

Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Consultation on the Establishment of a
Permanent Truth Recovery Archive
February 2025



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

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A. Introduction

1. Purpose and Structure of this Document

The purpose of this document is to seek your views and opinions about the establishment of a permanent Truth Recovery Archive.

The document contains the following:

Part A: Introduction

This provides background information, explains why it is important to establish a Truth Recovery Archive, provides details of the consultation process, and explains how you can respond to the questions asked in this document.

It also includes a statement regarding the terminology used in this document and about sources of support.

Part B: Establishment of a Truth Recovery Archive

This contains a set of eight suggestions from the Truth Recovery Independent Panel regarding the establishment of the Archive. Each suggestion is followed by questions which you are asked to consider when responding to this document.

2. Background

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

The Panel has considered this in several of its meetings and has had ongoing contacts with various stakeholders as part of its discussions.

3. Why is this Important?

Records are crucial in terms of individual and community identity and memory. Lack of records, or difficulties in gaining access to records, limits our ability to establish and understand our identities and memories, and can add to the trauma experienced by victims-survivors and their families. It can also limit a wider understanding of how institutions worked and how they were managed and operated on an ongoing basis.

The Panel has undertaken work to identify and assess records relevant to Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, Workhouses and other institutions in Northern Ireland, as well as their associated pathways and practices. Such records may be held by public bodies or private organisations (for example, religious orders or institutions).

Establishing a Truth Recovery Archive will involve gathering these records, and others yet to be identified, into a central location, where they can be suitably stored, organised and protected and where they can be accessed by affected people and by researchers, historians and the wider public.

The advantages of such an approach include:

- A central, comprehensive source of records relating to historical institutions and people who spent time in them, adoption records, and other records relating to children in state care.
- The preservation and secure storage of all relevant records to recognised archival standards.



- Consistent organisation and cataloguing of all relevant records, to ensure a comprehensive knowledge of what records are held and where they are located.
- Ongoing collection of additional relevant records, including testimonies.
- Clear and consistent procedures for victims-survivors who wish to access their own personal records, along with appropriate assistance and supports.
- Clear and consistent procedures for others, including historians and researchers, who wish to access and use the records.
- An ongoing role for victims-survivors in the management of the Archive, how it operates and how it manages the records in its care.
- Dedicated resources to ensure that records are stored, catalogued, digitised and accessed in an appropriate manner on an ongoing basis.
- Opportunities for research, educational and other uses to promote awareness of the issues relevant to the Archive.

4. Consultation Process

The contents of this document represent the Panel's suggestions regarding the establishment of a permanent Truth Recovery Archive.

Establishment of the Archive will require legislation to be introduced in the Assembly, to ensure that the Archive is properly established, managed and resourced. Once established, those involved in managing the Archive will need to carefully develop the necessary policies and procedures for the ongoing operation of the Archive. Many of the tasks involved, such as cataloguing and digitisation, require significant resources and can be time-consuming. The Archive will need to agree priorities and develop a phased approach to implementation.



The Panel is seeking your views on the suggestions in Part B of this document and will review and revise the suggestions on the basis of comments received during the consultation process.

The consultation process provides an opportunity for those directly affected, and their relatives and advocates, to have a say in the Panel's final recommendations regarding the Truth Recovery Archive.

In addition to this consultation document, the Panel will arrange consultation events, both online and in-person. These events will include a presentation by the Panel, and an opportunity for you to ask questions or raise points of interest relating to the establishment of the Archive.

You will be advised in advance of the location, date and time of these events.

5. How to Respond

If you wish to make a submission as part of the consultation process, you are asked to:

- Read this document and the questions it contains.
- Attend, if possible, the online or in-person presentations.
- Submit a response by completing the online questionnaire, available at <https://shorturl.at/Y7u0d> OR emailing your written response to secretariat@independentpanel.org.uk

Please note: you do not have to attend the online or in-person events in order to submit a response.

The deadline for submitting a response is **5.00pm on Thursday 20th March 2025**.



If you wish to receive this document in hard copy format, please contact us at secretariat@independentpanel.org.uk or by telephone at 028 9052 0263 (open Monday – Friday 11am - 12pm and 3pm - 4pm, or leave a voicemail on our secure answering service any time outside of these hours.).

Hard copy responses may be submitted by post to: Truth Recovery Independent Panel, 4th Floor, Equality House, 7-9 Shaftesbury Square, BT2 7DB.

6. Terminology

As a Panel, we acknowledge that the language and terminology we use is very important and that the content of this document is related to difficult and sensitive matters. We understand that some people may hold different views on the most suitable terminology, and we recognise this may be upsetting. We endeavour to use language and terminology which conveys respect and represents all people and their relatives impacted by Northern Ireland Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries, and Workhouses, and their pathways and practices.

7. Support

Support services are available through the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) and their community partners WAVE and Adopt NI. For more information, you can contact VSS by telephone on 028 9027 9100 (open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) or by email at enquiries@vssni.org.



B. Establishment of a Truth Recovery Archive

This section of the document sets out and explains the Panel's suggestions for the establishment and management of a permanent Truth Recovery Archive.

The Panel's suggestions are numbered 1 – 8 below. Each of the eight suggestions is followed by questions for you to consider when making your response.

1. The scope of the Archive's holdings should be set out in the legislation.

The legislation should specify that the following records should be included in the Archive:

- All relevant records, whether currently in public or private hands, as defined in the [Preservation of Documents \(Historical Institutions\) Act 2022](#).
- All adoption files and care files in Northern Ireland, including personal adoption and care files and administrative files (to be transferred to the Archive after an agreed period).
- Records of the Truth Recovery Design Panel; the Truth Recovery Independent Panel (including testimonies, where individuals have consented to their testimonies being kept in an archive); the forthcoming Public Inquiry; other relevant panels/inquiries/commissions or research projects.
- Other relevant records which the Archive may identify in the future.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with the scope of the Archive, as suggested by the Panel?

2. Do you believe that other records should come within the scope of the Archive, or do you have other comments or suggestions about what should be included?

2. Privately-held records should be made public records.

Relevant records held by private organisations should become public records and should be included in the Archive. This should apply to all relevant records as defined in the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022. The 2022 Act should be amended to this effect.

This provision should apply to records whose existence or location is not currently known.

Where relevant records are already stored or held outside Northern Ireland, the legislation should enable the Archive to seek and retain digital copies of those records.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with the Panel's suggestion about making these records public records?
2. Do you have comments or observations about this suggestion or how it should be implemented?

3. The legislation should list specific functions and responsibilities of the Archive.

The legislation should specify the following broad functions and responsibilities for the Archive, with detailed implementation to be the responsibility of the Archive's staff and management (see item 6 below regarding the management of the Archive):

- In addition to records listed at 1 above, the Archive should continue to collect and manage relevant records (including testimonies) on an ongoing basis, from both public and private sources.
- The Archive should develop and implement a range of appropriate policies and procedures in line with international best practice, including policies relating to collecting, cataloguing, digitisation, conservation, access and disposal.
- The Archive should provide support services to users, in addition to standard archival and research services.
- The Archive should maximise access to records while respecting the right to privacy (see item 4 below).
- The Archive should engage in appropriate educational, research and other outreach activities.
- The Archive should develop formal links with similar centres in other jurisdictions.
- The Archive should issue an annual report to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, detailing its operations, and should also publicise its work on an ongoing basis through other reports and public events as appropriate.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with the Panel's suggestions regarding the functions and responsibilities of the Archive?



2. Do you have comments or suggestions about these functions and responsibilities, or do you wish to see additional functions specified in the legislation?

4. The legislation should specify the legal basis on which access will be allowed to the Archive's holdings.

Access to sensitive personal information is a complex area. To provide clarity and to avoid conflicts with GDPR and data protection legislation, the legislation should make specific allowance for access to the Archive, including:

- Access by individuals to their personal records, without the payment of fees or charges.
- Access by individuals to the personal records of family members or relatives.
- Access by advocates or legal representatives on behalf of individuals.
- Access by researchers, historians or others carrying out relevant research.
- Access by journalists or other media representatives.

The legislation should also include a right for individuals to add to or clarify information relating to them if they believe the existing information is inaccurate or misleading.

The Archive should develop detailed access policies and procedures to manage the access arrangements set out in the legislation.

In all cases, the Archive should maximise access for individuals to their personal information with the minimum redactions necessary to protect the privacy of third parties.

Access to non-personal records (for example, administrative records of institutions or government agencies) should be allowed to the greatest extent possible, in line with policies and procedures developed by the Archive.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with the Panel's views on access, as detailed above?
2. Do you have any comments or suggestions about how the legislation should deal with issues regarding access to the Archive?

5. The Archive should be established and should operate under the auspices of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

The Archive should be hosted by PRONI because:

- PRONI is a well-established and trusted archive.
- Relevant public records are already part of PRONI's remit and are required to be transferred to PRONI under the Public Records Act.
- PRONI has experience of acquiring private collections and of hosting independent archives, e.g. the Prisons Memory Archive.
- As part of the Truth Recovery process, PRONI has already established a good working relationship with many of the private institutions holding relevant records.
- PRONI has existing storage, conservation and digitisation facilities which will be important for the Archive. This means that there would be no need to find new specialist facilities for storing and managing the records (both hard copy and digital) in the Archive.



QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree that the Truth Recovery Archive should be established under the auspices of PRONI?

2. Do you have comments or observations about this suggestion?

6. The Archive's operations should be overseen by an Executive Council, including victim-survivor representatives and other individuals with a range of relevant skills and experience.

The legislation should establish an Executive Council to manage the Archive.

The legislation should specify:

- the number of members, the recruitment or appointment process and a fixed term of office for each member.
- a specified minimum number of victim-survivor representatives.
- a specified minimum number of PRONI representatives.

The legislation should also allow for other members to be appointed, including those with relevant skills or experience relating to archives; genealogy; research; privacy and access laws; exhibition/education/outreach; trauma-informed practice; communications; other skills/experience as appropriate.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree that the Archive should be managed and operated by an Executive Council such as that described above?

2. Do you have comments or suggestions regarding the membership of the proposed Council, the nomination or recruitment process, the term of office, or the mix of skills that should be represented?

7. The Archive should be provided with dedicated staff and other resources in order to carry out its functions.

The Archive should have:

- a dedicated complement of staff, including those with relevant qualifications and experience in archival management, cataloguing, digitisation, storage, conservation and related matters.
- staff with skills and experience relevant to providing support and advocacy services to users of the Archive.
- adequate support and administration staff.
- access to archival quality storage facilities, including digital storage and digital preservation facilities and equipment, and to other resources necessary to fulfill its functions and responsibilities.

These resources should be over-and-above the resources allocated to PRONI for its other functions and activities and should be 'ring-fenced' for the Truth Recovery Archive.

The legislation should allow for the Archive to call on additional services and supports as required.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you agree with the Panel's suggestions regarding the resourcing of the Archive?
2. Do you have comments or suggestions regarding the resourcing of the Archive, or the type of resources that should be available to it?

8. Other Suggestions

The following suggestions do not need to be included in the legislation which establishes the Archive. They relate to more practical matters such as the location of the Archive, the layout of its facilities and the way it delivers some of its functions.

Although not for inclusion in legislation, the Panel believes that it should make recommendations on such matters, for the guidance of TEO, the Department for Communities, PRONI and the Archive's Executive Council. Such recommendations will facilitate the operation of the Archive on an inclusive, trauma-informed and victim-survivor centred basis.

The Panel's current suggestions on these topics are:

- 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.
- 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 Archive should develop a comprehensive online presence, to facilitate access by the widest possible number of people, especially victims-survivors.
- Policies developed by the Archive should make specific provision for ongoing collection of records, including testimonies, from victims and survivors.
- The public areas of the Archive should include a suitable mix of research spaces, including areas where individuals can consult their records in private and talk with support staff in an appropriate environment.
- 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.
- Consideration should be given to the inclusion of suitable outdoor areas for reflection, remembrance and memorialisation.
- The Archive should develop links with educational and research institutions to increase awareness and understanding of the issues addressed in the Archive's holdings.
- All staff of the Archive should have some element of trauma-informed training and should have access to ongoing supports and assistance.
- Policies adopted by the Archive should include a person-centred/participatory recordkeeping approach; this would allow victim-survivor input into how records are collected, catalogued and managed in the Archive.
- The Archive, and PRONI generally, should work with relevant public sector bodies and private agencies in updating and reforming their recordkeeping 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 Archive, and PRONI generally, should work with relevant public sector bodies to address wider recordkeeping shortcomings identified by the Independent Panel.
- Consideration should be given to cross-border funding opportunities for the Archive and its work.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have comments or observations regarding any of the specific suggestions listed above?
2. Do you have additional suggestions which you feel should be added?

