forward, the strong results following its launch suggest that starting sooner and having additional resources could have supported wider engagement, including reaching more people outside NI.

5.4 Lessons learned

The evaluation highlighted several key insights for future engagement programmes:

1. **Physical outreach is most suitable for sensitive engagement.** Activities such as leaflet distribution and in-person events proved the most effective in encouraging participation. Future campaigns should continue to invest time in strengthening partnerships with local community groups to maximise impact.
2. **Foundational tools remain vital.** The website, mailing list and newsletters were highly effective in maintaining transparency and providing reliable information. These should continue to be core elements of any future programme.
3. **Online visibility does not guarantee action.** While digital activity reached large audiences, it did not lead to significant numbers of people coming forward. This underlines the need for clear calls to action and complementary offline activities when dealing with sensitive engagements.
4. **Inclusivity requires sustained effort.** Targeted outreach helped broaden engagement with under-represented groups and diaspora communities, but building trust takes time. Future programmes should plan for ongoing, tailored engagement to ensure these voices are heard.
5. **Timely funding is critical.** Early approval of resources for public campaigns is essential to allow sufficient time for outreach and to maximise participation.

6.0 Conclusion

The engagement programme successfully met its core objectives and delivered a significant increase in the number of testimonies, particularly during the final campaign period. The sharp rise in participation, driven by a combination of consistent foundational communication and high-impact physical outreach, demonstrates the value of using multiple channels of communication for sensitive engagement.

While digital channels achieved broad visibility, the evidence shows that direct, tangible outreach remains the most effective way to prompt action in contexts requiring trust and personal connection. Foundational tools such as the website and newsletters were essential for transparency and credibility, while press and media coverage extended reach beyond NI.

Despite constraints related to time, budget and approvals, the programme achieved significant results. These outcomes underline a key lesson: early investment in resources and planning is critical to maximise engagement and inclusivity. Future programmes should build on these insights by combining a strong digital presence with targeted, community outreach and sustained efforts to engage under-represented voices.

The WG extends its sincere thanks to everyone who registered for updates through our newsletters, attended outreach events, engaged with our social media, visited our website or responded to our public campaign messaging. We hope the information provided helped all those who engaged to make informed choices and better understand the Panel's work.

Thank you.

Chapter 5

Records and Archives
Working Group



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Chapter content

This chapter discusses:

- 1.0** Role of the Working Group
- 2.0** Membership
- 3.0** Records processed by PRONI on behalf of the Panel
- 4.0** Privately-held records
- 5.0** Public records
- 6.0** Cross-border records
- 7.0** Permanent archive
- 8.0** Consultation events
- 9.0** Future management and retention of public records
- 10.0** Records of the IP

1.0 Role of the Working Group

The Records and Archives Working Group (WG) of the Independent Panel (IP) was established with the following functions and objectives:

- to liaise with the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) on identifying, accessioning, cataloguing and digitising of records relevant to the work of the Panel
- to liaise directly where appropriate with relevant institutions, religious orders, dioceses, private agencies or other organisations in relation to records and archives which may be relevant to the work of the Panel
- to identify research priorities within the relevant collections and to provide advice and guidance on how all stakeholders can best contribute to the Panel's objectives in this regard
- to assess and analyse relevant records, with the assistance of nominated researcher(s), and to contribute towards the Panel's various findings and reports

- to consult relevant parties and to make recommendations regarding long-term provision for a comprehensive repository of records relating to the institutions and associated pathways and practices, institutional and adoption records, and other records relating to children in state care
- to liaise as required with other Panel WGs; provide advice, guidance and updates throughout the duration of the Panel's work; and to contribute to the achievement of the Panel's Terms of Reference.

2.0 Membership

The Records and Archives WG consisted of:

- Dr Mark Farrell – WG Chair and archivist
- Professor Leanne McCormick – Panel Co-Chair.

The WG was assisted by researcher Dr Caitlín Smith.

Throughout the lifetime of the Panel, the WG conducted its business in close co-operation with the Truth Recovery team at PRONI. We are grateful for the support received from:

- Joy Carey – Project Manager and Senior Archivist
- Dr Patricia Marsh and Dr Declan O'Doherty – Research Officers
- Morery Stewart and Becky Cruze – Archivists
- Anne Craig – Operational Team Leader
- Terry O'Reilly, Paddy Smyth and Kyle Donegan – Administrative Officers, Operational Team (digitisation and transcription)
- Emily Mullin – Project Conservator
- Michelle Kelly – Administrative Officer, Research Support.

3.0 Records processed by PRONI on behalf of the Panel

Table 1 shows the number of records processed by PRONI in order to facilitate the work of the IP. Conservation work was carried out in cases where this was deemed necessary for the physical safeguarding of the records. Digitisation figures show the number of records (e.g., registers or files) plus the number of individual digital images created (e.g., individual pages within a register or file).

The table lists records from both public and private sources. Further details with regard to each set of records are provided later in this chapter.

Appendix 1 provides details of the content of each type of record that has been digitised by PRONI.

Table 1: Number of records processed by PRONI to facilitate IP work

	No. of records acquired: 5,700			54,620
	Conservation	Catalogued	Digitised	No. of digital images
Good Shepherd Sisters	1	2,293	2,293	14,107
Marianville Mother and Baby Home, Belfast PRONI Ref: D4912/2	—	5 registers 934 admission records 3 finance records	5 934 3	842 6,486 256
Marianvale Mother and Baby Home, Newry PRONI Ref: D4912/1	—	7 registers 869 admission records 4 account books 8 income and expenditure sheets	7 869 4 8	665 2,634 493
Good Shepherd Sisters St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Derry/Londonderry D4912/6	—	168 index cards 3 registers 194 files	168 3 194	335 209 793
Good Shepherd Sisters St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Belfast D4912/5	1	1 register 25 files	1 25	177

	No. of records acquired: 5,700			54,620
	Conservation	Catalogued	Digitised	No. of digital images
Good Shepherd Sisters St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Newry D4912/7	—	1 register 13 files	1 13	50 190
Sacred Heart Children's Home, Belfast D4912/3	—	2 registers	2	287
Adolescent Centre, Belfast D4912/4	—	55 files 1 account book	55 1	666 24
Sisters of Nazareth	17	227	216	13,540
Nazareth House, Portadown D4914/4	—	1	1	71
Nazareth House, Fahan, Co Donegal D4914/3	2	21 registers 67 Files	21 67	2,796 1,122
Nazareth House, Sligo* D4914/5	2	57	46	495
Nazareth Lodge, Belfast D4914/6	3	15	15	2,339
St Joseph's Termonbacca, Derry/Londonderry D4914/7	2	31	31	3,115
Nazareth House, Ormeau Road, Belfast D4914/1	2	22	22	2,189
Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Derry/Londonderry D4914/2	6	13	13	1,413

	No. of records acquired: 5,700			54,620
	Conservation	Catalogued	Digitised	No. of digital images
Family Care Adoption Services	1	—	1,576	7,756
Mater Dei Hostel	—	—	1,563 index cards	4,467
St Joseph's Babies' Home, Belfast	—	—	9 registers	2,514
Diocesan Orphan Society	1 page	— —	3 volumes 1 folder of documents	775
Family Routes	—	979	979	5,560
Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Society and Board of Responsibility D4911/1	—	15 minute books 3 welfare case registers	15 3	2,706 296
Church of Ireland Adoption Society	—	955 index cards	955	1,884
Hopedene Hostel D4911/2	—	3 registers 1 folder of documents	3 1	606 17
Kennedy House D4911/3	—	2 registers	2	51
Salvation Army	1	—	56	5,609
Thorndale House	1	—	Entries from 47 statement books 9 registers	4,787 822
Church of Ireland Representative Church Body Library, Dublin	—	45	45	1,446
Church of Ireland Rescue League minute books	—	2 minute books	2	396
Moral Welfare Council (Northern Ireland) and Moral Welfare Association Northern Diocese Executive Committee	—	3 minute books 40 annual reports/ accounts	3 40	365 685

	No. of records acquired: 5,700			54,620
	Conservation	Catalogued	Digitised	No. of digital images
Catholic Church	—	34	64	3,101
Milltown Cemetery	—	—	30	285
Parish registers associated with mother and baby institutions	—	10 registers	10	1,944
St Joseph's Children's Home	—	13 files	13	307
St Joseph's: inspection reports	—	11	11	565
Legion of Mary	5	25	25	2,757
Mater Dei Hostel minute books PRONI Ref: D4855	5	25	25	2,757
Department of Health	1	20	1	71
Ministry of Home Affairs, Anatomy Act Notebook (1937–2006)	1	1 register	1	71
Official files Social Work Advisory Group, etc.	—	19	—	—
Department of Finance	—	2	2	2
Valuation records (pertaining to institutions)	—	2 files	2	2 (PDFs)
Belfast City Council	—	—	135	135
City Cemetery burial records	—	—	135	135 (PDFs)
Derry/Londonderry City and Strabane City Council	75	75	75	ongoing
Welfare Committee minute books	75, dis- and rebinding required.	75	75	ongoing
Southern Health and Social Care Trust	—	40	—	—

	No. of records acquired: 5,700			54,620
	Conservation	Catalogued	Digitised	No. of digital images
Daisy Hill Hospital	—	3 maternity registers 37 memorandum books of birth and stillbirth Mortuary registers (yet to transfer)	—	—
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	—	165	5	332
Mount Oriel Hostel	—	5 files	5	332
Jubilee Maternity (City) Hospital	—	39 registers	—	—
Mater Maternity Hospital	—	6 registers	—	—
Royal Maternity Hospital	—	115 registers and baby charts	—	—
Private deposits from affected persons	—	9	9	204
3 individual collections	—	9	9	204

*Only information pertaining to Northern Ireland citizens has been digitised from this collection.

4.0 Privately-held records

The Executive Office (TEO) commissioned an initial survey of records held by institutions and organisations which was carried out by PRONI following the enactment of the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which states that records relating to relevant institutions must not be destroyed and must be properly protected and safeguarded. On foot of the survey findings, the Panel and PRONI engaged with the various organisations and institutions to secure agreement for their records to be digitised, catalogued and made available to the Panel.

It is important to note that, throughout this process, ownership of the records remained with the various institutions and organisations. Requests for access by individuals seeking their personal records continued to be routed through the relevant institution or organisation during the entire process.

As it did not have statutory powers to oblige private organisations to share records, the Panel is very appreciative of the co-operation received from the various institutions and agencies that agreed to make their records available. All organisations had legitimate concerns for confidentiality and for ensuring that sensitive private information was properly managed and protected at all times. This was achieved through detailed data-sharing agreements which were signed as appropriate by the relevant organisations, PRONI and the Panel.

A summary of the engagement between the Panel, PRONI and the various organisations (public and private) is provided below. This information is accurate as of December 2025.

4.1 Good Shepherd Sisters

- Private deposit agreement with the Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS) states that PRONI is to retain a closed copy (that is, not open to the public) of the records for permanent preservation in digital format. Any requests for access to the GSS information held by PRONI must be referred to the GSS for consideration.
- Further relevant information may be held by the GSS, for example at the GSS archive in Limerick.
- TEO met with the legal representative of the GSS, who has advised that PRONI can undertake verification for applications to the Truth Recovery Redress Service, using data from the digitised GSS records held by PRONI.
- The GSS have been provided with a digital copy of all their records that have been digitised by PRONI, for access use and to minimise the need for handling of the original records.
- Physical originals are being returned to the GSS.
- Physical originals are not stored in an environmentally controlled archive. It is recommended that the records are stored in an archive environment, to support their security and ongoing preservation.

4.2 Sisters of Nazareth

- PRONI has digitised records of Sisters of Nazareth institutions in Northern Ireland (NI), plus Nazareth House in Fahan, Co Donegal and Sligo. Only entries pertaining to NI were digitised for Nazareth House, Sligo.

- Private deposit agreement with Sisters of Nazareth states that PRONI is to retain a closed copy of the records for permanent preservation in digital format.
- Sisters of Nazareth have been provided with a digital copy of all their records that have been digitised by PRONI, for access use and to minimise the need for handling of the original records.
- Physical originals have been returned to Sisters of Nazareth in Dublin.
- Physical originals are stored in an office environment in Dublin, not in an environmentally controlled archive. It is recommended that the records are stored in an archive environment, to support their security and ongoing preservation.

4.3 Family Care Adoption Services

- PRONI has digitised records for St Joseph's Babies' Home, Belfast (admission and discharge records, plus adoption slips) and for the Diocesan Orphan Society (case registers and baptismal records).
- Mater Dei Hostel index cards (admission information) have also been digitised and are in the process of final quality assurance (QA) at PRONI (as of December 2025). The Mater Dei physical originals are to be returned to Family Care Adoption Services (FCAS) on completion of the QA process.
- FCAS will be provided with a digital copy of all its records that have been digitised by PRONI, for access use and to minimise the need for handling of the original records.
- Data-sharing agreement with FCAS states that PRONI cannot retain a copy of the records for permanent preservation in digital format – digitisation has been undertaken to enable digital access to the information for IP use only.
- FCAS has indicated that they do not wish PRONI to retain a copy of the records or be involved in the redress verification process.
- Physical originals are being returned to FCAS. They are stored in a commercial out-storage facility in Belfast. PRONI has no security concerns regarding this facility but it is recommended that the records are stored in a non-commercial, statutory archive environment, considering their historical and personal value and significance.
- Digitisation of adoption-specific records held by FCAS (such as adoption social work case files) is paused pending Department of Health reconsideration of Regulation 16 of the Adoption Agency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. The Department is considering an amendment to the Regulations to enable records (or copies of records) to be transferred to PRONI for permanent preservation.

4.4 Family Routes

- Records of Hopedene Hostel, Kennedy House (admission records) and the Church of Ireland (Col) Rescue League or Family Welfare Society (registers of expectant mothers and welfare cases) have been digitised by PRONI. Adoption index cards (a–z by birth surname, and a–z by adopted surname) have also been digitised.
- Private deposit agreement with Family Routes states that PRONI will retain the physical originals (however, the ownership and data controllership is retained by Family Routes).
- PRONI has provided a digitised copy to Family Routes for their use. PRONI has also digitally preserved the master copies of the records within its digital repository.
- TEO, the Department of Justice and PRONI met with Family Routes to request that PRONI assist in the standardised redress verification process. Family Routes have agreed in principle and are to confirm the approval of their Board of Directors and of the Col.
- Digitisation of adoption-specific records held by Family Routes is paused pending Department of Health reconsideration of Regulation 16 of the Adoption Agency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. The Department is considering an amendment to the Regulations to enable records (or copies of records) to be transferred to PRONI for permanent preservation.
- Physical originals (of records pertaining to adoptions) are not stored in an environmentally controlled archive. It is recommended that the records are stored in an archive environment, to support their security and ongoing preservation.

4.5 Salvation Army

- Records have been digitised, by PRONI staff, on-site at Salvation Army headquarters in London for Thorndale House (entries from 68 volumes of statement books, registers of mothers and registers of babies, plus 'New Assisted Cases').
- Data-sharing agreement with the Salvation Army states that PRONI cannot retain a copy of the records for permanent preservation in digital format; digitisation has been undertaken to enable access to the information for IP use only.
- The Salvation Army has indicated that they do not wish PRONI to be involved in the redress verification process.
- The Salvation Army will be provided with a digital copy of its records that have been digitised by PRONI, for access use and to minimise the need for handling of the original records.

- Physical originals are stored at the Salvation Army Heritage Centre in its headquarters at Denmark Hill, London. They are in an environmentally controlled archive and PRONI has no preservation concerns.

4.6 Col Representative Church Body Library

- Records have been digitised on-site at the Representative Church Body (RCB) Library by the RCB Library themselves (minute books and annual reports and accounts of the Col Rescue League and the Moral Welfare Council and Associations). PRONI has been provided with master copies (uncompressed and in file format suitable for digital preservation use).
- Private deposit agreement with Col RCB states that PRONI will retain a copy of the records for permanent preservation in digital format.
- Physical originals are stored at the RCB Library in Dublin. They are in an environmentally controlled storage room and PRONI has no preservation concerns.

4.7 Barnardo's

- Barnardo's has provided a 'statement in response to a request from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland'.
- It has confirmed that all of the 22 mothers, and/or their children, who were transferred from Hopedene to Barnardo's for support, from the 1950s to 1980s (data for whom was transferred to Barnardo's by PRONI with the consent of Family Routes, who are the data controller for this information), have been matched with Barnardo's records held in the Barnardo's 'Making Connections' archive in London.
- On the basis of legal advice received, Barnardo's has opted not to provide access to the complete case files for use by the IP.
- Barnardo's has provided PRONI and the IP researchers with contextual information relating to Deanery Flats, and statistical information regarding admissions of children into the Manor House, Ballycastle, and the ages of those children on admission.
- Barnardo's records (including individual case records) are stored at the Barnardo's 'Making Connections' Centre in London. They are in an environmentally controlled archive and PRONI has no security or preservation concerns about these records or their care.
- Barnardo's has advised PRONI and the IP that 'We welcome enquiries for access to records from anyone who has been in our care or supported by the charity'.

4.8 Diocese of Down and Connor

- For St Joseph's Children's Home, case records (13 files for infants under one year of age), which were deposited in October 2025, are in final QA stage following their digitisation at PRONI (as of December 2025). The physical originals are to be returned to the Down and Connor Diocesan Archive following this process.
- For Milltown Cemetery, digital images, scanned from the Public Ground registers (1921–86), plus spreadsheet transcriptions, have been deposited in PRONI by the diocese. The originals were digitised by the Ulster Historical Foundation on behalf of the diocese. The diocese plan to make the data publicly available and searchable online. The original volumes are stored in a secure vault in the diocesan offices in Belfast. PRONI has no security or preservation concerns regarding the storage of these records.
- Other original, physical copies of the Milltown registers, plus other historical records pertaining to burials and administration of the cemetery, are stored (inappropriately, in PRONI's opinion, for records of their date and significance) in the cemetery office, Milltown. A representative of the diocese advised that these records would be moved to the secure vault in the diocesan offices.
- For Holy Rosary Parish, baptism registers, covering the Truth Recovery Programme (TRP) 1922–95 period, were digitised by PRONI.
- Private deposit agreement with the Diocese of Down and Connor states that PRONI is to retain a closed copy of the records (all of the above) for permanent preservation in digital format. For the Holy Rosary baptism records, PRONI is permitted to retain only the birth entries pertaining to Truth Recovery matters.

4.9 Archdiocese of Armagh

- For Bessbrook Parish (Lower Killeavy), Newry, baptism registers and one burial register (for Carrickcruppen Cemetery, St Malachy's), covering the 1922–95 period, were digitised by PRONI.
- For Cloghogue Parish (Upper Killeavy), Newry, baptism registers, covering the 1922–95 period, were digitised by PRONI.
- Private deposit agreement with the archdiocese states that PRONI is to retain a closed copy of the records (all of the above) for permanent preservation in digital format. For the baptism records, PRONI is permitted to retain only the birth entries pertaining to Truth Recovery matters.
- The physical original parish records are not stored in an environmentally controlled archive. They are stored in an office environment in the parochial houses of the parish to which they pertain. It is recommended that the records are stored in an archive environment.

4.10 Legion of Mary

- 22 minute books and three finance and account books for Mater Dei Hostel, dating from 1942 to 1997, were deposited with PRONI in 2022, as an outright gift by a private individual who wishes to remain anonymous. The records had been salvaged from disposal during a building clearance.
- After taking legal advice regarding data controllership of the information contained within these records, PRONI made contact with the Legion of Mary, Down and Connor Immaculata Comitium, Belfast and their legal representatives and has put in place an agreement.
- The agreement with the Legion of Mary states that PRONI will retain the physical records for permanent preservation. The Legion of Mary has been supplied with a copy in digital format. The Legion of Mary wishes to be contacted regarding any requests for access to the record collection.

4.11 Sisters of Mercy

- PRONI and the IP requested access to records relating to Our Mother of Mercy Convent, Kilmore Street, Newry and the Orana Children's Home, Newry.
- On the basis of legal advice received, the Sisters of Mercy have opted not to provide access to these records for use by the IP.
- The Sisters of Mercy facilitated a site visit by PRONI to the Mercy Archive in Dublin, where these records are held.
- The records are stored in an environmentally controlled archive and PRONI has no security or preservation concerns about these records or their care.

4.12 Queen's University Belfast

- In May 2024, the WG met with representatives of Queen's University Belfast (QUB) to discuss the issue of anatomical research and to establish if QUB held any records of relevance to the Panel's Terms of Reference.
- The QUB representatives outlined the history of anatomy teaching and body donation at the university, their work to identify and digitise relevant records, and the wider memorialisation programme which is being undertaken. QUB provided the Panel with a range of information, including detail on the scope of anatomy records held and copies of information released in response to relevant freedom of information requests.

- QUB has deposited PDF copies containing excerpts (entries relating to TRP matters only) from the following records with PRONI, via a private deposit agreement:
 - anatomy technician's logbook, 1927–82
 - two 'scribble books' – notebooks or diaries dating from 1938 and 1939.
- QUB has confirmed that IP researchers can access the data for their research needs, but all other requests for access must be referred back to QUB for consideration (as they are the data controller of the information).
- The Panel must protect personal data made available to them, through pseudonymisation, and further sharing is not permitted.

5.0 Public records

In addition to records from private institutions and organisations, the Panel also worked to identify and access relevant records held by public agencies, including government departments, courts, and Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs). Some of these records had already been transferred to PRONI in compliance with the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923, and the Panel worked with PRONI researchers to identify and assess such records.

The Panel was conscious, however, of the potential for relevant records to have remained within the originating departments, due to oversight or poor record-keeping practices in the past.

5.1 Government departments

Letters were issued by PRONI on 21 March 2023 and 14 October 2024 to all NI government departments, requesting checks of all business areas for records relating to the TRP.

A letter was issued from PRONI to departments on 19 December 2023, informing them of the data-sharing agreement between PRONI and the IP to enable the Panel to have full research access to all official records (open and closed) currently held at PRONI.

Joy Carey of PRONI attended a meeting of the Information Management Council on 11 October 2023, presented on the Truth Recovery records work being undertaken by PRONI and made a request for relevant records to be shared .

All departments responded to queries from PRONI to the effect that no relevant records could be identified, with the exception of the Department of Finance and the Department of Health, as detailed below.

5.1.1 Department of Health

- An Anatomy Act register and 19 files relating to Health and Social Services inspections of institutions during the 1980s and 1990s have been officially deposited with PRONI.
- The Anatomy register is arranged per academic year, covering the period from the 1950s to 2006, and lists body donations received by QUB each year. It also has some statistical data per academic year.

5.1.2 Department of Finance

- Two files relating to valuation inspections of institutions during the 1980s–2000s have been officially deposited with PRONI.

5.2 Health and Social Care Trusts

On 9 February 2024, the Department of Health Looked After Children and Adoption Policy Unit wrote to the Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs), requesting engagement with PRONI to assist in the identification of relevant records.

During summer 2024, data-sharing agreements were put in place with each of the Trusts to enable PRONI to assess the extent, condition and storage of looked-after children and adoption records.

Preservation surveys have been completed by PRONI for all five Trusts which hold adoption records in their capacity as registered adoption agencies. The reports have been shared with TEO, Department of Health, the IP, and the Trusts themselves.

Among the findings of these surveys were inconsistencies in physical storage of records, lack of consistent or reliable lists or catalogues, and lack of staff resources to locate and retrieve records. All such issues impact negatively on the ability of the Trusts to respond in a timely and accurate manner to requests for information from individuals seeking access to their personal files.

Arrangements for the storage, safeguarding and cataloguing of adoption records, and arrangements for providing access, are relevant to the Panel's recommendations for the establishment of a permanent Truth Recovery Archive (see below). In the immediate term, all Trusts should be cognisant of the findings of the survey reports and of their obligations under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022, and should take steps to urgently address the recommendations made by PRONI as a result of the site assessments.

The Panel welcomes steps that have already been taken to address some of the issues that have been identified. The Western HSCT has allocated funding to address

shortcomings relating to the storage of records in Omagh, and appropriate remedial action is now underway in this regard. The Panel also notes that TEO, the Department of Health and the individual Trusts are in discussions with PRONI regarding the compilation of a centralised index of all adoption-related records. This work will be of significant benefit to the public inquiry and redress scheme, as well as to affected persons who seek access to their records.

The following records have been gathered from HSCTs. PRONI has requested checks be made for any further records relevant to TRP matters.

5.2.1 Southern HSCT

- Two maternity registers, one maternity theatre book and 37 memorandum books of birth and stillbirth have been received by PRONI as an official deposit from Daisy Hill Hospital Maternity Department. They cover 1979–91. They were received into PRONI on 8 December 2025. Two mortuary registers from Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry, dating from 1971–84 and 1986–92, were assessed as relevant to the TRP by PRONI staff on 24 July 2025. They are yet to transfer to PRONI (at the time of writing).

5.2.2 Belfast HSCT

- This Trust supplied five files of monitoring reports, relating to Mount Oriel Hostel, created between 1974 and 1986 by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board.
- There were also 65 maternity hospital registers and labour ward registers (1967–2006) for the Mater Infirmorum Hospital Maternity Unit, Jubilee Maternity Hospital (Belfast City Hospital) and the Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast (there are gaps in the date run).
- In addition, the Trust provided 55 volumes of baby charts (1935–62) for the Royal Maternity Hospital (there may be some gaps in the date run).
- The Trust also provided 31 booklets of stillbirth certificate counterfoils (1973–96) for the Royal Maternity Hospital (there are gaps in the date run).
- Eight ring binders of printouts from a database index of maternity patients for Belfast’s Jubilee Maternity Hospital (1970–87) were made available (there are gaps in the date run).
- Other resources included maternity doctors’ case books, annual reports and statistics.
- A baptism register (Col) for babies baptised in the Jubilee Maternity Hospital 1951–74 was also provided (there are gaps in the date run).

5.3 Local authorities

PRONI wrote to the 11 NI local councils on 13 June 2025, requesting that thorough checks be made for any relevant records. Nil returns were received from nine councils. The following records have been made available to PRONI and to the IP.

5.3.1 Belfast City Council

Burial and cremation data has been provided to PRONI for burials within municipal cemeteries, or relating to the cremation of former ‘residents’ of institutions.

135 scans of individual burial orders, which relate to the burial of former ‘residents’ of institutions, have been provided to PRONI.

5.3.2 Derry/Londonderry City and Strabane District Council

75 Londonderry Borough City Council Health and Welfare Committee minute books, from 1949–69, have been deposited with PRONI for digitisation. The records are to be disbound for digitisation by PRONI conservators. This work is ongoing as of December 2025.

5.4 NI Courts and Tribunals Service

The Panel and PRONI also held discussions with the NI Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) with regard to court-held adoption records. In particular, the Panel sought information regarding the number of adoption records held by NICTS, their location, physical condition, degree of organisation and procedures in place for individuals seeking access to their personal adoption information.

NICTS provided the figures set out in **Table 2** regarding the number of adoption files held at various court locations throughout NI.

Table 2: Number of adoption files held at NI court locations

Court	No.	Date range
Armagh	1,089	1931–95
Downpatrick	2,250	1931–95
Derry/Londonderry	2,236	1937–95
Antrim	160	1982–97
Belfast	2,727	1931–95
Omagh	1,578	1931–55
High Court	6,400	1959–95*
Total	16,440	

*Includes 20 files from the period 1953–58.

- The overall total is less than the General Register Office for Northern Ireland adoption figure of 18,398; this is explained by cases where a single file relates to siblings being adopted together.

Representatives of NICTS visited PRONI on 30 January 2025 to discuss the TRP and the Panel’s request for information relating to adoption records and related records held by the Service. There were discussions regarding legislative provisions governing access to court-held adoption records and agreement was reached for PRONI to conduct surveys of selected court locations where adoption records are stored. The locations nominated by NICTS were Downpatrick Courthouse, which was visited by PRONI on 20 May 2025, and Omagh Courthouse, which was visited on 8 July 2025.

PRONI prepared detailed survey reports for each location and made a series of relevant observations and recommendations regarding the storage arrangements and preservation of the records. The survey findings were provided to NICTS and the Panel.

Arrangements for the storage, safeguarding and cataloguing of adoption records, and arrangements for providing access, are relevant to the Panel’s recommendations for the establishment of a permanent Truth Recovery Archive. In the immediate term, NICTS should be cognisant of the findings of the survey reports and of their obligations under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022 and should take steps to address the recommendations made by PRONI as a result of the site assessments.

6.0 Cross-border records

The operation of mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, baby institutions and their related pathways and practices included cross-border movement of women and children. In many cases, religious orders that owned and managed the institutions are established on an all-Ireland basis, and many of the records relevant to the Panel's work are held outside NI. The Panel is grateful for the co-operation of those organisations that hold records in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and made them available for digitising by PRONI and for use by the Panel.

As outlined in section 4.2, the IP had access to records for Sisters of Nazareth baby institutions in Fahan and Sligo. However, many other relevant records are held by public agencies in RoI. At a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Dublin in September 2024, it was agreed that officials from both administrations would work closely on common issues relating to the TRP, including the availability of records. In this context, and in consultation with the Panel, representatives of PRONI and TEO met with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, in September 2025. PRONI submitted a list of institutions in RoI (in addition to those in Fahan and Sligo) where babies were transferred from NI. The relevant institutions, together with the approximate number of babies believed to have been transferred from NI, are set out in **Table 3**.

Table 3: RoI institutions to which babies were transferred from NI (whose records have not been accessed by the IP)

Name of institution	Address of institution	Approximate no. of babies
St Clare's Convent/Children's Home	Stamullen, Co Meath	150
Sisters of Charity St Patrick's Hospital/St Patrick's Guild	Temple Hill, Dublin and 50 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin	50
Sisters of Charity	82 Haddington Road, Dublin	1
Holy Faith Adoption Centre/Holy Faith Convent	46 Eccles Street, Dublin	2
St Vincent's Orphanage	North William Street, Dublin	1
Sisters of Mercy Convent	Dundalk, Co Louth	2
Dublin Catholic Protection Society/St Anne's Adoption Agency	30 South Anne Street, Dublin	15
Dr Goods Home St Anne's Adoption Society, Cork	Cork	1

In order to facilitate the future sharing of records with appropriate controls in place, it was suggested that a memorandum of understanding be put in place between TEO and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality in RoI. This would then be supplemented by specific data-sharing agreements between relevant organisations, such as PRONI and Tusla, to allow for the sharing of relevant information in specific circumstances. At the time of writing, discussions regarding this matter are ongoing.

The Truth Recovery team at PRONI has held a series of meetings with their counterparts at the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin. These meetings have discussed areas of common interest with regard to records and archives (such as access arrangements) in the context of the proposed permanent archive in NI and the National Centre for Research and Remembrance in Dublin.

In October 2024, representatives of the National Archives were invited to meet with the Panel. The National Archives updated the Panel on progress with regard to the National Centre for Research and Remembrance in Dublin, and there was a discussion regarding the Panel's ongoing work with PRONI and potential scope for ongoing co-operation.

7.0 Permanent archive

Under its Terms of Reference, the Panel was required to contribute towards legislation for the establishment of an independent permanent archive of historical institutional and adoption records, and other records relating to children in state care.

As part of this process, the Panel developed a list of suggestions for such an archive and circulated them as part of a consultation process with victims-survivors. The consultation document was issued in February 2025, with responses requested by 20 March 2025.

Consultation events were held on 27 February 2025, one in-person in Belfast city centre, and one online. At these events, the Panel outlined its suggestions for the proposed archive and attendees had an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.

Sixty-three responses were submitted as part of the consultation process. The responses were collated and assessed by the Panel and were circulated in the Permanent Archive Consultation Results Summary Document, which was issued in May 2025.

The Panel is very grateful to everyone who submitted responses as part of the permanent archive consultation process. The responses informed the Panel's deliberations with regard to the permanent archive, which resulted in a set of detailed recommendations being submitted to TEO. The recommendations relate to legislation which will be required to allow for the establishment of the permanent archive, access arrangements to the records it holds, and the ongoing management of the archive, including provision for direct victim-survivor involvement. The Panel also made a series of recommendations regarding the establishment and future management of the archive, which will not require legislative changes.

The Permanent Archive Consultation Document and Consultation Results – Summary Report are available on the Independent Panel's website.

The Panel's recommendations to TEO arising from the consultation process are noted in the Recommendations chapter of this report, and the full text of the recommendations are set out in **Appendix 2**.

After submitting its recommendations to TEO, the Panel was requested to contribute to a Strategic Case for the establishment of the archive. This document sets out in detail the rationale and justification for the establishment of the archive, identifies benefits and risks, and identifies various options and their associated advantages and disadvantages. The Strategic Case is being further developed and considered within TEO.

8.0 Consultation events

In addition to the dedicated consultation process relating to the permanent archive, the WG also participated in a number of consultations which focused on records and archives, including the following:

- In February 2024, victims-survivors were invited to an information event at PRONI, where they had an opportunity to meet with Panel members and PRONI staff, and to see PRONI's storage, digitisation and conservation facilities.
- In December 2024, PRONI issued a public call-out for records relevant to the Panel's work, requesting individuals or organisations to come forward if they held, or were aware of, records which were not already known to PRONI and the Panel.
- In April 2025, three Panel members attended a one-day conference in University College London entitled 'My Life, My Records'. This brought together care-experienced people, social workers and record-keepers to reflect on and learn from issues relating to record-keeping in the context of adoption, state care and related topics.
- The Records and Archives WG also contributed to several Panel presentations to the Consultation Forum and to other online and in-person updates to victim-survivor groups. The WG also responded to specific queries from individual victims-survivors on an ongoing basis.

9.0 Future management and retention of public records

Efficient management of public records is a core responsibility of all government departments and public agencies. PRONI offers a range of supports and guidance to public sector agencies, including the Northern Ireland Records Management Standard, Guidance on Retention and Disposal Schedules, and Guidance on the Transfer of Official Paper Records to PRONI.

Resource limitations mean that management of records in public sector agencies is subject to a number of shortcomings, including lack of adequate storage, poor organisation, lack of staff for record-keeping roles, and non-implementation of retention and disposal schedules.

Records held by public sector agencies which relate to personal lives, identities, family backgrounds and early life experiences are of significant importance to victims-survivors. As outlined above, PRONI's survey reports in relation to important personal records held by the HSCTs and NICTS identified a number of issues relating to the storage, organisation and safeguarding of such records.

The Recommendations chapter of this report addresses a number of issues relating to records and record-keeping within the public sector. Some of the most pertinent issues are addressed here, in the context of the WG's discussions and activities.

9.1 Adoption and care records

The Department of Health's current records retention policy stipulates that adoption case files should transfer to PRONI 75 years after the adoption order is made. Such transfer does not always take place as scheduled, due to record-keeping shortcomings and lack of resources. The Panel welcomes ongoing discussion between PRONI, the Department of Health and the individual Trusts with a view to agreeing an earlier transfer date for adoption records. Such arrangements will require a change to existing regulations and will impact on some practical record-keeping arrangements.

Future management of adoption and related records should be reviewed with a view to incorporating participatory record-keeping principles in the creation, management, access to and retention of such records.

Recent developments in England and Wales should influence this review, and the Department and the various Trusts should be guided by the good practice guidance for record-keepers and care professionals issued by the Archives and Records Association (available at: <https://www.archives.org.uk/resources#guidelines>).

The good practice guidance sets out a detailed list of recommendations relating to adoption and related records. The following selected recommendations are noted here:

- Record-keeping should be participatory – children and young people are at the centre. The voice, opinions and needs of every child and young person should be included in their records, in their own words and on their terms.
- Record-keeping should be person-centred – records are written with the person at the centre, explaining why actions were taken.
- Language should be caring, simple and understandable.
- Sensitive information should be collected and recorded in appropriate and trauma-informed ways to avoid creating unintentional harm.
- Information-sharing procedures with other organisations should be transparent.
- All records should be retained for at least 150 years from the date of birth of the individual.

Development of revised procedures for the creation, management and retention of adoption and related records will involve detailed deliberations and co-operation between several stakeholders, including the Department of Health, the HSCTs and PRONI. Adopted children, now adults, and other affected persons should have a central role in such deliberations.

As noted above, the proposed permanent archive should have a core role and responsibility in developing and implementing such guidelines and any procedures deriving from them. Recommendations in this report regarding adoption and related records should be read in the context of the overall recommendations regarding the establishment and operation of the permanent archive.

9.2 Medical records

Current Department of Health retention policy stipulates that GP medical records should be returned to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) when a patient dies or otherwise ceases to be a patient of the GP. The HSCB should retain such records, with some exceptions, for ten years thereafter. The HSCB was disbanded and its functions were transferred to the Department of Health in 2022.

Access to medical information is a core concern for adopted children, now adults, who often live their lives without any knowledge of family medical history or potential genetic or hereditary conditions.

In line with the participatory and person-centred record-keeping approaches recommended in this report, future policies regarding the management and retention of GP and other medical records should be informed by the needs of victims-survivors and adopted children, now adults. The Panel notes that the Department of Health is currently reviewing and updating its Records Retention Schedule. This review should seek and attempt to incorporate the views of affected persons with regard to the retention of records.

Recommendations in this report regarding medical records should be read in the context of the overall recommendations regarding the establishment and operation of the permanent archive.

10.0 Records of the IP

The WG devised a records management policy and a set of record-keeping guidelines for the IP. The Panel used Box, a secure document management and collaboration system, to create and manage its records during the course of its activities. This allowed for the secure upload and storage of all of the Panel's administrative records, as well as testimonies and digital copies of records made available to the Panel by PRONI and the various institutions.

The WG developed a Records Retention Schedule for the Panel's records, which was submitted to PRONI for approval. After the Panel has concluded its work, those of its records which are identified in the Records Retention Schedule as warranting permanent preservation will transfer to PRONI, pending the proposed establishment of the permanent Truth Recovery Archive.

Chapter 6

Recommendations



Chapter content

This chapter discusses:

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Recommendations to the public inquiry
- 3.0 Recommendations to the NI Executive
- 4.0 Recommendations for future independent panels
- 5.0 The Truth Recovery IP periodic recommendations

1.0 Introduction

The appointment of the Truth Recovery Independent Panel (IP) in April 2023 arose from Recommendation 3: An integrated Truth Investigation of the *Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland: Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability* report 2021.

This recommendation proposed an integrated truth investigation, comprising a non-statutory IP and a statutory public inquiry intended, at some point, to run concurrently. The recommendation endorsed that legislation required for the public inquiry and its Rules of Procedure be '*progressed urgently*'.

The Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability report published by the Truth Recovery Design Panel (TRDP) in 2021 states the following.



The work of an Independent Panel will be essential in sensitising and targeting the fact-finding investigations of a Public Inquiry, ensuring that the Public Inquiry's focus is rooted in the lived experiences and immense expertise of victims-survivors and relatives. Drawing on the testimony received and on its cataloguing and analysis of documentary records, the Independent Panel should recommend central questions and key issues for investigation by a statutory Public Inquiry to which the Independent Panel's work has given rise.

The IP's Terms of Reference were outlined by the TRDP in 2021.

An Independent Panel will:



Make recommendations regarding measures necessary to respond to, and prevent recurrence of, the human rights violation experienced, including periodic recommendations to the Public Inquiry, Ministers or any other state authority.

Unfortunately, as the public inquiry was not established in time to run concurrently with the IP, the IP have been unable to make periodic recommendations to the public inquiry. However, periodic recommendations have been made to the Executive Office (TEO) throughout the IP's tenure.

With the conclusion of the IP's work, this report makes final recommendations to the public inquiry and the Northern Ireland Executive.

2.0 Recommendations to the public inquiry

2.1 Operation of the public inquiry

Recommendation 1

The IP recommend that the public inquiry create a mechanism to afford victims-survivors core participant status.

Recommendation 2

The IP recommend that the public inquiry create a mechanism to receive and consider testimony given to the IP.

Recommendation 3

The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider the experience of victims-survivors from previous public inquiries in designing trauma-informed procedures for the reception of evidence so that mistakes of the past are not repeated.¹

Recommendation 4

The IP note the positive practices of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital inquiry with regard to the treatment of vulnerable witnesses and recommend that the public inquiry examine this model and follow best practice.

Recommendation 5

The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider fully the institutional records accessed, compiled and analysed by the IP.

2.2 Serious human rights issues

On the basis of its analysis of the testimony and archival records gathered, the IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate further the following serious human rights issues in particular.

2.2.1 In relation to oversight of the institutions

Recommendation 6

The IP's investigation points to a systemic failure on the part of the state to exercise effective oversight of the operation of the Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS) St Mary's institutions, the Thorndale Industrial Home, and the mother and baby institutions, as well as baby institutions, and over foster placements, boarding-out placements and adoptive placements. The IP consider this failure a serious human rights issue and recommend that the institutions be further investigated by the public inquiry.

2.2.2 In relation to the right to equality and non-discrimination

Recommendation 7

The IP's investigation suggests the very fact that the mother and baby institutions, St Mary's institutions and the Thorndale Industrial Home were permitted by the state to exist at all points to a systemic failure on its part to guarantee equal treatment and to prevent discrimination. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 8

The IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate where children with disabilities born to women admitted into mother and baby institutions were sent in those cases where family separation took place. The IP found very few records relating to the pathways taken by these children.

2.2.3 In relation to the right to life and the prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment

Recommendation 9

The IP suggest that no woman or girl should have been sent to the St Mary's institutions, whether by the state, or by her family, or because there was nowhere else for her to go. This is especially so given that these institutions were not properly regulated, and that there was, accordingly, no effective protection for individuals admitted against abuse and neglect. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 10

Many participants who engaged with the IP spoke of abuse, neglect and inadequate care in mother and baby institutions. In many cases, their experiences amounted to degrading treatment, especially given the level of vulnerability of the girls and women at the time. In some cases – as in the allegations made of sexual assault by Sister Z, which are discussed in detail in the chapter on the GSS Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast – the experiences described are likely to reach the threshold of inhuman treatment. The IP consider the treatment of girls and women who were admitted to the mother and baby institutions, including their time in maternity hospitals giving birth, to be a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry. In particular, the conduct of Sister Z in Marianville merits special attention, given the allegations of abuse made against her by women who spoke to the IP.

Recommendation 11

In terms of protection against abuse and neglect, the situation for children in both baby institutions and mother and baby institutions appears to have improved in line with better regulation and inspection from 1950. However, from 1972, the inspection regime became less effective. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 12

The IP's investigation suggests that there were systemic deficiencies in the regime for the selection and inspection of foster homes, boarding-out placements and adoptive homes, leading to failures to protect some children in these homes against abuse and neglect. The IP recommend that this be investigated by the public inquiry on the basis that foster homes, boarding-out placements and adoptive homes are part of the pathways of the mother and baby institutions.

Recommendation 13

The IP also recommend that the public inquiry investigate the drug trial that took place in 1962, involving young children, and led by scientists at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) on behalf of Glaxo Laboratories Limited, on the basis that the trial raises serious human rights issues.

2.2.4 In relation to the prohibition of forced labour

Recommendation 14

The IP's investigation indicates that labour laws were not enforced in the St Mary's institutions. In particular, women were required to carry out work for which they were not paid. Given that few women entered these institutions voluntarily, it is likely that many women experienced forced labour in them. The IP's investigation also suggests that women who worked in Thorndale Industrial Home were not paid. The IP consider the work done by women in these institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 15

The IP's investigation suggests that some pregnant women and new mothers were required to work in mother and baby institutions, and that some were sent to carry out domestic labour in local private homes. In some cases, the experience described may have amounted to forced labour in as much as it was involuntary and unpaid. Some of the work described – such as washing windows while standing on ladders or scrubbing floors – was manifestly unsuitable for pregnant women or women who had recently given birth. The IP consider the practice of making pregnant women and new mothers carry out these forms of labour a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

2.2.5 In relation to the right to liberty

Recommendation 16

The IP's investigation suggests that the state should not have committed girls and women to the St Mary's institutions or to the Thorndale Industrial Home. This practice was discriminatory in as much as it only affected girls and women, and it appears also that the institutions were not regulated or inspected effectively. Although girls and women were sometimes sent to these institutions for their own protection, alternative solutions should have been made available. The IP consider the practice of committing girls and women to these institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 17

The IP heard evidence of girls and women admitted to mother and baby institutions against their will. Some said they were prevented from leaving, and there is evidence that some who left were brought back by the police. Others said that they could not leave because they had nowhere else to go. In this context, the state's failure to put in place an effective system of support for one-parent families is particularly significant. Even though girls and women were not detained in the mother and baby institutions in a legal sense, the evidence seen by the IP suggests that their presence there can rarely be described as voluntary in any meaningful sense. In some cases, their experience may have amounted to unlawful deprivation of liberty. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

2.2.6 In relation to the right to respect for family life

Recommendation 18

The IP find that the practices surrounding the giving of consent to adoption resulting in family separation after a mother was admitted to a mother and baby institution raise serious human rights issues. The IP recommend that these practices be further investigated by the public inquiry. In particular, the practices of the social worker

anonymised in this report (as Social Worker A) merit special attention, given the concerns expressed by mothers with whom she had contact and by her social work counterparts who spoke to the IP.

Recommendation 19

The IP's scrutiny of the Marianville records indicate that between 1950 and 1970 it acted as a third-party adoption agency. This conclusion places the institution more centrally in the adoption process than the GSS have acknowledged in the past. The IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate this institution's dual role as a de facto adoption agency and as a mother and baby institution.

Recommendation 20

In the context of cross-border movement of children for adoption, the IP are concerned at the lack of evidence of compliance with requirements in the records of those institutions where this occurred. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that the public inquiry investigate compliance with the rules relating to cross-border movement of children organised by the institutions, the state and voluntary adoption agencies associated with their operation.

Recommendation 21

In the view of the IP, the question of consent needs always to be considered and understood in the broader societal context. This was in the context of prejudice and discrimination against girls and women generally, against 'unmarried mothers' in particular, and against their children. Reproductive justice evaded girls and women, with access to sex education, contraception and abortion all circumscribed. This was in a context in which social welfare provision for one-parent families was inadequate, and pursuit of a father for child maintenance entailed a risk of public humiliation for the mother. Taking these factors into account, the IP believe that even where, in a particular case, family separation was not forced in a technically legal sense, it does not necessarily follow that the adoption was voluntary in the true sense, or that the mother and the child were not victims of a harsh and unjust system. The IP recommend that in its investigation of adoption practices in mother and baby institutions and their pathways and practices, the public inquiry consider this wider context.

Recommendation 22

The IP did not receive co-operation from Barnardo's or the Sisters of Mercy in relation to the baby institutions they operated. On the basis that these institutions were part of the pathways of the mother and baby institutions and it would be artificial to exclude them, the IP recommend that the Sisters of Mercy baby institutions and Dr Barnardo's, Manor House, Ballycastle be investigated by the public inquiry. The IP note that they were not investigated by the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI). If legislative measures are necessary to permit this, the IP recommend that these be taken.

Recommendation 23

The IP suggest that a fuller analysis of the role of a small number of private nursing homes in facilitating family separations and an assessment of their role as de facto mother and baby institutions could be carried out by the public inquiry by checking the names of children born at the addresses of these nursing homes in birth registrations against the names of adopted children in the adopted children register.

Recommendation 24

Work on Recommendation 23 could be carried out in tandem with an examination of death certificates of any infant that died at Strand Nursing Home, Portstewart, during the period discussed in the chapter on Private Nursing Homes.

Recommendation 25

The IP suggest that births and subsequent adoptions linked to a small number of private addresses be examined by the public inquiry. This will confirm whether or not those private family homes were used as de facto mother and baby institutions for the concealment of pregnancies and family separation. The IP will provide details of these addresses for the public inquiry.

2.2.7 In relation to the right to respect for private life

Recommendation 26

The IP's investigation suggests that while, in general, Northern Ireland (NI) had a robust system of civil registration during the period 1922–95, there were some systemic weaknesses around the registration of births, making it possible for the births of some adopted children to be falsely registered. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 27

The IP have been able to locate death certificates for almost everyone whose death is recorded in the institutional records. The fact that some death certificates were not located may be explained by spelling variations or errors in the recording of names. The public inquiry may consider collaborating with the General Register Office Northern Ireland (GRONI) to identify the final missing registrations that relate to deaths that took place in NI. The IP did not find evidence of irregular or unlawful burials at the sites of any of the institutions. The IP's investigation suggests that, if the bodies were not claimed by their families, women, girls and their babies who died in the institutions were lawfully buried in ordinary burial grounds nearby or cremated by those operating the institutions or by the hospitals in which they died.

Recommendation 28

The IP were unable to inspect the Register of Stillbirths because it is not publicly accessible. The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider inspecting these registers, something the IP could not do, to identify any missing registrations for the sake of completeness.

3.0 Recommendations to the NI Executive

3.1 Relating to the public inquiry

Recommendation 29

The IP recommend the immediate appointment of the Chairperson of the public inquiry by the Executive Office (TEO). This will enable the Chairperson to engage in necessary foundational planning for the public inquiry, gathering of evidence and establishment of necessary support services for witnesses. The IP regret that the appointment of the Chairperson did not occur during our tenure. It was always the vision and recommendation of the Truth Recovery Design Panel that the synergy created by the overlap in these operations, approaches and workflow would benefit the overall truth recovery process.

Recommendation 30

The IP recommend that responsibility for release of testimonies for public viewing on the IP website be assigned by TEO to the Chairperson of the public inquiry when the inquiry begins. This relates only to the testimonies of participants who have consented to this. The IP hoped that this matter could have been dealt with earlier via discussion with the public inquiry's Chairperson. The IP are conscious that the Chairperson is likely to want these testimonies to be made available at a time when their publication does not interfere with the public inquiry's work.

3.1.1 Relating to inclusion of institutions and relevant persons

Recommendation 31

The IP recommend that Clogrennan Mother and Baby Institution in Larne, Co Antrim, be added to the list of institutions to be investigated by the public inquiry and to the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

Recommendation 32

The IP recommend that Thorndale Industrial Home in Belfast be added to the list of institutions to be investigated by the public inquiry and to the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

Recommendation 33

The IP recommend that the public inquiry review the list of private nursing homes it has identified for investigation as having acted as de facto mother and baby institutions. If it confirms that they did operate in this way, the IP recommend that they should be added to the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

Recommendation 34

The IP recommend that girls and women who gave birth in Workhouses and were separated from their children should be included, as should those children separated from their mothers, in the scope of the standardised payment scheme. There was no less pain and trauma as a result of family separation for a mother and her baby in a Workhouse infirmary than there was in a mother and baby institution.

Recommendation 35

The IP recommend that the category of baby institutions as pathways from mother and baby institutions be added to any list to be explored by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 36

The IP's investigation found that Barnardo's Deanery Flats was a facility that was established to support single mothers and ensure families remained together by offering vital support including an onsite nursery allowing mothers to go out to work. Unlike other mother and baby institutions investigated by the IP, Deanery Flats was not established to conceal pregnancy or promote and enable family separation. The IP recommend that Deanery Flats be removed from the list of institutions to be investigated by the public inquiry and from the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

3.2 Relating to civil registrations

Recommendation 37

The IP recommend that consideration be given by TEO to amending the law so that, in future, giving false information in the context of the registration of a birth is treated as a more serious criminal offence than has been the case historically.

Recommendation 38

The IP consider that access to civil registration information should be improved by removing distinctions between adopted people in access to birth information by reference to their adoption being before or after a certain date. The IP note that this differential treatment will be abolished when the Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 is commenced, and accordingly the IP recommend to the Executive that this occur as soon as possible.

Recommendation 39

The IP recommend that the practice of issuing short-form birth certificates to adopted people should be reviewed.

3.3 Relating to registration of all burials

Recommendation 40

It has not been possible to identify precisely where every person who died while ‘resident’ in the institutions was buried because in many private burial grounds, comprehensive burial records were not maintained. In private burial grounds, there is no requirement that all burials be registered. The IP recommend that the registration rules for public burial grounds be extended to private burial grounds, so that all burials in NI will be officially registered. The IP further recommend that measures be considered by the Executive to preserve the records of private burial grounds as public records so that future access may be guaranteed. Consideration should also be given to using information submitted to GRONI in ‘Disposal of Body’ forms to compile a burial and cremation database.

3.4 Relating to redress and reparations

Recommendation 41

The IP recommend that consideration be given to the introduction of a statutory right to support services for victims-survivors. The current short-term, temporary funding by TEO of existing support services is short-sighted in terms of strategic planning for the organisations involved. This also suggests a lack of validation of experiences and severity of impacts on victims-survivors.

Recommendation 42

The IP recommend that TEO progress discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions and their equivalent government counterparts outside the UK to ensure that applicants to the redress scheme will not be financially penalised and their state benefits will not be affected by receipt of a financial redress payment.

Recommendation 43

The IP recommend that TEO address the issue of non-payment of wages to women for daily manual work undertaken in the institutions. There is scant evidence that those girls and women were paid for the work or that superannuation payments were made by the institutions on their behalf. This has an impact on pension entitlement and economic status.

Recommendation 44

The IP recommend that TEO establish an effective mechanism and begin negotiations with those responsible for the management of the institutions to ensure there is financial contribution to the redress scheme.

Recommendation 45

The IP recommend that trauma-informed letters of acknowledgement and apology, from the First Minister and deputy First Minister, be written to families of impacted deceased relatives, recognising the suffering and undeserved shame and stigma they endured while alive, as an additional form of redress.

Recommendation 46

The IP recommend that work begin on the creation of an educational module relating to mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses and related pathways and practices for delivery on the Northern Ireland Curriculum at Key Stage 3, with input into its design by victims-survivors.

3.5 Relating to access to records

Recommendation 47

The IP recommend the **immediate** establishment of a central digital index of all NI adoption and care records to ease access to records in advance of the establishment of the permanent public archive. The IP note that TEO and the Department of Health met with the Health and Social Care NI (HSCNI) Trusts in January 2026 to discuss such a development. The IP recommend that the necessary resources be allocated as a matter of urgency, and that the Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) be involved in the planning and implementation of such an index.

Recommendation 48

The IP recommend that the necessary legislative measures be adopted to designate all institutional records as public records, and that they be stored in a single archive. This accords with the wishes of victims-survivors as expressed in the IP's consultation with them about archives. In our view, this is the best way to ensure the safety and security of the records while at the same time ensuring that access to them can be guaranteed in accordance with law. See the full text of the IP's recommendations for the permanent archive in **Appendix 2 of Volume 1** of this report.

Recommendation 49

The IP recommend the **immediate** provision of significant resources to the HSCNI Trusts to process requests for access to records within the three-month timeframe specified in the UK GDPR.

Recommendation 50

The IP recommend that HSCNI Trusts take **immediate** steps to urgently address the recommendations made by PRONI in relation to record storage. PRONI identified inconsistencies in the physical storage of records between different Trusts, absence of consistent or reliable lists or catalogues, and lack of staff resources to locate and retrieve personal records. The Trusts should be cognisant of their obligations under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022.

Recommendation 51

The IP recommend the **immediate** establishment of a straightforward mechanism of application for court records relating to adoption. The application process should be accessible, without charge, to birth mothers, and all adults adopted in NI, or their relatives if the adopted person is deceased. The process should enable applicants to receive copies of NI court records relating to their or their child's adoption, in full, within one month from the date of receipt under the UK GDPR.

Recommendation 52

The IP recommend that all records from care and court services pertaining to a victim-survivor's time as an adolescent be made available to the public inquiry. It is essential that all information be shared with any person who has spent time in any institution as determined by the court.

Recommendation 53

The IP recommend that the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) take **immediate** steps to urgently address the recommendations made by PRONI about record storage arrangements and preservation of court records. NICTS should be cognisant of their obligations under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022.

Recommendation 54

The IP recommend that a mechanism for access by adopted people to medical records of deceased parents be explored. The aim of this is to better balance their right to information about their identity and family health history against their parents' right to privacy and confidentiality of their own medical records. The full text of the IP's recommendations for the permanent archive includes details relating to proposed access rights and procedures.

Recommendation 55

The IP recommend access for immediate birth and adoptive family members to adoption and institutional records of deceased relatives' 'prescribed relatives', through development and implementation of regulations for the Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Recommendation 56

The IP recommend the **immediate** removal of means testing for legal aid for access to records requests by victims-survivors and their relatives, in relation to the institutions under scrutiny, related pathways and practices, and family separation. Although the Access to Records Guidance the IP has published includes advice on accessing remedies for failure to comply with access rules, we consider that access to these remedies is likely to be more effective if legal representation is provided. We recommend review and amendment of the relevant legislation. This recommendation was made by the IP in our interim report published in May 2024 and has yet to be actioned.

Recommendation 57

The IP recommend that TEO continue to support efforts to secure access to relevant records that are held in the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Co-operation to this effect was agreed at a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in September 2024, and subsequent discussions included the suggestion that a Memorandum of Understanding be put in place between TEO and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality in RoI, to be supplemented by specific data-sharing agreements between relevant organisations, such as PRONI and Tusla. The IP recommend that TEO pursue these discussions as a matter of urgency, with a view to expediting access to records such as those relating to St Joseph's Baby Home and the associated St Clare's Adoption Society, Stamullen, Co Meath (currently held by Tusla) and other relevant institutions.

Recommendation 58

The IP recommend that the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 be examined as a potential model for designating institutional records as public records. Section 3(1)(b) of that Act states that public records include 'records created by or on behalf of a contractor' in carrying out the functions on behalf of a public authority. The introduction of such a change in NI would have significant record-keeping benefits but also very significant resource implication for PRONI. The IP recommend that TEO consult with PRONI on such matters and that consideration be given to introducing such a change on a phased or sector-by-sector basis.

3.6 Relating to record-keeping

Recommendation 59

The IP recommend that the Department of Health, the HSCNI Trusts, and other public and voluntary agencies that create, maintain and manage records relating to institutions, adoption or state 'care' adopt participatory record-keeping approaches. This means that affected persons should have an input into the development of record-keeping policies and procedures, in discussion and consultation with the relevant public agencies and PRONI.²

Recommendation 60

The IP recommend that all government departments review arrangements relating to commercial off-site storage of records. The survey reports compiled by PRONI provide an insight into relevant storage and environmental issues. The driver for records management storage for statutory organisations at present is directly linked to cost and the Value for Money agenda. Preservation of records which are identified in Retention and Disposal Schedules for permanent or long-term preservation has been neglected. While commercial facilities will charge additional fees for environmentally managed storage facilities which meet the requirements for archival storage, it is the IP's view that such requirements should be met for those records identified for long-term retention. This is particularly the case when records relate to identity, personal experience, family history and early life experiences of affected persons.

Recommendation 61

The IP recommend that steps be taken and resources allocated to increase awareness of, and compliance with, record-keeping requirements in government departments and public agencies, which are often unaware at operational levels of matters such as records retention and disposal, legislative obligations, the role of PRONI as the national archive and the process of transferring records to PRONI, as per agreed Records Retention and Disposal Schedules, the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 and the Disposal of Documents Order (Northern Ireland) 1925. Budget and resourcing difficulties may account for some of these issues, which risk deliberate or accidental disposal or loss of records, including those relating to personal identity, memory, family history and early life experiences of affected persons.

Recommendation 62

The IP note that the Department of Health is in the early stages of reviewing and updating its Good Management, Good Records (GMGR) guidelines, which includes the Retention and Disposal Schedule for a wide range of health and social care records. The IP recommend that the revision of GMGR be based on participatory record-keeping principles. This means that affected persons should be consulted as part of the review process.

Recommendation 63

The IP recommend that the following points in particular be addressed as part of the review of GMGR:

1. Retention periods for adoption records, and the creation and management of adoption records generally, should be informed by recent developments in England and Wales regarding good practice guidance for record-keepers and care professionals issued by the Archives and Records Association.³
2. Transfer of adoption records to PRONI should take place earlier than the 75 years currently stipulated in the Adoption Agency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. This would facilitate the records being stored and preserved in an environment

appropriate to their age, to arrest or slow their material degradation, and to mitigate any risk of loss of the historical and personally significant information they contain. Discussions are currently underway between the Department of Health and PRONI in this regard, and the IP recommend that the Trusts undertake the necessary adjustments to record-keeping procedures to facilitate an earlier transfer of such records to PRONI, for example, by closing files after an agreed period, with no further papers to be added. Revised procedures should also stipulate the access arrangements to be put in place for files that have been transferred to PRONI. Future management of these records will also be impacted by the IP's recommendations for the establishment of a permanent archive.

3. The retention of medical records should be reviewed. Access to and knowledge of family medical history is a core concern for affected persons, and the Department of Health should seek input and feedback from affected persons with regard to future retention and disposal of medical records.

Recommendation 64

In the immediate term, the IP recommend that all Trusts take steps to ensure that staff are familiar with the Better Records Together guidelines⁴ issued by the Information Commissioner and that appropriate steps be taken to implement the guidelines when dealing with access requests and other aspects of record-keeping.

3.7 Relating to National Archives

Recommendation 65

The IP recommend that the UK's online legislation database be reviewed to ensure that it contains historical Northern Irish legislation. Much important historic legislation relating to NI is absent from the UK's online legislation database, legislation.gov.uk, which is operated by the National Archives. Even where legislation is available, it is often published in a format that is not searchable, making research more difficult and time-consuming. This legislation is an important part of NI's legal history. In the context of the right of victims-survivors to pursue legal remedies, the fact that so much of it is inaccessible to the public must be considered an access to justice issue.

3.8 Relating to the Police Service of Northern Ireland

Recommendation 66

The IP recommend that when dealing with future complex non-recent abuse cases or investigations, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) develop a fully trauma-informed communication strategy and operational practice to ensure that victims-survivors are updated on any developments in their complaint. The PSNI should consider co-designing such a strategy with the involvement of victims-survivors.

3.9 Relating to voluntary agencies holding records

Recommendation 67

The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider investigating the current and past experiences of victims-survivors in accessing personal records relating to the institutions from voluntary agencies. The examination of these practices will enable the inquiry to make findings that could ensure that any new arrangements for accessing records involving these agencies will be empathetic, trauma-informed and based on best practice. For victims-survivors access to their records is a critical issue and the mitigation of difficulties from past practices would be welcomed.

4.0 Recommendations for future independent panels

Recommendation 68

The IP recommend the appointment of any independent panel's Chairperson in advance of establishment of the whole panel. If this had been actioned for the Truth Recovery IP, where the Co-Chairs had been able to take up post ahead of the rest of the Panel, it would have enabled them to oversee planning for the Panel's most significant workstreams. This could have included: securing access to institutional records before the Panel began its work, ensuring processes had been completed to recruit testimony facilitators, and securing accommodation for the taking of those testimonies early in the Panel's work.

Recommendation 69

The IP recommend that in future the Chairperson of any such panel have responsibility for overseeing the work of the other panel members and secretariat, lead engagement with stakeholders, and liaise with government departments. The IP advise that a Chairperson does not have an active role in day-to-day operational tasks but takes an overarching leadership and governance role facilitating balanced participation and guiding towards strategic, well-governed decision-making.

Recommendation 70

The IP recommend that any future independent panel be given greater control over its own budget. A truth recovery process of this type requires agility and innovation to make a case to victims-survivors that the process is truly designed in their own interest. Bureaucracy should be at an absolute minimum, while also ensuring clear auditing of expenditure and the decision-making behind that expenditure. The IP's ability to move forward at pace was delayed by the constraints involved in having to work within public sector procurement procedures that are not designed for a time-limited and highly sensitive tasks such as the one required for the IP's work. The impacts of these restraints included: the appointment and training of testimony facilitators much later than was desirable due to the length of the procurement process; and the need to appoint testimony facilitators on a part-time rather than a full-time basis due to issues related to the financial

limits placed on differing procurement processes. However, by far the most significant issue was the long delay in awaiting Executive sign-off on the budget for the IP's outreach campaign. This included leafleting of every home in NI, and social media and YouTube advertising. This did not commence until almost two years after the IP began its work.

5.0 The Truth Recovery IP periodic recommendations

5.1 Recommendations outlined in our Interim Report, May 2024

- The IP asked Ministers to consider the early appointment of the Chairperson of the public inquiry. This would have allowed the IP to support the work of the public inquiry more effectively. It would also have enabled the Chairperson to engage in foundational planning for the public inquiry. In hindsight, providing a similar opportunity for the IP's Co-Chairs to take up post ahead of the rest of the IP members would have enabled them to oversee planning for the Panel's most significant workstreams. This could have included: securing access to institutional records before the Panel began its work, ensuring processes had been completed to recruit testimony facilitators early in the Panel's work, and securing administrative support and suitable accommodation for the taking of testimonies.
- When employed in future truth recovery exercises, we recommend that any future panel be given greater control over its own budget. A truth recovery process of this type requires agility and innovation if we are to make a case to victims-survivors that the process is truly designed in their own interest. Bureaucracy should be at an absolute minimum, while also ensuring clear auditing of expenditure and the decision-making behind that expenditure.
- The Panel asked Ministers to consider extending their working remit by six months. In the Panel's view, this was necessitated by several factors:
 1. Our ability to move forward at pace was delayed by the constraints involved in having to work within public sector procurement procedures that are not designed for a time-limited body such as this Panel. The impacts of these restraints included: the appointment and training of testimony facilitators much later than was desirable due to the length of the procurement process, and the need to appoint testimony facilitators on a part-time rather than a full-time basis due to issues related to the financial limits placed on differing procurement processes.
 2. The requirement to continue negotiations on access to several of the institutional record sets, slowing the pace of digitisation and shortening the time that the Panel had in which to analyse those records both for its own final report and for the benefit of the public inquiry and the Redress Service.
 3. The recent realisation that government departments and public bodies need to carry out thorough searches for records held that relate to the institutions and related pathways and practices. Assurances given to Leanne McCormick and

Sean O’Connell (authors of the QUB and Ulster University report) in 2018 that no records existed outside PRONI were inaccurate in the case of at least one of the departments. It was not yet clear when those searches can be completed.

- The IP asked Ministers to continue to support efforts through appropriate channels to secure access to relevant records in RoI.
- The IP recommended the removal of means testing on legal aid for access to records requests by victims-survivors of these institutions. The IP is concerned that the low income and capital threshold limit applied to eligibility for legal aid is an unfair barrier to access. We recommended review and amendment of the relevant legislation.

5.2 Recommendations for the establishment of a permanent archive, May 2025

Following a consultation process with victims-survivors in 2025, the IP made a set of recommendations to TEO regarding the establishment and future management of a permanent archive of historical institutional and adoption records, and other records relating to children in state care. This was in fulfilment of one of the Terms of Reference set for the IP by the TRDP report.

The IP made recommendations for legislative provision with regard to the following:

- the scope of the permanent archive
- ownership of records (that records in private ownership be made subject to the Public Records Act)
- functions of the archive
- access to records held by the archive
- the right of individuals to add to or correct records held by the archive
- ongoing management and governance of the archive
- resourcing of the archive.

The IP also made a set of recommendations relating to more practical issues concerning the future management and operation of the archive, which would not require inclusion in legislation.

The full text of the IP’s recommendations to TEO regarding the permanent archive is provided in **Appendix 2** of Volume 1 of this report.

5.3 Recommendations in response to the draft legislation to establish a public inquiry: Mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses and redress scheme

The IP made recommendations to TEO during the public consultation period for legislation for a statutory public inquiry and financial redress scheme. The IP responded to those areas of the TEO Consultation exercise that were relevant to our remit and status.

5.3.1 The public inquiry

5.3.1.1 *Composition of the inquiry*

- The IP recommended that the participation of victims-survivors on the public inquiry panel is essential to the credibility and integrity of the process and entirely consistent with recommendations made in academic research on the successes and failures of other similar inquiries in this and other jurisdictions.

5.3.1.2 *Time period to be covered by the inquiry (1922–95)*

- The IP recommended that the legislation incorporate a mechanism to allow the period to be extended to take account of any recommendation to that effect that the IP may make as its investigation progresses. Such a measure will allow for the investigation of any institution (or a particular pathway or practice) which operated after 1995, and which has previously not come under public scrutiny.

5.3.1.3 *The proposed focus on systemic failings*

- The IP considered that the focus of the public inquiry should be on systemic failings. However, nothing in the legislation should prevent investigation of individual violations of human rights enshrined in the international human rights treaties to which the UK is a party. Moreover, these rights have long been protected by the common law and by laws enacted by Parliament. The IP also noted that the public inquiry will be a public authority for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998, and that it will be obliged to act in a manner compatible with the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to fair procedures and the prohibition of discrimination.

5.3.1.4 *The public inquiry and records the IP could not access*

- The IP recommended that consideration be given through the legislation as to how the public inquiry is to gather, preserve, catalogue and digitise relevant records and archives that the IP were unable to access, including records concerning personal and family histories and information regarding the whereabouts of deceased relatives.

5.3.1.5 The public inquiry and the archives of the HIAI

- The IP recommended that consideration also be given to ensuring that the public inquiry has access to the archival material of the HIAI. Significant numbers of individuals who spent time, as children, in the institutions examined by the work of the HIAI were later placed in mother and baby institutions and/or Magdalene laundries. There were also children who were removed from mother and baby institutions who were placed subsequently in the residential institutions examined by the HIAI. A full appreciation of the pathways and practices associated with the latter institutions – such as the movement of teenage girls from children’s institutions into Magdalene laundries – will only be reached if the HIAI archival material is available to the public inquiry.

5.3.1.6 *The primary legislation and the IP’s recommendations*

The IP recommended that consideration be given to include in the primary legislation an obligation on the public inquiry to consider the IP’s recommendations. The public inquiry should note that the TRDP recommended that the inquiry should consider the recommendations of the IP regarding issues requiring investigation.

5.3.1.7 *Institutions within the scope of the inquiry*

- The IP agreed that the legislation should incorporate a mechanism to allow the list of institutions to be investigated to be prescribed by TEO and amended in the event that such amendment is recommended by the IP or by the public inquiry itself.
- The IP recommended the addition of one more institution to the list proposed at that stage of their research, Clogrennan, in Larne.
- The IP also outlined its intention, once its work was completed, to potentially add specific private nursing homes to the list of institutions scrutinised by the public inquiry.
- The IP recommended that the category of baby institutions must be added to any list to be explored by the public inquiry. It is vital that the records of these institutions are examined because, as the QUB and Ulster University 2021 report concluded, the evidence suggests that infant mortality rates in these homes gives great cause for concern. These institutions must be central to the work of the public inquiry if it is to understand the pathways and practices related to the institutions. At the time of the public consultation, the IP were experiencing difficulties accessing records from separate organisations holding two sets of records for significant baby institutions.
- The IP agreed with the proposal put forward by the consultation that the public inquiry go beyond the role of the institutions themselves and examine their links to the childcare system.

5.3.1.8 *Persons affected by the institutions*

- The IP recommended that the legislation should be flexible enough to allow the public inquiry to consider the inclusion of new institutions and therefore the inclusion of new cohorts of people within the scope of the public inquiry and redress scheme.
- The IP recommended that unmarried girls and women who gave birth in Workhouses and were separated from their babies be included as persons affected by the institutions.

5.3.1.9 *Deaths and burials*

- The Legislation Consultation made a series of points about the potential existence of unmarked burial sites and the possibility of legislating for the commissioning of geophysical surveys and archaeological investigations at former institutional sites to ascertain the presence, or otherwise, of unmarked graves. The IP invited anyone with any evidence of unmarked graves on the site of any of the former institutions to come forward to speak to us. The IP undertook the process of mapping potentially relevant sites and reviewing geophysical and archaeological investigations performed to date. We also consulted on these issues with the PSNI and the experts they commissioned to carry out investigations and received their appraisal of the situation. This process informed the recommendations the IP made with regard to further investigation of burial sites by the public inquiry.

5.3.1.10 *The redress scheme*

- The IP agreed with the TRDP that financial redress should not require waiver of legal rights or prevent an applicant taking a civil claim.
- The IP recommended that with regard to the appointment of non-judicial members for the redress scheme, the participation of victims-survivors is essential. The IP were content that the Redress Service will be an independent body with judicial and non-judicial members.
- The IP recommended that the legislation should be sufficiently flexible to allow inclusion of other institutions and addresses acting as de facto mother and baby institutions identified by the IP and public inquiry, and that they be included in the eligibility criteria for applicants to the redress scheme.

5.3.1.11 *Standardised payment*

- The IP agreed that the standardised payment should be based on admittance to an institution or being born to a woman or girl admitted to an institution.

- The IP recommended that measures be taken to make clear that standardised payments are intended to acknowledge past failings and are not intended to be compensatory. Making a direct connection between a sum of money and a person's experience risks compounding rather than redressing harm.
- The IP agreed that the standardised payments should be paid in tandem with the public inquiry carrying out its duties. It was disappointing that it was not possible to fulfil the desire of the TRDP that the methodology be found through which interim standardised payments could have been paid while work on the creation of the public inquiry was stalled during the most recent collapse of the Stormont Executive. With this in mind, the IP proposed that the issue of an interim standardised payment should be looked at again in the event of any further significant delay to the proposed legislation being tabled.
- The IP recommended that girls and women who gave birth in Workhouses and were separated from their children should be included, as should the children separated from their mothers, in the scope of the Standardised Payment Scheme. There was no less pain and trauma due to separation of a mother and her baby in a Workhouse infirmary than there was in a mother and baby institution.
- The IP recommended that there should be no minimum duration of time spent in an institution in cases of family separation and no individual should be excluded from a standardised payment because of this arbitrary measure. The Consultation proposed a 24-hour qualification period of time in an institution before any individual can apply for a standardised payment.
- The IP recommended that girls and women who paid (or whose family paid) mother and baby institutions privately for their accommodation should be eligible for standardised payments. This recommendation is for cases where the mother was separated from her baby. The children of such mothers should be included also in redress. The IP maintain that these institutions were sustained financially by the state, and without this they would not have existed as an option for any family who wanted to reach a private financial arrangement with a mother and baby institution. Moreover, this type of financial payment did not remove the shame and stigma, or the trauma suffered by girls and women in this category.

5.3.1.12 Individually assessed payments

- The IP recommended that measures be taken to make clear that individually assessed payments are intended to acknowledge past failings and are not intended to be compensatory.
- The IP suggested that the example of the Historical Institutional Abuse (HIA) Redress Board should be studied so that lessons from this service can be incorporated into the mechanism of assessment for individually assessed payments.

5.3.1.13 *Application process for standardised payments and amount of award*

- The IP recommended that a victim-survivor's eligibility for redress ought not to depend on the survival of institutional or official records. The evidence of an applicant's time spent in an institution should be accepted as confirmation of their eligibility in the absence of records.
- The IP recommended that the standardised payment for this redress scheme be increased to the minimum level of £15,000 to take account of inflation since 2019, when the standardised payment for the HIA redress board was set at £10,000.

5.3.1.14 *Posthumous claims and next of kin*

- In this area of the consultation process, the IP were acutely aware that the whole truth recovery process should be informed by the principles of doing no harm, causing no retraumatisation and taking a non-adversarial approach.
- The IP recommended that in lieu of the next of kin approach, a system of standardised payments for the immediate families of deceased victims should be considered. The IP suggested that these symbolic payments should be made in the deceased's name to recognise both what happened to them, and the effects this had on their family. The standardised family payment could be paid in addition to any claim made by a person on their own behalf. The IP strongly believe that the next of kin approach proposed in the Consultation Paper would be unworkable, as the next of kin of a deceased person is often extremely difficult to determine. The situation is further complicated when some descendants are adopted. In the wake of the family separation experienced by thousands of those who were admitted to the institutions, many birth mothers still carry secrets about their children who were taken for adoption, boarded out, placed into foster families or admitted into institutions for children. In cases such as these, there is potential for great harm when multiple individuals, some of whom are not known to each other, come forward as the next of kin.
- The IP recommended the removal of a TEO proposal for a cut-off date for posthumous claims. The proposal to limit posthumous claims to the relatives of victims-survivors who passed away after November 2021 is ill-conceived, arbitrary and, potentially, cruel. There are many examples of evidence of the state's knowledge that mother and baby institutions were separating mothers from their babies (for Thorndale House and Malone Place this evidence exists from the 1920s). The state was also aware that girls and women were giving birth in Workhouse infirmaries and that their babies were then being boarded out via the auspices of the state. From 1916, the Salvation Army's Thorndale Industrial Home and the GSS St Mary's institutions (and their laundries) in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast were used by the state to place girls and women on probation orders. The state was aware of the controversy over Magdalene laundries and their use of unpaid female labour, as they were the topic of numerous parliamentary legislative debates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

5.4 Recommendations made in our Access to Records Consultation, October 2025

The IP carried out a consultation with victims-survivors in the form of a survey in June 2025 to gather responses and statistics relating to individuals' experience in trying to access records held about them or their relatives. The IP believe that full and straightforward access to records is fundamentally important for every individual affected by issues investigated by the Truth Recovery Programme. From the survey results we made the following recommendations relating to access to records in October 2025.

- The IP recommend the immediate establishment of a central digital index of all NI for adoption and care records.
- The IP recommend the immediate introduction of legislation to ensure that victims-survivors and their families can directly access their own personal records and those of immediate family, without arbitration by the agencies involved.
- The IP recommend the mainstreaming of provision of current government funding for advocacy and support services helping those seeking access to their own and family members' records, including wrap-around services before, during and after accessing records.
- The IP recommend that the available support and guidance be signposted by, and embedded in, agencies and government departments involved in this process.
- The IP recommend that the Department of Health immediately ensure consistent approaches to access to records across all health trusts, now and when future mechanisms are developed.
- The IP recommend an immediate review of the eligibility criteria for access to legal aid and the Advice and Assistance scheme to ensure free legal advice and support for those seeking access to records, particularly in relation to court documents.
- The IP recommend the provision of clear guidance and training on accessing records in NI for key stakeholders and diaspora networks in other jurisdictions.

The IP's Access to Records Consultation findings and recommendations made can be found on the IP's website.

Appendix 1

Summary contents of records digitised by
the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
for use by the Independent Panel



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

The following records from private sources have been digitised by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) for use by the Independent Panel (IP).

Apart from those already in PRONI, the records listed here have been made available to the IP by the various organisations and agencies which own and/or are responsible for the records. Ownership and control of these records remain with those organisations and agencies. Requests for access to the records listed here should be made to the relevant organisation or agency, not to PRONI. The IP have issued Access to Records Guidance which will assist individuals who wish to request access to their own personal records.

In each case, PRONI and the IP have been granted access to the records, and permission to digitise them, under the terms of individual data-sharing agreements. In some cases, PRONI will retain a copy of the digital records after the work of the IP has concluded. In other cases, the record owners have provided permission for the digital copies to be created solely for the use of the IP; in such cases, digital copies will not be retained.

The following list is designed to give an insight into the type of information contained in the various records. It should be noted that record-keeping was frequently inconsistent, and the level of detail changed over time. For example, admission registers do not always have information entered in every column; some later volumes commenced while earlier volumes were still in use; some entries are duplicated in more than one volume; and the level of detail in admission forms, case files and similar records can vary significantly.

Please note also that we endeavour to use language and terminology which conveys respect and represents all people and their relatives impacted by Northern Ireland (NI) mother and baby institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses, and their pathways and practices. The original records and archives use language which may be considered offensive and upsetting. This can be the case not just in the contents of the records, but in the titles or names of the records, some of which are reproduced here, including, for example, words such as 'home' and 'disposal'.

FAMILY ROUTES

Hopedene Hostel

Admission Register 1950–60

Admission Register 1960–68

Both the recorded information and the format change throughout the registers, which include details under some or all of the following headings:

- Name
- Age
- Address
- Occupation
- Religion
- Sources of referral and payment
- Dates of admission and discharge
- Estimated date of confinement
- Actual date of confinement – this would be date of birth (DOB) of baby
- National Insurance and medical card numbers
- A section labelled 'how dealt with' – this is later relabelled 'remarks'. This section typically includes the dates of admission and discharge from hospital where baby was born; may include the baby's first name; gender of baby; and where baby was discharged to, that is, taken home by mother, sent to foster parents, adopted.

Admission Register 1983–85

This volume has a different format to the ones above and includes details under some or all of the following headings:

- Name
- Age – sometimes the DOB
- Address
- Occupation
- Religion
- Name of social worker
- Dates of admission and discharge
- Estimated date of confinement
- Actual date of confinement – this would be DOB of baby
- National Insurance and medical card numbers
- Although there is not a Remarks section as in previous volumes, there is a notes section which typically includes date of admission, date of discharge, where baby was born, gender/ name of baby, where mother and baby were discharged to, DOB of baby, where the baby was discharged to (e.g., home with mother, fostered).

FAMILY ROUTES

Thorndale House (see also Salvation Army)

As part of the collection of Hopedene records deposited by Family Routes, PRONI received a small number of documents pertaining to Thorndale House, namely:

Brief History of Thorndale House (1905–98)

Two sets of black and white photocopies of photographs of Thorndale House (with one set from 1925 and the other from 1990)

Four news articles about Thorndale House (c.1989–90)

Kennedy House

Admission Register 1950–55

Two registers, which appear to be duplicates of one another and contain information under some or all of the following headings:

- Registration number
- Name
- Address
- Age
- Religion
- County
- Date admitted
- DOB of baby
- Date discharged
- Remarks – contains details of mother's discharge; may detail name or gender of the baby, whether the baby went home with mother, was adopted, placed in a home.

Church of Ireland Rescue League

(see also Church of Ireland Representative Church Body Library)

Minute Book 1912–24

Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association

Minute Book 1941–53

Minute Book 1953–55

Minute Book 1955–63

Minute Book 1963–68

Minute Book 1968–77

Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association Appeals Committee

Minute Book 1961–77

FAMILY ROUTES

Church of Ireland Adoption Society Case Committee, later the Church of Ireland Adoption Society Adoption Panel

Minute Book 1954–62
Minute Book 1962–69
Minute Book 1969–93
Minute Book 1993–2003

Church of Ireland Social and Family Welfare Association

Minute Book 1977–92

Church of Ireland Board for Social Responsibility

Minute Book 1992–99
Minute Book 1991–2003

Church of Ireland

Register of Welfare Cases 1940–57
Register of Welfare Cases 1957–69
Register of Welfare Cases 1969–87

Three volumes contain details of pregnant women and contain information under some or all of the following headings:

- Date of admission
- Name
- Address
- Religious denomination
- Case no.
- Reported by
- Help required – this heading becomes ‘Type/Nature of case’ in 1942 and then ‘Remarks’ in 1944. It is not always completed but will typically contain details of, for example, whether child was fostered, adopted or placed in an institution such as Kennedy House, but no details of the child itself. It can also include information regarding miscarriage or stillbirth.

In the 1969–87 volume, entry under ‘Action taken/Remarks’ can record whether the person had visitors, was advised in relation to adoption, arrangements for admittance to Hopedene or Thorndale House, clothes given for children, etc.

Adoption Index Cards

Set 1, 1949–2000

Contains 483 cards, arranged alphabetically by surname of the birth mother. These cards contain some or all of the following personal details:

- Date of adoption order
- Birth mother name and address
- Adoptive parents: Surname and address.

The cards do not contain personal details of the child.

Set 2, 1945–2009

Contains 472 cards, arranged alphabetically by surname of the adoptive parents. (The earliest DOB and/or date of adoption order is 1945 and latest is 2009). These cards may contain some or all of the following personal information:

- Date of adoption order
- Adopters' names
- Adopters' address
- Natural/Birth mother's name
- Natural/Birth mother's address.

The cards do not contain personal details of the child.

Statement Books

Contain c.2,500 entries.

These pertain to people who 'resided' or were born in Thorndale House, Belfast. The extracted entries, specific to NI, are from 48 original volumes of the Salvation Army 'Country Series' Statement Books (1922–78).

Note: Due to a gap in the Statement Books for the period 1942–48, four volumes of 'Registers of Mothers' (1942–50) were also digitised.

Entries ('Woman's or Girl's Statement') record some or all of the following information:

- Name of receiving home
- Month and year of admission
- Name
- Age/DOB
- Date of entry
- Where they are from
- If they had ever been in prison and for what reason
- If they have been in other homes
- Date of departure from Salvation Army home and destination
- If 'Satisfactory or not at Departure' from the institution (this is the wording used in the records).

Entries ('Statement concerning Mothers and Infants') record some or all of the following information on mothers and babies:

- Name of receiving home
- Month and year of admission
- Name of mother
- Name of child
- DOB of child
- Name and address of father
- How much does father pay
- If nothing, how is child supported
- Name and address of nursing mother
- If adopted – address of adopting parents
- Date of death, place of burial, etc.

New Assisted Cases 1919–37

New Assisted Cases 1923–24

New Assisted Cases 1938–47

New Assisted Cases 1951–87

Four volumes. Each book contains information on new admissions; there are no details of readmissions. Information is registered in two sections: Admissions ('Girl's statement') and Exit ('How disposed of').

Admissions categories include some or all of the following details:

- Home number
- Name
- Age
- Where born
- Manner of application
- Where from
- Date of admission
- Ever in prison
- Drink case
- Cause of fall or application
- Address of relatives or friends.

Exit information includes some or all of the following details:

- Conduct in home
- Did she profess to be saved?
- Personal appearance
- Where sent to?
- Date of leaving
- Kind of assistance given.

Day Book for Mothers 1929–42

Day Book for Mothers 1943–47

Day Book for Mothers 1947–51

Three volumes, each containing records arranged in chronological order. The volumes contain information on 'Maternity Girls' and include some or all of the following information:

- Home number
- Date of admission
- Name of mother
- Age/DOB
- Where from
- Payment towards maintenance
- Religion
- Date sent to hospital
- Date of confinement
- Date returned to home
- Future address
- Date of discharge
- Professed salvation.

SALVATION ARMY

Day Book for Babies 1941–47

Day Book for Babies 1947–52

Two volumes, each containing records arranged in chronological order. The volumes contain information on children born to 'Maternity' cases (as described in the records). The information provided varies and may include some or all of the following:

- Number
- Name of baby
- DOB
- Date of entry
- Is mother with baby?
- Date admitted
- Date of discharge
- Place discharged to.

CHURCH OF IRELAND REPRESENTATIVE CHURCH BODY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

Church of Ireland Rescue League (see also Family Routes)

Minute Book 1924–30

Minute Book 1930–39

Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Council

Minute Book 1936–40

The minutes in this volume date from November 1936 to September 1940. Also included in volume is a typed five-page document, 'Notice of meeting dated 11 November 1955', which includes the agenda and minutes for Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association meeting that took place on 15 September 1955.

Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association Executive Committee

Minute Book 1938–45

Minute Book 1945–53

CHURCH OF IRELAND REPRESENTATIVE CHURCH BODY LIBRARY, DUBLIN

Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association

Annual Reports and Statements of Account 1940–74; 1979; 1982–85

There are 40 pamphlets containing the Annual Reports and Statements of Accounts for the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association (Northern Diocese) dating from 1940. Subsequently known as the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association Incorporating The Church of Ireland Rescue Home (Northern Diocese) from 1947 to 1948, Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association Incorporating Kennedy House (Formerly The Church of Ireland Rescue Home Northern Diocese) from 1948 to 1956, Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association (Northern Diocese) Incorporating The Church of Ireland Adoption Society for Northern Ireland from 1957 to 1972, and Church of Ireland Social and Family Welfare Association Northern Diocese from 1973.

Contents include list of members of Council, Moral Welfare Work, Organising Secretary's Report, Hon. Treasurer's Report, Statement of Accounts, Donations (List of Subscriptions to Society).

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution, Newry

Admission Register 1955–63

Admission Register 1958–63

Admission Register 1963–67

Admission Register 1963–67

Admission Register January–June 1967; 1968–69

Five volumes. Some entries are duplicated in more than one register (the volumes dated 1963–67). The final register also includes information relating to adoptions from 1968 to 1969.

The volumes typically contain a handwritten paragraph about the pregnant girl or woman. Headings and level of detail vary from one register to another and contain information under some or all of the following headings:

- Name of mother
- Address of mother
- DOB of mother
- Occupation of mother
- Family history – may include details of mother and father and other family members
- Where mother was admitted from – normally the name of the hospital where she had her confinement
- Date of admission to institution
- Date of discharge from institution
- Name of baby
- DOB of baby
- Remarks section – may include date of leaving and destination of both the mother and child after leaving Marianvale.

Adoption Register 1955–63

The first eight pages contain information under some or all of the following headings:

- Name and address of mother
- Name and DOB of baby
- Date of adoption
- Name and address of adoptive parents.

From page 9 onwards, some or all of the following details for all children considered eligible for adoption are recorded:

- Name, gender and DOB of child
- Place of birth
- Admission date
- Weight at birth
- Weight on admission
- Date of discharge
- Notes whether child has been adopted.

Register of Adopters June 1971–July 1976

Contains some or all of the following information on babies and their adoptive parents:

- Name and address of adoptive parents
- Name and DOB of child placed
- Name of mother of child
- Date of placement
- Comments section – may record if this was the first, second, third, etc. adoption by these parents; if child was reclaimed by mother; and so on.

Admission Records 1967–84

Contain 850 individual admission forms.

Towards the end of 1967 the method of recording admission to Marianvale was changed to an admission form and admissions continued to be recorded in this way until closure in 1984. These forms normally contain more information than the registers, with details noted in relation to some or all of the following:

- Personal details – such as name, DOB, address, date of admission and date of discharge, previous health
- History of the mother – includes family details, work history, schools attended, information on putative father including details of their family members; and details of any previous pregnancies
- Comments section – may include antenatal care, any complications during pregnancy and date of confinement and place of confinement, discharge of mother from Marianvale
- Separate form may be included if baby admitted to Marianvale, with details of the baby such as name, DOB, place of birth, type of birth, weight at birth
- Space to record immunisation details for the child and other medical tests that may have taken place
- Section for recording where the baby was placed and address where the mother went.

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast

Baptismal Register 1963–90

Includes information under some or all of the following headings:

- Surname of child
- First name of child
- Place where child was born
- DOB
- Date and place of baptism
- Baby destination – information on what happened to baby after leaving Marianville, for example, home with mother, adopted; fostered; sent to another baby institution such as St Joseph's Babies' Home, Nazareth House, Portadown or Fahan
- Remarks section – may record if child was suitable for adoption, or whether the child died.

Index Register 1950–63

This typed document is an alphabetical index of girls and women admitted to the institution, which is used as a finding aid. This index includes some or all of the following personal details:

- First name
- Surname
- House name
- Admission date
- Registration number.

Admission Register 1950–63

Admission Register 1963–70

These registers contain very limited information. They typically contain a handwritten paragraph about the pregnant girl or woman, with some or all of the following:

- Name of mother
- Home address of mother
- DOB/Age of mother
- Expected date of confinement
- Family history – details on other family members
- Work history – occupation if one held
- Who recommended the girl or woman to the institution – typically in early years a member of the clergy such as parish priest
- Name/Gender of baby
- DOB of baby
- Destination of baby
- Destination of mother.

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

Admission Records 1970–90

Contain 915 individual admission cards.

In 1970, the method of recording admissions to Marianville changed to an admission booklet and admissions continued to be recorded in this way until the institution's closure in 1990.

These booklets normally contain more information than the registers, with details recorded under some or all of the following:

- Personal details – such as name, DOB, address, date of admission and date of discharge of mother
- Family history of the mother – includes family details, work history, limited information on putative father
- Medical notes on mother – may include antenatal care, any complications during pregnancy and date of confinement and place of confinement
- Notes on the mother – opinions written about the pregnant girl or woman, for example in relation to her IQ or personality traits, as perceived by the author
- Destination of mother
- Section on the baby – includes name, DOB, place of birth, details on baptism if applicable
- Notes on baby – may advise if baby was admitted to Marianville, medical details if any, date child was discharged and where they were discharged to.

Index Register 1970–90

This volume records a breakdown of the admissions to Marianville from 1970 to 1990 as contained in the Admission Records. The information recorded is typically:

- Card number
- Name and address of person admitted
- Date of admission.

Sacred Heart Children's Home, Belfast

Admission Register 1902–62

Details of people admitted to this home, noting some or all of the following:

- Name
- Residence
- Age/DOB on arrival
- Date of admission
- Date of departure
- Remarks section – may record what happened to the person once they left the institution; for example, went home with mother, father or other family member; sent to St Mary's Home (Laundry); left for situation; etc.

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

Admission Register 1963–81

Although this register is entitled 'Admission Register – Sacred Heart Home' it also includes details on girls or women who were in Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS) St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Belfast from 1963 to approximately 1969, when it became the Adolescent Centre (see below). There is some overlap between the contents of this register and the St Mary's, Belfast Admission Register for 1933–84 (see below). Typically, there is a handwritten paragraph with details about the person under some or all of the following headings:

- Name
- Home address
- DOB/Age
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Source of referral – could be welfare, police, voluntary
- Case history of the person – may or may not include occupation, family history; whether they had been in another GSS institution; and so on.

Adolescent Centre, Belfast

Case Files 1967–82

Contain 55 individual case files.

The files contain a variety of information, including Admission to Care Forms from the Belfast County Welfare Committee, Northern Health and Social Services, Eastern Health and Social Services, Southern Health and Social Services, and Down County Welfare Department. These forms may contain some or all of the following personal information:

- Name
- DOB
- Place of birth
- Home address
- School attended before admission
- Recommended by
- Date of admission
- Information on family members
- Medical details
- Social report on the person.

The files may also contain items such as probation orders, court reports and social worker reports from the Adolescent Centre.

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Belfast

Admission Register 1851–1932

Admission Register 1933–84

The second register primarily covers admissions from 1933 to the 1960s; however, the earliest admissions date from 1890 and relate to those people who had been admitted at an earlier date and were still 'resident' in the institution in the 1930s. New admissions are recorded from 1933. There is some overlap between this register and the register described as Sacred Heart Children's Home Admissions Register 1963–81 (see above). The register also contains some notes and loose inserted documents from later dates. Information is recorded under some or all of the following headings:

- Family name
- Christian/First name
- Class name
- Age
- Friend's address (relative's address)
- Date of admittance to institution
- Date and reason of leaving.

Court orders and/or welfare reports 1961–68

There are 23 court orders and/or welfare reports relating to girls and women admitted to the Good Shepherd Convent in Belfast.

St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Derry/Londonderry

Admission Register 1919–54

Contains information about women or girls admitted to the institution, under some or all of the following headings:

- Date of admission
- Name
- House name
- Address
- Age
- Who sent the girl or woman to the institution – this could be family member, religious institution or priest
- Remarks section – may record the date of discharge, reason for discharge and destination after leaving the institution.

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

Admission Register 1933–84

The front of this volume is labelled 'Derry St Mary's Register 1955–1970' and the inside 'Good Shepherd Convent Derry – Class Register 1955'. However, the volume covers admissions from 1933 to 1984.

Contains information under some or all of the following headings:

- Date of admission
- Name
- House name
- Address
- Age/DOB
- Remarks section – may record the details of who sent the girl or woman to the institution, date of discharge, reason for discharge and destination after leaving the institution.

Volume of Admission Book Records 1936–51

Contains very limited information. Typically, it contains a handwritten paragraph about women or girls admitted to the institution, which includes some or all of the following:

- GSS reference number
- Name
- Address
- Age/DOB
- Date of entry
- Date of discharge
- Remarks section – may record details of who sent the girl or woman to the institution, and destination after leaving the institution.

Admission Index Cards 1923–84

Contain 167 individual cards.

Cards were completed for those who stayed for a period of six weeks or more in St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry. Includes some or all of the following personal details:

- Name
- Address
- Date of referral
- DOB/Age
- Placing authority
- Payment
- Remarks – may include reason for admission, family history or destination after leaving the institution.

Admission Files 1923–81

Contain 171 individual case files relating to girls or women admitted to the institution.

Although the files contain a variety of documents, many only contain one page with typed-up details on long-term 'residents', which appear to have been typed and included in files in retrospect, as the information contained in them matches up with their corresponding entry in the St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry Registers. The files may also include handwritten notes on long-term 'residents' dated 1991–92; these notes mainly relate to the person's medical appointments. The typed pages contain some or all of the following details:

- Name
- Class name
- Address
- DOB
- Date referred
- Source of referral/Placing authority
- Reason for referral/admission
- Remarks
- Details about other family members
- Date of discharge.

The files may or may not also contain a will or probate, birth certificate, baptism certificate, Fit Person Order, social worker reports, admission forms from county welfare committees, certificate of death registration, death certificates and Admission to Care Forms.

St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Newry

Admission Register 1946–82

Includes some or all of the following details on girls or women admitted to the institution:

- Name
- House name
- Address
- Who sent them to the institution
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Remarks section – may record the destination after leaving the institution.

GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

Admission Files 1967–78

Contain 11 individual case files relating to teenage girls who were in St Mary's, Newry.

The files contain a variety of documents, including some or all of the following: correspondence and official forms from Tyrone County Welfare Committee, Armagh County Welfare Committee, Down County Welfare Committee and Belfast County Borough Welfare Committee; application forms for training centre, 132 Armagh Road; probation officer reports; adoption orders; medical forms; social workers' reports; 'special care' reports; Fit Person Orders; Admission to Care Forms. These records contain some or all of the following personal information:

- Name
- DOB
- Place of birth
- Date received into care
- Details on parents
- Home address
- Recommended by
- Date of admission into training centre, 132 Armagh Road
- Social history of the person
- Date of discharge.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Nazareth House, Ormeau Road, Belfast

Index File 1882–1984

Typed alphabetic index of those children admitted to the institution, used as a finding aid (i.e., an index to locate other records). Includes some or all of the following personal details:

- Registration number
- Surname of child
- First name of child
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Children's Register 1922–28

Children's Register 1928–84

These two registers record some or all of the following personal details of children admitted to the institution:

- Christian/First name of child
- Place of birth
- DOB
- Where baptised
- Parents' names
- Occupation of parents
- Date received
- Recommended by (1928–84 volume only)
- Dismissed/Died
- Observations – may include destination of child after they have left institution; information on parents, etc.
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

Discharge Slips 1958–79

Discharge Slips 1979–84

Two volumes of discharge slips with child's name, signed by person who was taking the child, confirming that they have received the child 'from under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth, 353 Ormeau Road in a Perfect State of Health'.

Observation Book 1903–25

Observation Book 1926–64

Observation Book 1928–48

Observation Book 1929–31

Observation Book 1931–33

Observation Book 1940–76

Observation Book 1941–43

Observation Book 1945–48

Observation Book 1948–51

Observation Book 1951–56

Observation Book 1956–61

Observation Book 1964–75

Twelve volumes. Contents vary from volume to volume but typically include information under some or all of the following headings:

- Name of child
- DOB
- Where baptised
- Parents' names
- Occupation of parents
- Date admitted
- Recommended by
- Date left
- Taken by whom
- Remarks – may include who recommended child, where they went after they left institution, information on parents, etc.
- Observations – may include destination of child after they have left institution; information on parents, etc.
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Address Book 1901–64

Address Book 1907–37

Address Book 1929–65

Three address books, recording names and addresses for relatives of children in Nazareth House.

Disposal Book 1924–67

Disposal Book 1952–76

Two volumes which contain some or all of the following details on people in the institution:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Paragraph on where the person went after leaving the institution, and if they were 'doing well' or not.

Nazareth House, Bishop Street, Derry/Londonderry

Index File 1882–1998

Alphabetical index of those children admitted to the institution, used as a finding aid. This notes some or all of the following personal details:

- Registration number
- Surname of child
- First name of child
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge.

General Register 1892–1941

General Register 1941–98

Contains some or all of the following details on children in the institution:

- Christian/First name of child
- Place of birth (DOB)
- Where baptised
- Parents' names
- Occupation of parents
- Date received
- Recommended by
- Date dismissed
- Date deceased
- Observations – may include destination of child after they have left institution, information on whether parents are living or dead, and so on
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Discharge Register 1919–36

Discharge Register 1935–66

Discharge Register 1954–67

Records information on people discharged from the institution, including some or all of the following details:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Dates and details about progress of the person after leaving the institution, and if they were 'doing well' or not.

Discharge Slips 1949–68

Discharge Slips 1968–88

Two volumes of discharge slips with child's name, signed by person who was taking the child, confirming that they have received the child 'from under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth, Nazareth House, Derry in a Perfect State of Health and Cleanliness'.

Observation Register 1894–1987

Records admissions to the institution from 1894 onwards under some or all of the following headings:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Admission date
- Where born
- Parents' names
- Recommended by
- Date of death if applicable.

Sacramental Book 1890–1999

Sacramental Book 1904–83

Two Sacramental Books, recording details of when 'residents' of the institution received the sacraments. Contain some or all of the following information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Date of first confession
- Date of first Communion
- Date of Confirmation.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Children's Inventory Book 1916–46

Documents the clothing inventory for each child upon admission to the institution and records the following information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Details of the person's items of clothing.

Address Book 1934–53

Records the names and addresses of relatives of 'residents' of the institution.

Nazareth House, Fahan, Co Donegal

General Register 1940–2000

Records the following personal information on infants who were admitted to the institution. These infants could come from either NI or RoI:

- Registration number in home
- Name of child
- Place and DOB
- Place and date of baptism
- Date of admission
- Name of mother
- Address of mother
- Name and address of nurse-mother
- Promise to pay
- Remarks section – may record who made the recommendation for the child to go to Fahan; whether the child died and date of death; final destination of the child, for example, returned home with mother, sent to another institution, adopted. Sometimes this section will have the boarding out details of the child or whether they were adopted, and the name and address of the adoptive parents.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Admission Register 1935–42

Admission Register 1941–63

Admission Register 1963–71

Admission Register 1971–82

Admission Register 1982–96

Five Admission Registers, which include a handwritten paragraph on babies and infants who were received into the institution, with information under some or all of the following headings:

- Name of mother
- Address of mother
- Name of child
- Age of child/DOB of child
- Date of admission
- Who recommended by
- Payment for child
- Certificates received such as birth certificate, baptism certificate
- Destination of child – for example, taken home by mother, adopted, died.

Some of the registers include an index.

Register of Adopters 1974–77

Contains some or all of the following details on adoptive parents:

- Serial number
- Name and address of applicants
- Date of application
- Area board district
- Date of approval
- Date of placement
- Name of child
- Date of order or comment.

Discharge Slips 1983–86

Discharge Slips 1986–88

Discharge Slips 1988–95

Discharge Slips July–October 1995

Discharge Slips January 1996–September 1996

Discharge Slips May 1997–July 2000

Six volumes of discharge slips with child's name, signed and dated by person who was taking child (in some cases their address is included), confirming that they have received the child 'from under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth, St Mura's Fahan, in a Perfect State of Health and Cleanliness'.

Observation Book 1952–62

Contains some or all of the following personal details on infants in the institution:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name (DOB)
- Admission date
- Where born
- Parents' names
- Recommended by
- Date of death if applicable.

Address Book c.1940–2000

Contains the names and addresses of relatives of people in the institution. Includes an index.

Vaccination and Immunisation Book 1956–87

Shows the vaccination records for children in Fahan. It includes some or all of the following details on children in the institution:

- Year
- Name of child
- BCG details
- Vaccination date
- Immunisation – recording 'yes' or 'no' in each column until December 1959 where it records first, second and third immunisations along with the date
- From 1960, it includes a column for polio with date of injections.

Adoption Book North and South 1946–69

Adoption Book North 1969–78

Adoption Book South 1969–78

Three adoption books, each with an index. Information is recorded under some or all of the following headings:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- DOB
- Place of birth
- Date and place of baptism
- Placement date
- Sent out
- Mother's names and address
- Adoptive parents' names and address
- Remarks – mostly details of adoption order.

Adoption Slips: St Mura's Adoption Society 1935–c.2000

One volume containing 28 slips, which are signed by the mother or guardian of the child and witnessed (not dated), with the statement: 'I the mother/guardian of the child have received from you a statement explaining the effects of an adoption order. That statement was attached to this receipt and I have myself torn it off. I understand that statement.'

Adoption Orders and Applications for Adoption Orders: St Mura's Adoption Society 1955–78

One volume containing 250 adoption orders and applications for adoption orders, with some or all of the following information:

- Names and address of adopters
- Name of child prior to adoption
- DOB of child
- Name of mother
- Date and place of baptism
- Name of child after adoption
- Date of adoption order.

Adoption Case Files 1961–95

There are 80 files, organised by name of child. Note: While some details were recorded for all 80 files, only 22 were digitised, as these referred to children born in NI, or where the mother gave an address in NI or where prospective adoptive parents were from NI.

Adoption Case Files 1973–78

There are 12 files, organised by name of adoptive parents. Note: While some details were recorded for all 12 files, none were digitised as they did not relate to children born in NI, a mother with an address in NI or prospective adoptive parents from NI.

Adopters' Application Forms: St Mura's Adoption Society 1970–77

There are 34 forms. Note: While some details were recorded for all 34 forms, none were digitised as they did not relate to children born in NI, mothers with an address in NI or prospective adoptive parents from NI.

Child Life Protection Forms 1961–70

There are 67 forms, issued by County Borough of Londonderry Welfare Committee. They contain details of the person who was to undertake nursing and maintenance of a child and include some or all of the following details:

- Name of the person/s who will undertake nursing and maintenance of child
- Address person/s who will undertake nursing and maintenance of child
- Name of child
- DOB of child
- Signature of representative of the County Borough Council.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Correspondence from the Central Council of Catholic Adoption Societies 1967–78

Contains 82 items. Note: While some details were recorded for all 82 items, none were digitised as they did not relate to children born in NI, mothers with an address in NI or prospective adoptive parents from NI.

Other correspondence 1948–90

Contains 79 items. While some details were recorded for all 79 items, only 30 were digitised as these related to children born in NI, mothers with an address in NI or prospective adoptive parents from NI.

Birth/Baptismal certificates 1953–83

There are 165 certificates. Note: While some details were recorded for all 165 certificates, only 143 were digitised as the rest referred to people who were not resident in NI.

Medical/Hospital reports 1961–94

There are 18 reports. Note: While some details were recorded for all 18 reports, only six were digitised as the rest referred to people who were not resident in NI.

Social workers' reports 1950–95

There are 57 reports. Note: While some details were recorded for all 57 reports, only 26 were digitised as the rest referred to people who were not resident in NI.

Discharge slips 1982–95

There are 18 slips. Note: While some details were recorded for all 18 slips, only seven were digitised as the rest referred to people who were not resident in NI.

Administrative records of St Mura's Adoption Society 1969–92

One copy of the Constitution of St Mura's Adoption Society (1992)

Three Lists of Committee Members St Mura's Adoption Society (c.1969–77)

Includes 27 Monthly Minutes St Mura's Adoption Society (1969–91)

One item of correspondence from St Mura's Adoption Society (1978)

Also contains 13 Financial Receipts and Statements in relation to St Mura's Adoption Society (1978–86)

Note: While some details were recorded for all 13 statements, only three were digitised as the rest referred to people who were not resident in NI.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Nazareth House, Charles Street, Portadown, also known as Altavilla Nursery

Index File 1953–83

Typed alphabetical index of those admitted to the institution – used as a finding aid. Includes some or all of the following personal details:

- Registration number
- Surname of child
- First name of child
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge.

Admission Register 1953–83

Contains some or all of the following personal information on infants who were transferred to the institution:

- Christian/First name of child
- Where born (DOB)
- Place and date of baptism
- Parents' names
- Recommended by
- Received (date of admission)
- Died
- Left
- Observation section – may contain final destination of the child, that is, whether they were sent to another institution, adopted, returned home with mother, etc.
- Registration number used by GSS.

Nazareth House, Sligo

Index File 1900–99

Typed alphabetic index of those children admitted to the institution, used as a finding aid. Includes some or all of the following personal details:

- Registration number
- Surname of child
- First name of child
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

General Register 1910–92

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains some or all of the following personal information:

- Christian/First name of child
- Where born
- DOB
- Where baptised
- Parents' names
- Parents' occupation
- Recommended by
- Date of admission
- Date of death
- Date left
- Observations – may include destination of child after they left institution, information on parents, etc.
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

Admission Register 1912–75

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains a paragraph on the child which includes some or all of the following personal information:

- Name of child
- Where born
- DOB
- Parents' names
- Recommended by
- Date of admission
- Recommended by
- Date left
- Destination of child after they left institution
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

Discharge Register 1910–2007

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains a paragraph on the child which includes some or all of the following personal information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Date of reports
- Address on leaving and subsequent reports.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Discharge Slips October 1949–May 1965

Discharge Slips June 1974–July 1984

Discharge Slips December 1976–January 1982

There are nine volumes of discharge slips in total. While some details were recorded for all nine volumes, only the three listed here were digitised as the rest refer to people who were not resident in NI.

The slips carry the child's name and are signed by the person who was taking the child, confirming that they have received the child from under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth, Nazareth House, Sligo 'in a perfect state of health and Cleanliness'.

Disposal Book 1944–89

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains a paragraph on the child which includes some or all of the following information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Christian/First name
- Where born (DOB)
- Where baptised
- Names of parents
- Recommended by
- Date of admission
- Conditions of admission.

Record Book January 1949–June 1960

There are two Record Books. While some details were recorded for both books, only the one listed here was digitised as the other refers to people who were not resident in NI.

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. The book contains a paragraph on the child which includes some or all of the following information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Reports on destination of the person and subsequent reports on their life.

Address Book c.1900–c.1999

There are two Address Books. While some details were recorded for both books, only the one listed here was digitised as the other refers to people who were not resident in NI.

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains the names and addresses of relatives of children 'resident' in the institution.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Sacramental Register 1911–91

There are two registers. While some details were recorded for both books, only the one listed here was digitised as the other referred to people who were not resident in NI.

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. This book records details of when the child received the sacraments and includes some or all of the following personal information on the relevant child:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Date of first confession
- Date of first Communion
- Date of Confirmation
- Date of Brown Scapular
- Date of pledge.

Children's Inventory Book 1910–90

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. This volume documents the clothing inventory for each child upon admission to the institution and records the following personal information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Details of the child's items of clothing.

Particulars of Children Register 1975–83

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains some or all of the following personal information on relevant children:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- DOB
- Date and place of baptism
- Parents' names
- Address of parents
- Recommended by
- Date of administration
- Date of discharge.

Boys' Application Book 1928–64

Only pages which have information relevant to NI or its citizens have been digitised from this record. It contains a handwritten paragraph which notes the reason for the application for the child to the home.

Individual Case Files 1920–77

There are 32 files relating to NI or its citizens. Some may have been created in recent years and contain a typed record with the details found in the general and other registers. The files contain some or all of the following information:

- Name of child
- DOB
- Date and place of baptism
- Parents' names
- Address of parents
- Recommended by
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Where discharged to.

The files contain a variety of information including copies and original birth certificates or baptism certificates; medical information on the child; correspondence from the child when older, Freedom of Information requests; etc.

Nazareth Lodge, Ravenhill Road, Belfast

Index Files 1890–1999

Two typed documents which are duplicates of each other. Alphabetical index of those admitted to the institution, used as a finding aid. Contains the following personal details:

- Registration number
- Surname of child
- First name of child
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge.

General Register 1923–78

General Register 1938–64

General Register 1978–97

Names of children admitted to the institution, including some or all of the following personal details:

- Christian/First name of child
- Place of birth (DOB)
- Where baptised
- Parents' names
- Occupation of parents
- Date received
- Recommended by
- Date dismissed
- Date deceased
- Observations/Remarks – may include destination of child after they left institution, information on parents, etc.
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

General Industrial School Register 1918–48

Contains information on children who attended the industrial school, including some or all of the following personal details:

- Name
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Where, when and by whom ordered to be detained
- With what charged
- Term of detention
- States if 'illegitimate' (this is the term used in the register)
- Details on parents – names, address, occupation and religious persuasion
- Particulars of leaving the school: by licence or discharge.

Note: A second General Industrial School Register covers the years 1902–18, which is outside the remit of the Truth Recovery IP.

Discharge Book 1921–37

Discharge Book 1937–79

Contain information on those children discharged from the institution and include some or all of the following personal details:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Address on leaving and subsequent reports – includes details on the person after leaving the institution, job details, details of correspondence, etc.

Discharge Slips 1964–84

Discharge Slips 1984–90

Discharge Slips 1990–97

Three volumes of discharge slips recording date of discharge and child's name. Signed by the person who was taking the child, confirming that they have received the child 'in a clean, healthy condition and free from infection'.

Sacramental Register 1899–1996

Details of when people received the sacraments, with some or all of the following information:

- Name
- Date of first confession
- Date of first Communion
- Date of Confirmation.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Diary of Boys' Department 1953–75

Handwritten diary chronicling events that happened in the institution such as annual holidays; the opening of the new babies' institution in October 1953; Confirmation days, Christmas; etc.

Observation Book 1931–81

Includes a handwritten paragraph on individual children, with some or all of the following personal information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- Place of birth (DOB)
- Where baptised (date of baptism)
- Parents' names
- Date received
- Recommended by
- Date left
- Relatives' address.

St Joseph's Home, Termonbacca, Derry/Londonderry

Index File 1911–82

Typed alphabetical index of those admitted to the institution, used as a finding aid. Contains the following personal details:

- Registration number
- Surname of child
- First name of child
- DOB
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge.

General Register 1911–82

Names of children admitted to the institution, which contains some or all of the following personal details:

- Christian/First name of child
- Place of birth (DOB)
- Where baptised
- Parents' name
- Occupation of parents
- Recommended by
- Date received
- Date died
- Date left
- Observations – may include destination of child after they left institution, information on parents, etc.
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Boys' Admission Information Book 1936–41

Boys' Admission Information Book 1940–70

Boys' Admission Information Book 1947–58

Boys' Admission Information Book 1974–77

Four volumes, which include some or all of the following personal admission information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Christian name of child
- Place of birth (DOB)
- Place of baptism
- Father's name
- Mother's maiden name
- Parent's occupation
- Recommended by
- Date of admission
- Are parents living?
- Address of parents
- Conditions of admission.

The volume for 1940–70 is described inside front cover as 'Enquiries Re Background'. It is in alphabetical order and contains a handwritten paragraph on each child.

Discharge Slips 1948–68

Discharge Slips 1968–71

Discharge Slips 1971–74

Discharge Slips 1974–78

Discharge Slips 1978–81

Discharge Slips 1981–82

Discharge Slips 1988–96

Seven volumes of Discharge Slips with child's name, signed and dated by the person who was taking child confirming that they have received the child 'from under the care of the Sisters of Nazareth, St Joseph's Home, Derry in a perfect state of health and cleanliness'.

Index Register 1944–68

Contains some or all of the following personal information on each child:

- Surname
- Christian/First name
- Where born (DOB)
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Destination
- Sisters of Nazareth registration number.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Observation Book 1908–74

Contains a handwritten paragraph on each child, with some or all of the following personal details:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- Place of birth (DOB)
- Where baptised (date of baptism)
- Parents' names
- Date received
- Recommended by
- Date left and destination
- Relatives' address.

Observation and Discharge Book 1935–76

Contains a handwritten paragraph on the child, with some or all of the following personal details:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Paragraph with remarks on the person after they left the institution.

Register of Sacraments 1923–53

Register of Sacraments 1947–82

Two volumes which contain details of when the child received the sacraments. Includes some or all of the following personal information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Date of first confession
- Date of first Communion
- Date of Confirmation
- Date of Brown Scapular
- Date of pledge
- Name of church where Confirmation took place (second volume only).

Boys' Aftercare Book 1923–56

Contains information on those children discharged from the institution, with some or all of the following personal details:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name of child
- Date of admission
- Date of discharge
- Age on discharge
- Date of reports
- Address on leaving and subsequent reports – includes details such as whether the person has a new job, details of correspondence, etc.

SISTERS OF NAZARETH

Boys' Inventory Book 1911–74

Contains the clothing inventory for each boy upon admission to the institution and records the following information:

- Sisters of Nazareth registration number
- Name
- Details of the person's items of clothing.

Address Book 1907–50

Address Book 1941–70

Two volumes containing the names and addresses of relatives of 'residents' of the institution. Also, may contain details of the child's discharge.

Correspondence 1958–2005

Nine items of correspondence.

FAMILY CARE ADOPTION SERVICES

Diocesan (Down and Connor) Orphan Society

Case Register Book 1 1930–32

Case Register Book 2 1928–34

Case Register Book 3 1928–37

Book 2 commences as a copy of Book 1 up to page 150, then contains new entries thereafter.

These registers contain some or all of the following:

- Name of child
- Name and address of mother
- Where child was born
- DOB
- Date of baptism and where baptised
- Nursed by (details of nurse, name and address)
- Occupation of mother
- Any information on adoption – such as name and address of adopter.

FAMILY CARE ADOPTION SERVICES

Baptism Register 1905–35

Ring binder, labelled 'Baptism Register', that contains 142 baptism certificates for babies with dates of birth from 1905 to 1935. One certificate dates from 1905, the others from 1930 to 1935. There is no reference to where the child is domiciled. Each certificate records the following information:

- Church where the baby was baptised
- DOB
- Date of baptism
- Name of child
- Name of mother
- Name of father sometimes included.

Mater Dei Hostel, Antrim Road, Belfast (see also PRONI)

Index Cards 1940–55

Index Cards 1956–80

Two sets of index cards, with a combined total of 1,563 cards, organised alphabetically by birth mother's surname within each set. These records contain some or all of the following details:

- Name and address of birth mother
- Age of mother
- Date of admission
- Christian/First name of baby
- DOB of baby and place of birth
- Date and place of baptism
- Date of discharge of mother and destination
Date of discharge of baby and destination.

St Joseph's Foundling Home, also known as St Joseph's Babies' Home, Belfast

Admission Register January 1913–May 1936

Admission Register October 1934–July 1953

Admission Register April 1951–April 1981

Three admission registers, which contain some or all of the following information:

- Admission number
- Name of child
- Place of birth (DOB may be included here)
- Date and place of baptism
- Date of admission
- Name of mother
- Address of mother
- Date of nursing out
- Name and address of nurse-mother
- Promise to pay (amount of money)
- Remarks section – may include information regarding the baby's health or appearance, death, adoption or transfer to another institution (e.g., Belfast Union, Nazareth House).

FAMILY CARE ADOPTION SERVICES

Admission Slips 1959–64

Admission Slips 1964–71

Admission Slips 1971–81

Three volumes of admission slips. All volumes contain two slips to each page and they record the following details:

- Child's name
- DOB
- Where born
- Weight at birth
- Present weight
- Feeding
- Baptised at
- Date of baptism
- Adoption (yes/no)
- Mother's name
- Mother's address
- Date of admission.

Discharge Slips 1964–71

One volume of discharge slips. Dated, with child's name and signed by the person who was taking the child confirming that 'This is to certify I have received my child in a clean, healthy condition and free from infection'.

Adoption Slips 1959–67

Adoption Slips 1967–83

Two volumes, each containing two adoption slips per page which include some or all of the following information:

- Date of adoption
- Child's name
- Date of admission of child
- DOB of child
- Name of adoptive parents
- Address of adoptive parents
- Name of witness.

PRONI only retains information referring to baptisms of children born to 'residents' of mother and baby institutions (1922–95). All other entries in the Registers have been redacted.

Holy Rosary Parish, Belfast Baptism Register 1922–31

Holy Rosary Parish, Belfast Baptismal Register 1931–62

Holy Rosary Parish, Belfast Baptism Register 1964–84

Holy Rosary Parish, Belfast Baptism Register 1985–95

The Registers record the following information on baptised children:

- Child's first name
- Child's surname
- DOB
- Name of mother and father
- Address of parents
- Date of baptism
- Name of priest.

If the child was adopted, registers may also record:

- Adopted name of child
- Name and address of adoptive parents.

PRONI only retains information referring to baptisms or deaths of children born to 'residents' of mother and baby institutions (1922–95). All other entries in the Registers have been redacted.

Bessbrook Parish (Lower Killeavy) Baptism Register 1955–61

Bessbrook Parish (Lower Killeavy) Baptism Register 1961–84

The Registers record the following information on baptised children:

- Child's first name
- Child's surname
- DOB
- Name of mother and father
- Address of parents
- Date of baptism.

If the child was adopted, Registers may also record:

- Adopted name of child
- Name and address of adoptive parents.

Bessbrook Parish Baptismal Register, Marianvale Good Shepherd Convent, Newry 1955–84

The Register records the following information on baptised children:

- Child's surname
- Child's first name
- Name of mother
- Address of mother
- Date of baptism
- DOB
- Name and address of sponsor
- Name of minister.

St Malachy's, Carrickcruppen (Lower Killeavy) Burial Register 1948–2025

Register may or may not record the following information on deceased children:

- Name of deceased
- Age of deceased
- Date of death
- Place of burial
- Date of burial.

Cloghogue Parish (Upper Killeavy) Baptism Register: Daisy Hill Hospital 1955–63

Cloghogue Parish (Upper Killeavy) Baptism Register: Daisy Hill Hospital 1963–84

ARCHDIOCESE OF ARMAGH

Registers record the following information on baptised children:

- Child's first name
- Child's surname
- DOB
- Name of mother and father
- Address of parents
- Date of baptism.

If the child was adopted, registers may also record:

- Adopted name of child
- Name and address of adoptive parents.

PRONI

Mater Dei, Antrim Road, Belfast (see also Family Care Adoption Services)

Records of Mater Dei already held by PRONI.

Minute Book June 1944–July 1946
Minute Book September 1946–December 1947
Minute Book September 1949–March 1951
Minute Book April 1951–May 1953
Minute Book May 1953–July 1955
Minute Book July 1955–April 1956
Minute Book May 1959–November 1961
Minute Book January 1962–February 1965
Minute Book February 1965–October 1967
Minute Book October 1967–March 1971
Minute Book March 1971–January 1973
Minute Book January 1973–November 1974
Minute Book November 1974–August 1977
Minute Book August 1977–January 1979
Minute Book January 1979–November 1981
Minute Book November 1981–April 1984
Minute Book April 1984–July 1985
Minute Book July 1985–February 1987
Minute Book February 1987–February 1988
Minute Book March 1988–June 1990
Minute Book June 1990–February 1993
Minute Book February 1993–December 1994
Minute Book December 1994–September 1987

Ledger of Accounts August 1942–July 1966
Ledger of Accounts July 1966–June 1987
Ledger of Accounts July 1987–November 2001

Appendix 2

Independent Panel Recommendations
to the Executive Office regarding the
establishment and management of a
permanent Truth Recovery Archive



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

PART 1: LEGISLATION

These recommendations relate to legislative changes that will be required to allow for the establishment and operation of the proposed permanent archive. They are based on the feedback received during the consultation process undertaken by the Independent Panel (IP) in February and March 2025.

SCOPE

The Truth Recovery Archive should include:

- all relevant records as defined in the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022
- all adoption, fostering, boarding out and care files in Northern Ireland, including those currently created and/or retained by the Health and Social Care Trusts and by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service
- records of the Truth Recovery Design Panel; the Truth Recovery IP (including personal testimonies where individuals have consented to their inclusion in the Archive); the forthcoming public inquiry; the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry; and other relevant panels, inquiries, commissions or research projects
- other records which the Archive may identify in the future as falling within its remit and acquisitions policy.

Where particular records are not held by the Archive but are relevant to an affected person, the Archive will provide support and assistance in locating and retrieving such records.

RECORDS CURRENTLY IN PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

Relevant records held by private organisations should become public records and be made subject to the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923.

Where such records are held outside Northern Ireland, the Archive should be given authority to acquire either the original records or copies of the originals.

FUNCTIONS OF THE ARCHIVE

The Archive should carry out a range of functions, including but not limited to:

- development and implementation of a range of policies in line with international best practice, including policies relating to collecting, cataloguing, digitisation, conservation, access and disposal

- acquisition of relevant records on an ongoing basis, from both public and private sources, including the taking of testimonies from affected persons with appropriate support and assistance in place
- development of detailed policies and procedures for providing access to records in line with the provisions of the legislation, as addressed in more detail below
- provision of support services to users of the Archive, in particular to affected persons who are accessing their records
- development of a range of educational, research, exhibition and related outreach activities
- development of formal links with similar centres in other jurisdictions
- publication of an annual report detailing its operations.

ACCESS

The legislation should mandate the Archive to develop and implement policies relating to access, in line with the following principles.

Access for individuals to their own records:

- Individuals have the right to view original records relating to themselves.
- Individuals have the right to view and receive copies of records relating to themselves.
- Applications to view and/or receive copies of records must be made in writing.
- The individual making the request must provide proof of identity in a form to be set out in the access policies developed by the Archive.
- The individual making the request must provide as much detail as possible, to enable the Archive to identify all relevant records.
- The individual may submit an application via an agent or representative. In such cases, the agent or representative must submit evidence that they are acting on the instructions and with the consent of the affected person. The nature of such evidence should be set out in the access policies developed by the Archive.
- No fees or charges should apply.

- Access to adoption records should be aligned, at a minimum, with the *Access to Birth Records and Adoption Agency Records for Adults Impacted by Adoption: Practice Guidance* issued by the Department of Health in 2023, or with any revisions or updates to this guidance.
- If redactions are necessary to protect the personal information of third parties, the affected person has the right to inspect and to receive redacted copies of the records, not the original records.
- Copies must be provided in a format (hard copy or digital) which makes them accessible and comprehensible to the person receiving them. Advice and support must be provided to assist individuals in understanding terminology used in the records, how the records are organised and presented, and other information which will aid their understanding of the records.
- Individuals accessing records must receive appropriate trauma-informed support at all times during the process.

Access for family members of affected people

- Family members may request access to records of affected people.
- In assessing such requests, the Archive will establish whether the affected person has consented to the applicant having access to the records in question. If the affected person has stated their wishes, the Archive will observe whatever conditions have been specified.
- Access will not be granted to the records of any person still living unless that person gives their consent.
- In the case of deceased persons, and where no clear information is available regarding their wishes in relation to access, the Archive will attempt to establish the nature of the relationship between the applicant and the affected person. The applicant will be required to provide information or evidence of this relationship, if requested to do so by the Archive.
- Applications to view and/or receive copies of records are to be made in writing.
- The applicant must provide proof of identity in a form to be set out in the access policies developed by the Archive.
- The applicant must provide as much detail as possible, to enable the Archive to identify all relevant records.
- If redactions are necessary to protect the personal information of third parties, the applicant may inspect and receive redacted copies of the records, not the original records.

Access for research purposes

- Access to records may be provided, under particular circumstances and with appropriate controls, to others, including those who request access for the purposes of journalism, research, analysis, educational or other purposes.
- The Archive will develop an access policy and a set of appropriate procedures which may grant such requests if:
 - the records in question do not contain personal information
 - the records in question contain personal information, and the relevant individuals have consented to the use of their information for research or other purposes
 - copies of the records in question can be provided with personal information redacted in a way which protects the identities of individuals mentioned in the records
 - the specific research being undertaken necessitates access to unredacted records, and the researcher(s) can provide clear undertakings that no individuals will be identified in any research outputs, unless the individual gives their consent.

Access for criminal investigations, public inquiries, commissions of investigations, etc.

Access to records containing personal information will be granted in line with legal obligations, if requested for the following purposes:

- parliamentary investigations, commissions of inquiry, public inquiries or other similar investigative or research bodies established by the NI Executive or Assembly or the UK government or parliament
- criminal investigations or prosecutions conducted by the Police Service of Northern Ireland or another authorised police body.

In such cases, personal information of third parties will be redacted where possible, consistent with the requirements of the investigation.

Access to records not containing personal information

The Archive will grant access to records that do not contain personal information in line with relevant legislation and normal archival procedures and practices, as specified in the access policy to be developed by the Archive.

RIGHT TO ADD OR CORRECT

An individual to whom a record relates may provide additional records or statements of clarification if they believe that particular records held by the Archive contain incomplete, inaccurate or misleading information about themselves or about other individuals mentioned in the records.

A family member of an affected person may also provide additional records or statements of clarification in relation to themselves or the affected person if they believe that particular records held by the Archive contain incomplete, inaccurate or misleading information about themselves or the affected person.

The Archive will retain such additional records along with the main body of records and will manage them in accordance with the legislation and relevant policies developed by the Archive.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

The Archive should be established as a separate entity under the remit of the Director of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

An Executive Council (EC) should be established to operate the Archive and carry out the functions assigned to it by the legislation.

The EC should consist of a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 15 members, including a Chairperson.

Membership of the EC should comprise:

- affected persons, with representation for birth mothers and for children, now adults
- members of PRONI staff representing the Director of PRONI
- other members with a range of skills and experience including but not limited to:
 - archives and records management
 - human rights and privacy laws
 - historical or other research relevant to the records held by the Archive
 - social work with a trauma-informed focus
 - educational outreach, exhibitions, artistic interpretation of historical sources, public relations or related areas.

Apart from the members nominated by the Director of PRONI, all members should be recruited through a public recruitment process operated on behalf of the Executive Office (TEO).

Members of the EC should hold office for a period of five years and may serve a maximum of two terms.

If a member resigns or becomes unavailable during their term of office, TEO shall nominate a replacement with similar skills or background.

Members of the EC should be paid at a daily rate to be set by TEO.

The EC should issue an annual report to TEO.

RESOURCES

The Assembly should approve a budget for the Archive.

The EC should report to the Director of PRONI on the use of the budget which has been allocated.

Resources should be allocated separately to the resources available to PRONI prior to the enactment of the legislation.

Resources allocated to the Archive should include but will not be limited to:

- storage facilities to ensure that records are housed according to recognised standards
- digitisation equipment and facilities, allowing records to be copied and preserved in digital formats in a manner which ensures long-term preservation and accessibility
- ICT infrastructure and software which is necessary for the Archive to carry out its functions
- buildings and facilities to accommodate public research areas, meeting rooms, quiet areas and other spaces necessary for the archive to carry out its functions
- staff resources including but not limited to:
 - archivists and cataloguers
 - digitisation staff
 - administrative and clerical staff.

Staff may or may not be members of the EC.

Additional staff resources may be called upon when required, for example, trauma specialists or social workers to provide support for individuals accessing their records.

The Archive should have the capacity to procure relevant services and expertise on a short-term basis to supplement the work of its staff and/or the expertise available via the EC.

PART 2: FUTURE MANAGEMENT OF THE ARCHIVE

While the management of the Archive will be a matter for PRONI and the EC, the IP recommend the following actions which do not require legislative provision:

- The IP recommend that the public areas of the Archive should be located in a convenient location in or close to Belfast city centre, with good public transport links. Any building housing the Archive should be fully accessible for all potential users and visitors.
- The IP recommend that the public areas of the Archive should include a suitable mix of research spaces, including areas where individuals can consult their records in private, talk with support staff and be safeguarded in an appropriate environment.
- The IP recommend that the public areas of the Archive should include a suitable mix of meeting rooms, exhibition spaces and other facilities which can facilitate a range of exhibitions, performances and other public events.
- The IP recommend that consideration should be given to the inclusion of suitable outdoor areas for reflection, remembrance and memorialisation.
- The IP recommend that exhibitions and events should be organised in other locations on a periodic basis, in order to maximise awareness of and accessibility of the Archive; this may be done in co-operation with suitable archives, museums or similar centres in other jurisdictions.
- The IP recommend that the Archive should develop a comprehensive online presence, to facilitate access by the widest possible number of people, especially victims-survivors.
- The IP recommend that policies developed by the Archive should make specific provision for ongoing collection of records, including testimonies, from victims-survivors.
- The IP recommend that the Archive should develop links with educational and research institutions to increase awareness and understanding of the issues addressed in the Archive's holdings.

- The IP recommend that all staff of the Archive should complete professionally recognised trauma-informed training and should have access to ongoing supports and assistance.
- The IP recommend that policies adopted by the Archive should include a person-centred, participatory record-keeping approach; this would allow victims-survivors input into how records are collected, catalogued and managed in the Archive.
- The IP recommend that the Archive, and PRONI generally, should work with relevant public sector bodies and private agencies in updating and reforming their record-keeping systems to include person-centred, participatory approaches on an ongoing basis; this would allow individuals a say in how their records are created and managed.
- The IP recommend that the Archive, and PRONI generally, should work with relevant public sector bodies to address wider record-keeping shortcomings identified by the IP.
- The IP recommend that consideration should be given to cross-border funding opportunities for the Archive and its work.

Endnotes

Language and Terminology

- ¹ For more on the issue of language and terminology, see Caroline McGregor, Carmel Devaney and Sarah-Anne Buckley, *Language, Terminology and Representation Relating to Ireland's Institutions Historically Known as 'Mother and Baby Homes', 'County Homes' and Related Institutions* (University of Galway, 2023).

Chapter 1 – Introduction

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- ³ Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society: 1800–1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77; James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Manchester University Press, 2007), 25.
- ⁴ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 92.
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- ⁶ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 77.
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- ⁸ Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries*, 26; Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 113–14; Leanne McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality: Women in Twentieth Century Northern Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2009), 63–64.
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- ¹⁸ Peter Hughes, 'Cleanliness and Godliness: A sociological Study of the Good Shepherd Refuges for the Social Reformation and Christian Conversion of Prostitutes and Convicted women in Nineteenth Century Britain' (PhD thesis, Brunel University, 1985), 376; McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality*, 62.
- ¹⁹ *Irish Times*, 25 August 1993; *Irish Press*, 24 August 1993.
- ²⁰ See, in particular, the work of Mary Raftery, *Irish Times*, 21 August 2003.
- ²¹ Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society*, 76; *Irish Times*, 25 September 1996.
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- ²⁹ Deirdre Heenan and Derek Birrell, *Social Work in Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change* (Policy Press, 2011), 12.
- ³⁰ This was similar to the situation in the Irish Free State; see Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and child welfare in Dublin, 1922–1960*, (Manchester University Press, 2013) 180.
- ³¹ McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality*, 71.
- ³² Maria Luddy, 'Unmarried mothers in Ireland, 1880–1973', *Women's History Review* 20, no. 1 (2011): 110.
- ³³ Ciara Breathnach and Eunan O'Halpin, 'Scripting blame: Irish coroners' courts and unnamed infant dead, 1916–32', *Social History* 39, no. 2 (2014): 226.
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- ⁴³ Rattigan, 'What Else Could I Do?', 19.
- ⁴⁴ Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart, *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920–2018* (Palgrave, 2019), 43.
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- ⁴⁶ McAvoy, 'Before Cadden', 153; McCormick, "No sense of wrong-doing": 132–38; Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, *The Irish Abortion Journey*, 47.
- ⁴⁷ For more on this see Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The boat to England: An analysis of the official reactions to the emigration of single expectant Irishwomen to Britain, 1922–1972', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 30 (2003): 54–71; Paul Garrett, 'The abnormal flight: The migration and repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers', *Social History* 25, no. 3 (2000): 330–44; Jennifer Redmond, 'Sinful singleness? Discourses on Irish women's emigration to England, 1922–1948', *Women's History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 455–76; Louise Ryan, 'Sexualising emigration: Discourses of Irish female emigration in the 1930s', *Women's Studies International Forum* 25, no. 1 (2002): 51–65.
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- ⁵² *Registrar-General's Annual Report for Northern Ireland, 2000.*
- ⁵³ Royal Commission on Venereal Disease, Government Board of Ireland, 27 February 1914, Cd. 7475, qq. 8286–8289.
- ⁵⁴ Urquhart, 'Gender, family and sexuality', 247.
- ⁵⁵ See for example, McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality*, 98–101; Catriona Beaumont, 'Women Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State 1922–1948', *Women's History Review*, 6/4 (1997).
- ⁵⁶ See for example, Maria Luddy, 'Sex and the Single Girl in 1920s and 1930s Ireland', *The Irish Review* 35 (2007): 79–91; Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin, 'Producing "decent girls": governmentality and the moral geographies of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922–1937)', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 15/4 (2008), 355–72; Louise Ryan, 'Constructing "Irishwoman": Modern girls and comely maidens', *Irish Studies Review* 6, no. 3 (1998): 263–72.
- ⁵⁷ For more on this, see Leanne McCormick, '"One Yank and They're Off": Interaction between US Troops and Northern Irish Women, 1942–45', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 2 (2006): 228–57; Leanne McCormick, 'Filthy Little Girls: Controlling Women in Public Spaces in Northern Ireland During the World Wars', in *Irish Women at War* (Irish Academic Press, 2010), ed. Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart, 103–19.
- ⁵⁸ Church of Ireland Diocesan Meeting, Moral Welfare Association, February 1943.
- ⁵⁹ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 10 June 1943.
- ⁶⁰ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 29 April 1944.
- ⁶¹ Urquhart, 'Gender, family and sexuality', 248.
- ⁶² Leanne McCormick and Sean O'Connell with Olivia Dee and John Privilege, *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1990* (Department of Health, 2021), 59.
- ⁶³ Urquhart, 'Gender, family and sexuality', 247.
- ⁶⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 October 1972.
- ⁶⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 December 1974.
- ⁶⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 March 1978.
- ⁶⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 June 1981.
- ⁶⁸ Medical Officer of Health, *Report on the Health of the County Borough of Belfast for the Year*, 1955, 1968.
- ⁶⁹ McCormick et al., *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries*, Chapter 17.
- ⁷⁰ TRIP, *Interim Report* (2024), accessed 8 November 2025, <https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/files/independentpaneltruthrecoveryni/2024-05/Interim-Report-May%202024.pdf>.

Chapter 2 – Testimony Gathering and Analysis Working Group

- ¹ As outlined in the Truth Recovery Design Panel's report: Deirdre Mahon, Maeve O'Rourke and Phil Scraton, *Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability report* (Truth Recovery Design Panel, 2021), which was accepted by the NI Executive on 15 November 2021.
- ² The IP did not take testimony from children but it resolved to apply appropriate safeguarding protocols in the event that contemporary concerns were raised about children during testimonies.
- ³ Several other testimonies feature private domestic residences as the site at which a pregnant girl or woman was concealed prior to entry in one of the institutions or a private nursing home.
- ⁴ Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee Report to Establish State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* (2013), accessed 12 August 2025, <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/collections/report-of-the-inter-departmental-committee-to-establish-the-facts-of-state-involvement-with-the-magdalen-laundries/>.
- ⁵ See, for example, ed. Miriam Haughton, Mary McAuliffe and Emilie Pine, *Legacies of the Magdalen Laundries: Gender, Commemoration and the Carceral Postcolonial State* (Manchester University Press, 2021); Claire McGettrick, Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke, James M. Smith and Mari Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries: A Campaign for Justice* (I.B. Tauris, 2021), particularly Chapter 5.
- ⁶ James Gallen, 'Redressing gendered mistreatment: Magdalene laundries, symphysiotomy and mother and baby homes', in ed. L. Black and P. Dunn, *Law and Gender in Modern Ireland* (Bloomsbury, 2019), 263–80.
- ⁷ Ed. Selma Leydesdorff and Kim Lacy Rogers, *Trauma: Life Stories of Survivors* (Routledge, 2004), 4.
- ⁸ Department of Children, Disability and Equality, *The Report of the Commission into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report)*, (2009).
- ⁹ See, for example, Lucy Simpson-Kilbane, '"A document of truth?": Ireland's Magdalene Laundries and the McAleese Report', in ed. Haughton et al., *Legacies of the Magdalen Laundries*.
- ¹⁰ Mahon et al., *Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability report*, 86.
- ¹¹ For analysis of this see Patricia Lundy, '"I just want justice." The impact of historical institutional abuse inquiries from the survivors' perspective', *Éire-Ireland* 55, nos. 1–2 (2020).
- ¹² Department of Children, Disability and Equality, *Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes* (2021), accessed 3 November 2025, [Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes](https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/files/independentpaneltruthrecoveryni/2024-05/Final-Report-May%202024.pdf).

- ¹³ This is discussed in detail by Catriona Crowe, 'The Commission and the Survivors', *Dublin Review* (Summer 2021).
- ¹⁴ Ed. Aoife O'Donoghue and Mairead Enright, 'Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation Report: Alternative executive summary', *Feminist Law Review* 14, no. 1 (2025): 92, accessed 10 November 2025, <https://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/feministsatlaw/article/view/1396>.
- ¹⁵ Department of Children, Disability and Equality, *Report of the Confidential Committee to the Commission of Investigation on Mother and Baby Homes October 2020* (2021), 12., accessed 3 November 2025, [Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes](#).
- ¹⁶ Statement by the Oral History Network of Ireland on the role of oral testimony in the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes, 5 June 2021.
- ¹⁷ Leanne McCormick and Sean O'Connell, *Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1995* (QUB and UU, 2021).
- ¹⁸ OHNI Statement, 5 June 2021.
- ¹⁹ O'Donoghue and Enright, 'Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation Report', 90.
- ²⁰ Lynn Abram, *Oral History Theory* (Taylor and Francis, 2013), 80.
- ²¹ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 1–19.
- ²² Olivia Dee, 'Navigating cultures of silence with survivors of Northern Irish mother and baby institutions', *Oral History*, 5/1 (2023), p. 84.
- ²³ Dee, p. 84.
- ²⁴ See the chapter on the Mater Dei Hostel.
- ²⁵ There has been a long-running and still active debate about repressed memory, which is sometimes referred to as dissociative amnesia. See H. Otgar et al., 'The return of the repressed: the persistent and problematic claims of long forgotten trauma', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14/6 (2019).
- ²⁶ Joint Committee on Human Rights, *The Violation of Family Life: Adoption of Children of Unmarried Women 1949–1976 – Third Report of Session 2022–23* (House of Commons and House of Lords, 2022), accessed 20 September 2025, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/23076/documents/169043/default/>.
- ²⁷ 'Historical adoption practices: A formal apology', Scottish Government, 22 March 2023, <https://www.gov.scot/news/historical-adoption-practices-a-formal-apology/>.
- ²⁸ *Irish News*, 25 November 2025.
- ²⁹ Phil Scraton, Deena Hayden, Lucy Easthope, Patricia Canning and Peter Marshall, 'Treated with Contempt': An Independent Panel Report into Fans' Experiences Before, During and After the Champion's League Final in Paris (October 2022).

Chapter 3 – Access to Records, Advocacy, Genealogy and Legal Services Working Group

- ¹ Deirdre Mahon, Maeve O'Rourke and Phil Scraton, *Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland: Truth, Acknowledgment and Accountability* (Truth Recovery Design Panel, 2021).
- ² C. McGregor, C. Devaney and S. A. Buckley, *Language, Terminology and Representation Relating to Ireland's Institutions Historically Known as 'Mother and Baby Homes', 'County Homes' and Related Institutions* (UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway, 2023).
- ³ Truth Recovery IP, *Access to Records*, accessed 10 February 2026, <https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/access-records>.
- ⁴ TEO, *Truth Recovery – Public Consultation on a Statutory Public Inquiry and Financial Redress Scheme Consultation Paper* (2024), accessed 10 February 2026, <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/execcoffice/trp-consultation.pdf>.
- ⁵ Truth Recovery IP, *Response to TEO Public Consultation on a statutory Public Inquiry and Financial Redress Scheme* (2024), accessed 10 February 2026, <https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/publications/response-teo-public-consultation-statutory-public-inquiry-and-financial-redress-scheme>.

Chapter 6 – Recommendations

- ¹ In relation to the experience of victims-survivors at previous public inquiries see, for example, Patricia Lundy, “‘I just want justice’: Assessing the impact of historical institutional child abuse inquiries from the perspective of survivors”, *Eire-Ireland* 55, nos. 1–2, (2020), accessed 29 May 2026, https://media.amnesty.org.uk/documents/Lundy_Eire-Ireland_article.pdf; Mairead Enright, Aoife O'Donohue et al., ‘Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation Report: Alternative Executive Summary’, *Feminists@Law* 14, no. 1 (2025); Claire McGettrick, Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke, James M. Smith and Mari Steed, *Ireland and the Magdalene Laundries* (Bloomsbury, 2021), Chapter 5.
- ² Guidance on participatory record-keeping policies and their implementation can be found via the MIRRA Project (Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access) at University College London, accessed 12 November 2025, <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/mirra/about/>.
- ³ Archives and Records Association, ‘The records of adopted and care-experienced people – Developing guidance for record-keepers and care professionals’, accessed 16 November 2025, <https://www.archives.org.uk/care-and-adoption-records>.
- ⁴ Information Commissioner's Office, ‘Better Records Together’, accessed 13 November 2025, <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/campaigns/better-records-together/>.
- ⁵ For the IP Access to Records consultation findings and recommendations, see *Access to Records Survey – Detailed Analysis Report*, accessed 13 November 2025, <https://www.independentpanel.truthrecoveryni.co.uk/publications/access-records-survey-detailed-analysis-report>.

“ *It takes up your life, you get on with your life, but it's always there, and it's at the back and then it comes to the front, and then it goes away back again, then it comes to the front again. It just keeps doing that all the time.*

“ *I am remote when it comes to relationships and know that I hold back to prevent myself getting hurt. This is a life sentence truly.*

“ *You just feel empty and your big bump's gone, okay that's grand, but there's no baby there, you you're very unsure of yourself, you can't ask anyone, because nobody knows, you know.*

“ *I never had a bond with my adopted mother or father, especially my adopted father, there was no bond, no loving. They were just there for you know my basic needs, but there was no emotional needs.*

“ *I wouldn't be sitting here [over 40 years] later wondering is my adopted child still alive, searching for her – there's no happy ever after in this, as far as I'm concerned.*

“ *I didn't come to defend the nuns but I really, when I watch those things on TV I think that's not fair. They, you know, your parents didn't give you the roof over your head, the option is this, the support, the food, a place to hide. That's really what it was for me, basically. A place to hide.*

“ *My feelings were very, very sad - I knew that every day would be a day nearer the time I had to give my lovely boy up for adoption.*

“ *I says ‘No I can’t watch this here, if that child’s going away today, I can’t see this.’ So that’s the bit that I won’t forget [crying].*

“ *Rejection was the largest part of being adopted as you always had in your mind that your birth mother didn’t want you for some reason.*

“ *I said I was not going to confession, And they made me kneel at their altarI had to kneel there for about four to five hours.*

“ *So, there’s a lot of things make sense and a lot of, I think I’ve carried a lot of guilt and shame because I look at my birth mum and I know she’s not okay, but she doesn’t want to address any of it, she just wants to pretend it never happened.*

“ *That lady was just constantly telling me, you know, he’s going to be going to foster care whether you like it or not, she was just a, it was almost like she relished in this position that she had that she could control you by telling you they were taking your baby away basically.*



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth