



Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery

Work Plan 2024-25

APRIL 2024

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Foreword

from Chief Commissioner, Sir Declan Morgan

This is the first work plan for the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery ('the Commission'). The Commission has been established to provide information to families, victims and survivors of deaths and serious injuries related to the Troubles/Conflict, and to assist the promotion of reconciliation.



While the Commission was legally established from December, we will begin our work from May. This first year will be an important step as we move from planning and design, to starting to carry out investigations and supporting those individuals and families that have requested investigations. We will need to learn from our first cases and be open to feedback and change as we seek to improve how we can help people. This year will see further work to continue setting up the Commission, to build awareness about our approach, and to begin to talk to people about their cases. Requesting individuals will begin their journey on the Commission's three stages of investigation (Support; Information Recovery; and Findings).

The work plan outlines the activity we will undertake in the financial year 2024-25. There is a broad range of work to finish building the foundations that will ensure that the Commission is operating effectively as an independent organisation rooted in our values of integrity, impartiality, openness, accountability, and respect. The plan also begins to outline how we anticipate the work of the Commission to progress in future years.

A central theme of the Commission's work, especially in relation to our investigations, is to embed a Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model. This approach will be woven into the fabric of every level of the organisation and needs to continually evolve so that learning from experiences and feedback is reflected in the Commission's model.

In a few weeks, the Commission will be able to receive requests from individuals – victims, survivors, families – to investigate their specific case. And from May, the Commission will be setting out more information, through different means, to raise awareness of how the Commission will work.

The support stage, where initial contact is made to the Commission about the possibility of investigating a case, is at the start. Dedicated Case Support Workers will start meeting with individuals and families to discuss how the Commission's work might help in their case. The approach is about people and not process – individuals will need the time and space to consider what is right for them, having been able to ask questions and explore the issues important to them. Having had the information, consideration, and time each individual needs, the information recovery stage will then begin, with the Commission under a duty to look into all the circumstances.

I accepted the role of Chief Commissioner because I believe this is worth doing. The people of Northern Ireland and all those affected by the Troubles/ Conflict need the legacy of the past to be properly dealt with. Previous attempts to address this have failed but that doesn't mean we can simply give up. This first year of the Commission's work is the start of that new attempt. There will be challenges and there will be things that the Commission does not get right. But it is how we listen to feedback, how we maintain our values and principles and how we keep sight of our principal objective to promote reconciliation that will guide the Commission to seek to do the right thing.



Sir Declan Morgan
Chief Commissioner

Introduction

This work plan for the coming year (financial year 2024-25) outlines the next steps on the programme of work to form the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery. This represents a significant step: from the small secretariat formed to support Sir Declan on his identification in May 2023, to a formed and functioning independent public authority.

Considerable progress has been made since last May. Fully formed governance, finance, human resources, and outreach teams have been put in place. Expert teams to develop operational practices to carry out ECHR compliant investigations have been formed and are working to high professional standards and at pace. And the senior leadership of the Commission's investigative functions under the Commissioner for Investigations is in place. This a remarkable achievement, as the expected time to create a new 'Arms Length Body' is around four years, and many 'new' organisations start with teams and existing practices being transferred from existing organisations. That has not been the case here and we have built an organisation, begun to shape a culture and set a new Code of Conduct from the ground up.

Over the last year the teams have grown and our work has evolved to move into more detailed operational design, into greater outreach to give a wider range of voices an opportunity to be heard, and with deepening expertise to embed a Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model so that those we are here to serve are truly supported.

Our strength has been the clarity of purpose that all those joining the team have, set from our Chief Commissioner and our Commissioner for Investigations, to do their best to help address the unresolved past of the Troubles/Conflict in Northern Ireland. To innovate, to use new ways to gather information and investigate, while supporting victims, families and survivors through genuine and proper involvement in the progress of their case. And to ultimately focus on how we can build an organisation and an approach that assists with the promotion of reconciliation.

Northern Ireland's evolution since 1998 has seen many challenges. In that regard, this Commission's development is not unique. The societal context has, at times, been turbulent. We recognise the contested nature of the legislation that has established the Commission, and accept the necessity of consideration of that legislation by the Courts to confirm its validity. The High Court's judgment confirms that the Commission is independent and is capable of carrying out investigations which are compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Commission is therefore properly and lawfully established and should be treated as such by other public authorities. The Commission will continue to stand on the integrity and independence of our people, our values, our purpose, and our actions, both as individuals and an organisation. And as a Commission, we once again restate our commitment to ECHR-compliance; to respecting the principles of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and to focus on providing useful information to

those affected by the Troubles/Conflict.

As more operational staff join in waves over the next year to work on the cases that come to the Commission, we must maintain that purpose and continue to strengthen our values. This means holding ourselves to those high standards, seeking and accepting feedback no matter how difficult, and admitting when we have got things wrong so that we might learn and improve. For all coming to work in the Commission, their experience and background is important to make the Commission a success, but everyone – no matter their seniority, their previous roles or their personal views – must also be open minded and respectful of the new approach that is needed.

We do not have all the answers and we do not and cannot know best. Listening well to people coming forward to the Commission, those across the communities in Northern Ireland, and further afield, and especially those who have continued to live their lives carrying their loss and pain, is what we must now redouble our efforts as a Commission over the next year to put at the heart of our work.

It is this open and collaborative approach that will shape the nature of our work to complete our foundational phase during a further period of change – uncertainty through ongoing litigation, the start of operational work, a new Chief Executive Officer and the move from the programme building the institution into a steady state. The Commission must focus on what we can control and focus on what we can deliver to demonstrate to others the possibilities and the potential of our proposed approach.

And this first set of changes begins from May. Building gradually, as part of the next stage of the plans to establish the Commission, we will start our interaction with victims, survivors and families who want to find out more about the Commission and what it might specifically be able to do in their case. Anticipating and predicting how many people may choose to approach the Commission from May is an impossible task. The Court of Appeal will be considering further legal challenges to the Legacy Act, overall awareness of the Commission's actual powers and approach is relatively low, and for many, the way in which the legislation was introduced still causes concern. The Commission is committed to educating and informing, through a wide range of routes, what we can actually do for people and will be stepping up these efforts from May so that individuals can make an informed choice about whether or not to approach the Commission.

However, the Commission has also planned a progressive build up to our activities so that we can use initial interest from victims, survivors and families to inform and improve how the next parts of the planned build up occur. For example, required staffing numbers and specialisms for investigative officers are better informed once there is an early understanding about the types of cases that people are requesting the Commission to consider investigating. Continuous learning from our early interactions will improve how we work.

Our progression from May will therefore comprise:

- In the first weeks of May a telephone and email service will be open to the public to express interest in having their case investigated by the Commission by registering their details. This will begin from 1 May and trained staff are in place to operate this.
- From late May onwards, face to face meetings between a dedicated Case Support Worker and those who have registered will begin. This will allow for further explanation about how the Commission will work – including following the Commission’s response to the consultation that it is running which closes on 10 May. And the Case Support Worker will explore more information about the person’s case. More face-to-face meeting will be able to follow. These meetings will be in neutral, discrete locations which is an important part of our commitment to create a safe and trusted approach with those who come to us.
- Pre-investigative work and further Case Support Worker meetings will begin from mid to late June, potentially meeting that requests for investigation will begin being accepted during July.
- Operations sites in London and Northern Ireland will be functioning. We will have a front-office presence at our Headquarters in central Belfast and are in the late stages of designing and fitting-out the remaining space to ensure that it can also support meetings with victims, survivors and families in a secure and sensitive way. We expect that this will be ready for full use from the Autumn but until then will not be able to have visitors to those offices.

It is a solemn task that we have ahead. And there is much to still do, so that words and promises are demonstrated through actions, values are proved through how people are treated, and results are shown through the Commission’s published reports that establish the facts of past events and provide an acknowledgement of the wrongdoing.

Tristan Pedelty

Chief Executive Officer and Commissioner

Mission, Vision & Values of the Commission

Vision:

A society that is more reconciled because the Commission has provided greater information to the public about deaths and serious injuries during the Troubles/Conflict.

Mission:

An independent Commission committed to serving victims, families and survivors by thoroughly investigating and establishing the facts of past events, to provide an acknowledgement of the wrongdoing, in a way that is sensitive to the trauma experienced and assists with the promotion of reconciliation.

Principles:

In addition to the principal objective of promoting reconciliation and the need to follow a trauma-informed approach, the Commission will undertake this serious work based on three essential principles:

- Compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights
- Respect for the principles of the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement; and,
- Focus on providing information to those affected by the Troubles/Conflict

The Commission is working with other public authorities in the current justice system to learn from their current approach and put in place arrangements for transition to the new framework. This includes learning the lessons from and building on work undertaken by the Legacy Inquests Unit, Operation Kenova and the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland to improve the ability to retrieve information about deaths and serious injuries during the Troubles/Conflict.

The Commission recognises its responsibilities under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and has recently published a draft Equality Scheme. This Work Plan also reflects actions from the draft Equality Scheme which may change or be added to in light of responses to the consultation.

Values:

The Commission's code of conduct was published in December 2023 and sets out the values the whole Commission has adopted to guide its work - integrity, impartiality, openness, accountability and respect. They are the standards of behaviour that can be expected of Commissioners, officers and others working on behalf of the Commission.

Figure 1: Code of Conduct

Values and Behaviours

Integrity

Putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests. Acting in line with other applicable professional obligations and standards.

Openness

Being truthful and straightforward in your communications and your engagement while respecting confidences and keeping information safe.

Respect

Treating everyone with whom you interact with courtesy, irrespective of their background or beliefs. Engaging in constructive, respectful and professional dialogue even in the case of differing opinions.

Impartiality

Behaving in a fair and objective manner, treating all equally, remaining open minded and taking decisions based on evidence.

Accountability

Operating within legal requirements, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the Equality Act 2010 and equivalent equality legislation in Northern Ireland, the requirements of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023, and within the objectives and policies of the Commission. Being willing to justify decisions, actions and omissions.

Engagement and outreach

The Commission recognises that its work extends beyond legislative frameworks and operational mechanisms to ordinary lives and human relationships. Awareness of the Commission and education about what it can offer is the first step for people being able to decide whether to request that the Commission carries out an investigation. The need for the Commission to seek to understand and meet the needs of those who might access its services should start through the opportunity for as many as possible to feed in to plans for how the Commission operates. This must be an ongoing process, rather than at a single point. And this should link with activity to raise awareness of and education about the Commission. For this reason, the Commission is developing and evolving an engagement and outreach strategy to build awareness of the service it provides, and to listen, learn and respond to the feedback it receives. This approach also needs to reflect that the Commission's remit is across the United Kingdom. While Northern Ireland is the focus, there will be others across Great Britain who may want to come to the Commission for their case to be investigated.

Continually improving our understanding of the views and needs to people who might come to the Commission is very important. Throughout this year, the Commission will work with victim and survivors' groups, and engage directly with families, victims and survivors.

The Commission will be undertaking a range of activities in the early part of this year to highlight and explain how individuals can access the Commission and its services, and what those individuals will receive when they do so. Plans will also be developed to engage stakeholders, including families and individuals who could request investigations, in Great Britain. The Commission's website will be further developed to provide more information for those seeking to access the Commission's services, including through audio-visual content.

Raising public awareness is important to the Commission and work is ongoing. This is important for several reasons, to enable individuals to access the Commission in the most appropriate way and to give them confidence in doing so, and also to build wider understanding in Northern Ireland in the Commission and its work. In 2024-5 this will focus on sharing information about how the Commission is being formed, the services it offers and how it is discharging its duties. The Commission will keep people informed using a variety of means including specific meetings with interested groups, wider speaking and information sharing events, to engagement with elected representatives.

A considerable amount of material has been made available on the Commission's website for feedback, comments and consultation. During this year further information about the Commission's operating approach will be provided. Planned improvements to the website will enable data from the use of the website to be used to inform ongoing engagement. In addition to undertaking formal and informal consultation as appropriate, the Commission will continue to conduct quarterly polling which will provide data on how the Commission is seen, both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain.

Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model

The Commission will build on early commitments to a Trauma Informed Approach, developing its Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model to ensure all its work is focussed on people and their needs. This was set out in the consultation on Trauma Informed Approach published in February 2024. An immediate change from further feedback received has been to add resiliency as an essential part of the overall model that the Commission adopts. That consultation has now closed and we are considering the feedback received.

The purpose of this approach is to mitigate the negative impacts of trauma on mental and physical health, and to enable people to engage safely with the Commission. We are conscious of the experience people may have had when they engage with public services and the negative outcomes that have affected them.

A Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model is being developed which will cover all the work the Commission undertakes. This approach will underpin the Commission's meetings, including with families, victims and survivors, as well as to the care of Commission employees. The aim is to ensure that people who work in or interact with the Commission will have appropriate support.

The figure below provides more information about the principles, which will be incorporated into the work of the Commission, where a plan will be developed to cover the range approaches throughout the Commission's work.

A number of other pieces of work are underway to help support those coming forward to request information from the Commission, including:

- Ensuring requestors have a good understanding of what the Commission can and can not do;
- Ensuring the Commission have a good understanding of the needs of the requesting individual; and,
- How to develop the request that families, victims and survivors want to make so they get the best information possible.

The Commission will provide a single named person from the Casework Support Team. The aim is for the same person to remain with and liaise with the families, victims and survivors throughout their engagement, from request through each stage of the process. Where there is a need, specialist emotional support will also be made available and the model for provision of this service is proactively being worked on and will be refined and developed from feedback gathered from individuals making a request of the Commission, during the forthcoming year.

For those who will provide witness information and evidence to the Commission support is also important both for their wellbeing and so they can provide the best evidence possible. How this support will be provided is actively being considered and will be developed and refined throughout the upcoming financial year.

Figure 2: Key principles of trauma-informed practice

There are 6 principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration.

Safety

The physical, psychological and emotional safety of service users and staff is prioritised, by:

- people knowing they are safe or asking what they need to feel safe
- there being reasonable freedom from threat or harm
- attempting to prevent re-traumatisation
- putting policies, practices and safeguarding arrangements in place

Trustworthiness

Transparency exists in an organisation's policies and procedures, with the objective of building trust among staff, service users and the wider community, by:

- the organisation and staff explaining what they are doing and why
- the organisation and staff doing what they say they will do
- expectations being made clear and the organisation and staff not overpromising

Choice

Service users are supported in shared decision-making, choice and goal setting to determine the plan of action they need to heal and move forward, by:

- ensuring service users and staff have a voice in the decision-making process of the organisation and its services
- listening to the needs and wishes of service users and staff
- explaining choices clearly and transparently
- acknowledging that people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma may feel a lack of safety or control over the course of their life which can cause difficulties in developing trusting relationships

Collaboration

The value of staff and service user experience is recognised in overcoming challenges and improving the system as a whole, by:

- using formal and informal peer support and mutual self-help
- the organisation asking service users and staff what they need and collaboratively considering how these needs can be met
- focussing on working alongside and actively involving service users in the delivery of services

Empowerment

Efforts are made to share power and give service users and staff a strong voice in decision-making, at both individual and organisational level, by:

- validating feelings and concerns of staff and service users
- listening to what a person wants and needs
- supporting people to make decisions and take action
- acknowledging that people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma may feel powerless to control what happens to them, isolated by their experiences and have feelings of low self-worth

Cultural consideration

Move past cultural stereotypes and biases based on, for example, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability, geography, race or ethnicity by:

- offering access to gender responsive services
- leveraging the healing value of traditional cultural connections
- incorporating policies, protocols and processes that are responsive to the needs of individuals served currently consulting to inform updates and developments to its framework for a trauma informed approach.

Partnerships and good working relationships with a variety of groups across Northern Ireland and Great Britain are essential to building the model so the Commission provides the best support it possibly can to those engaging with it. These partnerships and relationships will continue to be built and formally acknowledged, where appropriate, in the coming business year ahead.

As Commissioners, our individual and collective commitment to is to:

- Monitor and challenge the wider Commission and those working for it about whether the actions [to implement a trauma and resilience informed model] are being delivered;
- Encourage and support the Commission to listen to and reflect feedback about what more, what next, and what not; and,
- Personally undertake training, improve our own understanding, and bring focus to bear in all our discussions as a Commission.

Expected Case Numbers

The Commission will be able to consider requests for investigations following commencement of its powers from 1 May. This consideration of the formal request will follow initial contact, meetings and explanations of how the process will work in the Support stage. It is impossible to predict how many requests the Commission might receive and how many cases the Commission will investigate in its first year.

The Commission's remit is to investigate deaths and serious injuries that are related to the Troubles/Conflict. More than 3,500 people died in the Troubles/Conflict and many more were injured and seriously injured.

The Police Service for Northern Ireland currently have around 1,000 cases relating to unsolved murders that are understood to be within the Commission's remit. The Police Ombudsman Northern Ireland are currently working on in excess of 200 complaints, which they consider could be within the Commission's remit.

Coroners have existing inquest cases, with an estimated 18 cases (as at 18th April 2024) in which hearings have commenced, and a further number of cases, an estimated 17, that have not yet progressed to hearings.

The equivalent numbers of cases for England & Wales, and Scotland, are not easily available, as information is not held centrally.

How and by whom requests are made will depend on the circumstances and a number of factors, it is not possible to be specific about the numbers of cases expected in 2024-25. Case numbers will be affected by several factors, including:

- The desire of families and survivors to make a request of the Commission, which will vary considerably, depending on individual circumstances;
- Level of understanding and awareness of the Commission; and,
- The extent to which requests are eligible for investigation by the Commission.

The variables outlined above are significant and therefore this will greatly affect the numbers of cases coming to the Commission. There will also be a range in terms of the complexity of requests and resources required to meet them.

It is possible however to set out the routes by which the Commission may be requested to investigate deaths or other harmful conduct forming part of the Troubles/Conflict. One approach is through family members, victims and survivors, known as requesting individuals. Cases can also be referred by the Secretary of State; or in Northern Ireland by coroners, the Attorney General or the Advocate General; in Scotland by a sheriff, procurator fiscal or the Lord Advocate; and in England and Wales by a senior coroner or the Chief Coroner.

The number of investigations is not the sole indicator on which the Commission should be judged. Those who come to the Commission to discuss their case

and decide that they do not wish to proceed with the investigation into the Information Recovery stage may also have benefited from the Commission's work. Understanding the reasons why individuals approach the Commission and why they chose to take the investigation further or not is also important and will help the Commission to make a better estimate in future years about potential case load (in addition to the greater detail about the current caseload carried over from the previous year).

The Commission is recruiting to a level so that it is able to meet requests properly, in a timely manner and with a trauma-informed approach. The caseload data will be reviewed regularly by the Commissioner for Investigations and the resourcing plans have the flexibility to be amended accordingly, including through ongoing recruitment rounds and reserve lists, and updating budget forecasts for Annually Managed Expenditure. It is expected that officers will work on a range of cases at the same time, to ensure efficient utilisation of expertise within the Commission.

Working Methods

There are three key stages to an investigation led by the Commission. These are explained in detail in the recent consultation document on Operational Design. This consultation is still live and so further changes may be made in light of consideration of responses to the consultation.

These stages are:

1. Support – where the Commission works closely with individuals and families.
2. Information recovery – where information is gathered by the Commission.
3. Findings – where findings are reported.

A number of processes are being put in place to ensure the Commission undertakes its important task as effectively and sensitively as possible.

Ensuring information can be shared and stored appropriately and securely is key. Systems, ways of working and equipment are being put in place and tested so that information received and held by the Commission is secure and personal data is protected.

Arrangements for working with organisations to retrieve information – for example from police forces, from the security services, and from coroners – are at an advanced stage and will be finalised in the first quarter of this year.

The Commission has made public how it intends to categorise and resource its caseload (Consultation document) to ensure cases are dealt with in the most sensitive way. This includes specific arrangements for this year around the automatic inclusion in category A (the highest priority) of advance stage inquests. The Commissioner for Investigations will review the caseload quarterly and has the ability to revise the categorisation of each case if necessary.

Figure 3: Stages of approach to Commission

Stage 1: Support.

This is the start of an individual's journey with the Commission. Dedicated Case Support workers will help individuals and families better understand how the Commission may be able help them (and what it will not be able to do), the different options available to them and the information the Commission will need to move to the next stage. While this is the first stage of the journey, that support will be available throughout the entire process. The case support team will provide a single point of contact and consistent, objective support for the requesting individual and family throughout their time with the Commission. They will respond to any questions and provide people with the space, time and information to make decisions that are right for them and the information recovery outcomes they seek.

Stage 2: Information Recovery.

In this next stage, a team of investigators will gather information and evidence and seek to answer the questions the requesting individual and family have raised. The team will need a range of skill sets, to comb through archives, interview witnesses and secure evidence. Investigators will work across a range of different cases at any one time to maximise progress and efficiency. Each investigation will be overseen by a Senior Investigative Officer. Investigators will be able to require access to all material from any previous fact-finding and determination processes, as well as all material held by the state, no matter how sensitive. They may also undertake new investigative work. Investigative teams will follow defined terms of reference for each investigation, which will start with a scoping exercise, based on an approach to cold case reviews that follows with internationally recognised best practice. This will inform the Commissioner for Investigation's decision on which of three investigative routes will be most appropriate for the case. All three routes will embed the features required for an ECHR compliant investigation.

Stage 3: Findings.

The Chief Commissioner is responsible for the production of reports at the conclusion of investigations. In this work, they are supported by the Findings Team. A Findings Officer from the unit will be assigned to each investigation from an early stage and will independently challenge the direction of investigative work. As the investigation nears its conclusion, the Commissioner for Investigations and team will present their evidence to the Chief Commissioner who will assess and evaluate it to determine findings. Further investigative work may be requested. Reports will be produced to record the findings that have been made and to seek to address the requesting individual's questions

Key Policies

Since it was established in December 2023, the Commission has consulted on a number of key policies and published a wide range of proposals, policies and information, in line with its commitment to openness. These policies will apply throughout the period of this work plan. The Commission is very mindful of its obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and each policy will be considered against the Equality scheme requirements, with the responsibility resting with the policy owner.

Over the year the Commission will publish further policies and approaches to provide information to the public about its approach. These include how the Commission will approach its Enhanced Inquisitorial Process and how it expects state authorities to make requests. All policies will be subject to ongoing informal review in light of learning and feedback from the public, expert organisations and staff.

Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model

A Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model - which will involve learning for staff - is being developed by the Commission. Over the first year of the Commission's operation, the Commissioners will ensure that the policies are fit for purpose in this context.

The published policies are:

Operational Design Consultation: published for consultation on 14th March 2024

In this consultation paper, the Commission seeks feedback on aspects of design of its operational policies. The feedback received will inform decision making on the approach that the Commission will take.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/consultation-on-operational-design/>

Equality Scheme 2022 – 2029: published for consultation on 7 March 2024

In this consultation paper, the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (the Commission) seeks feedback on its Equality Scheme. The feedback received will inform the approach the Commission will take to embedding inclusivity and accessibility in all that it does.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/equality-scheme-2022-2029-draft-for-public-consultation/>

Disability Action Plan 2024 – 2029: Draft for public consultation: published: 23 February 2024

The Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery has published a draft Disability Action Plan, setting out its commitment to promoting positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and encouraging participation, in particular, by people with disabilities in public life.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/disability-action-plan-2024-2029-draft-for-public-consultation/>

Consultation on Implementing a Trauma Informed Approach: Published 15 February 2024

In this Public Consultation paper, the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery is seeking feedback on the future development of its Trauma Informed Approach. The feedback received will inform decision making on the approach the Commission will take.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/consultation-on-implementing-a-trauma-informed-approach/>

ICRIR Complaint Handling Procedure: Published 8 February 2024

This procedure sets out how ICRIR handles complaints and the standards it will follow.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/icrir-complaint-handling-procedure/>

ICRIR policy for the declaration and management of outside interests: published 14 December 2023

This policy ensures that employees of the Independent Commission for Information and Reconciliation Recovery (ICRIR) have a clear understanding of what might constitute a relevant outside interest and that the Commission takes a consistent approach to the management of outside interests.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/icrir-policy-for-the-declaration-and-management-of-outside-interests/>

ICRIR Gifts and Hospitality Policy: published: 14 December 2023

ICRIR's values of integrity and impartiality include ensuring that no gift, hospitality or other benefit is accepted which could be perceived to undermine or call into question the proper conduct of its staff or Commissioners. This policy outlines the process to be followed in the event of the offering of a gift or hospitality to any Commissioner, officer or member of staff of ICRIR.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/icrir-gifts-and-hospitality-policy/>

ICRIR Code of Conduct: published: 14 December 2023

This code helps everyone in the Commission to carry out their work in accordance with clear values. It sets out the values we will hold ourselves accountable for and how every member of the Commission's staff will uphold them in their work.

<https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/icrir-code-of-conduct/>

Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity

The Commission has recently launched consultation on the draft Equalities Scheme 2024-29. The document sets out the proposals for the Commission fulfilling its Section 75 statutory duties across all our functions (including service provision, employment, and procurement) through implementation of our Equality Scheme. The scheme sets out to ensure there are opportunities for people affected by our work to positively influence how we carry out our functions in line with our Section 75 statutory duties.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires ICRIR to comply with two statutory duties: Section 75 (1) In carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland, we are required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without;
- persons with dependants and persons without.

Section 75 (2) In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. “Functions” include the “powers and duties” of a public authority. This includes the Commission’s employment and procurement functions.

The key areas of work in the Equalities Scheme 2024-29 are:

During our first two years of taking cases, we will carry out an audit of inequalities.

The audit of inequalities will gather and analyse information across the Section 75 categories to identify the inequalities that exist for those who interact with the Commission and those affected by our policies.

Following this audit, we will develop an action plan to reflect any areas identified by the audit. Action measures will be specific, measurable, linked to achievable outcomes, realistic and timebound. Action measures will include performance indicators and timescales for their achievement.

We will develop any action plans for a period of between one and five years in order to align them with our business planning cycles.

Implementation of the action measures will be incorporated into our business planning process. We will seek input from our stakeholders and consult on our action plan before we send it to the Equality Commission and thereafter when reviewing the plan.

We will monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures annually and update the action plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to our functions and work.

The Commission will inform the Equalities Commission of any changes or amendments to our action plan and will also include this information in our Annual Report.

Alongside this, the Disability Action Plan 2024 – 29 was published for consultation recently. This policy sits alongside the Equality Action Plan. The plan is designed to ensure that the Commission is accessible to those people with disabilities.

The Disability Action Plan includes a number of actions, including ensuring that the Commission will implement accessible infrastructure in our public spaces. It will provide disability awareness training for staff to promote understanding and inclusivity.

The Commission will ensure the availability of accessible formats for public documents and information. It will offer assistive technologies and support services, to facilitate participation in public meetings and events. There will also be an audit of groups representing disabled people's interests on consultation / engagement / information lists to be undertaken by end July 2024.

Developing our Organisation

The Commission is focused on the start of its investigative activities from May and how it builds capability and capacity from that point.

The Board of Commissioners is fully constituted and the Board has met seven times since appointment. A summary of the business of each meeting is published on the Commission's website. The Commissioners have set strategic objectives for the year ahead:

- Improving wider public understanding of what the Commission can do and building credibility and trust with the wider public;
- Obtaining certainty about the framework for the Commission's work adhering to the ECHR (and obtaining changes if needed to meet this principle);
- Beginning operations (case support, information recovery, findings) and improving them through learning and feedback. And using this work to demonstrate the validity and efficacy of this new approach; and,
- Undertaking preliminary policy development and cross-community engagement as a foundation for the Commission's historical record function and wider reconciliation work.

Recruitment to the Commission is being carried out with care to bring together the right skills and experience. A robust consideration of outside interests to avoid any conflicts of interest, and demonstration of meeting the Commission's values are two particular aspects tested in our selection process, in addition to the necessary expertise and experience.

The initial leadership team, including senior investigators, is in place. The initial Chief Executive Officer will hand over to a new Chief Executive Officer towards the end of the summer. The organisation's design has been agreed by the Board and further details about each directorate and their priority areas of work are included in an annex to this document.

The Commission will publish its Annual Report and Accounts for the period that it was a legal entity in 2023-24 later this year. Throughout this year the Commission's Board will continue to meet at regular, at least bi-monthly intervals and the Executive Committee will meet at least monthly. Internal structures and ways of working are in place to promote evidenced, and timely decision making and a culture of learning.

The Commission will finalise a Learning Development Plan in 2024-25, which will build on the Commission's vision and values to ensure that staff are supported and able to develop their expertise in their roles and beyond. This will include foundation training for all staff alongside more specific training for different roles.

The Commission's trauma and resiliency informed model must extend to its own staff and arrangements are in place to support team members as needed. Emotional support for staff is being provided through a range of measures, including bespoke access to third party support.

Our Resources

The Commission operates independently of other organisations, including the Northern Ireland Executive and the UK Government. The Commission receives its public funding through a direct grant from the Northern Ireland Office (in the same way as the Northern Ireland Executive.) This approach, and the accountability for use of public resources, is set out in more detail in the Framework Document between the Commission and the Northern Ireland Office, which is published on the website. A letter setting out the funding mechanisms to ensure operational independence is published here <https://icrir.independent-inquiry.uk/document/icrir-funding-letter/>

For the financial year 2024-25, the agreed budget for the Commission is £22.2m, to deliver against the outputs described in this workplan. Of this, £7.3m is a forecast (Annually Managed Expenditure) and may vary according to demand, allowing the Commission to access the funding necessary to carry out investigations based on the requests received.

This grant comprises Resource and Capital spend, to fund the completion of the Commission's set up activities, the Commission's operations and investigations. The head office is in Belfast, with two further operational sites in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. These facilities are being invested in to provide appropriate space for the Commission's different activities in a safe and secure manner.

The Commission will be staffed in a resource driven way to ensure that it can respond effectively to the workload, depending on case numbers. The Programme Establishment Team, who are responsible for designing and building how the Commission operates will end in Autumn 2024. During this period they will handover products to the relevant teams within the Commission who will then assume ownership and responsibility for further improvements and changes.

Investigations Directorate

Objectives

- To carry out thorough and independent investigations in line with the Commission's published design that involves victims, families and survivors in each step.

Key Deliverables

- Lead the integration of the Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model across the Commission's work.
- Operation of the Case Support function providing high quality support to requesting individuals.
- Provision and operation of specialist support to individuals where required and appropriate.
- Ongoing contact, updates and support, including drawing in other expert officers from the Commission, to requesting individuals and families.
- Provision of safeguarding across the Commission.
- Operation of Information Recovery team to carry out work that looks into all the circumstances of cases and seeks to address the questions raised by requesting individuals.
- Handling of all information to the necessary standards to safeguard its use and avoid any unauthorised disclosure.
- Establish a Team working alongside (and, where necessary, embedded within) relevant authorities to enable the comprehensive recovery and review of all materials to ensure effective and efficient investigations.
- Induction, training and building a cohesive team across the Directorate and the Commission.
- Appropriate data and diversity recording to assist the Commission understand its impact.
- Operation of Investigations Oversight Committee.
- Acceptance of Programme Establishment Team products into service and ongoing training, feedback and improvement to these products.

Peter Sheridan

Budget:

AME: £6.3m

(subject to forecast updates based on the number of cases the Commission receives)

Chief Commissioner functions

Objectives

- To make findings based on evidence provided by the Investigations Directorate and to produce and publish final reports recording those findings at the conclusion of investigations.

Key Deliverables

- Operation of findings stage of the Commission's investigative work.
- Acceptance of Programme Establishment Team products into service and ongoing training, feedback and improvement to these products.

Tristan Pedelty

Budget:

AME: £0.5m (subject to forecast updates based on the number of cases the Commission receives)

Commissioners and Secretariat

Objectives

- To ensure that good governance is embedded across the Commission to support robust and accountable decision-making, at the right levels
- To support the Commissioners in obtaining advice and insight that assists them to lead the Commission
- To provide oversight of and reporting on delivery of key governance and accountability measures, including GDPR, FoI and complaints, and the provision of high-quality support to Commissioners and Executive team members

Key Deliverables

- Supporting the Board to achieve its objectives through effective secretariat support, including for Board and supporting Committee meetings (including Executive Committee, Audit and Risk Committee and Remuneration Committee)
- Supporting the Chair and members of the External Assurance Group carry out their remit
- Maintenance and review of agreed governance framework, including Board Standing Orders and Committee terms of reference
- Embedding and overseeing effective governance policies and mechanisms throughout the Commission and in line with the Code of Conduct values, including in relation to gifts and hospitality and the declaration and management of outside interests
- Correspondence management to support the Commissioners responding to public and other correspondence.
- Day to day records management responsibility, including wider guidance to teams on overall approach
- Freedom of Information handling policy, lead response to FOI requests and reporting
- Complaints management, including policy, process and training for staff, as well as reporting to the Board and Audit and Risk Committee
- Providing administrative and logistical support for Board and Executive Committee

Nikki Bodel

Budget:

RDEL: £1.7m

Corporate Operations

Objectives

- To support the work of the Commission by providing the infrastructure (estates, information technology, procurement, etc) and resources (people and money) necessary
- To support the Accounting Officer in ensuring the effective and efficient use of public resources in a way that meets the required standards of regularity, propriety, value for money and feasibility
- To ensure compliance, help drive efficiency, support our people to deliver and develop, and contribute to strategy, planning and risk management

Key Deliverables

- Complete the development of our office estate to ensure we have offices that are accessible to the public and facilitates engagement in a sensitive and trauma informed way
- Complete development of our operational estate so that investigations can be carried out effectively and evidence and material stored securely
- Continue to develop our IT estate to ensure the information entrusted by members of the public and organisations is secure, and the systems support fair, effective and efficient investigations and our wider work. Develop and implement new HR systems and review our accounting platform.
- To support and manage promotion, recruitment, selection and onboarding activity for the Commission's operational staff so that they are highly skilled, demonstrate the Commission's values, are vetted and act with integrity.
- Support the ongoing development of the Commission's operations and culture by providing HR advice, delivering and commissioning training, and reviewing and developing our processes for managing performance and development.
- To roll out and evolve staff well-being support.
- To develop, with the Strategy Directorate, our approach to reporting financial, Human Resources and other information to the Executive Committee, Board and externally.
- To procure and support internal audit capability to carry out a programme of activity to monitor control within the Commission
- To produce the Commission's first Annual Report and Accounts covering the period December 2023 – March 2024.
- Develop our budget management approach. In particular, to develop our approach to managing and forecasting our Annually Managed Expenditure.
- Implement robust internal processes for information protection including having information management and data protection training (refreshed annually) for all staff.
- To deliver and update the Commission's induction and ongoing general

training activities, including in support of our Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model and our equalities and disabilities duties.

- To continue to undertake our essential business as usual activities including high volumes of essential recruitment, paying staff and suppliers and the day-to-day operation of our IT.

Kieran Rix

Budget:

RDEL: £6.6m

CDEL: £1.9m

AME: £0.9m

Strategy Directorate

Objectives

- To develop the Commission's strategic approach and ensure organisational alignment
- To design and deliver performance, planning and risk frameworks
- To lead on strategic outreach and building awareness of and education about the Commission, including management of communications and engagement
- To develop future initiatives for the Commission
- To begin the policy development of the Commission's historical record

Key Deliverables

- Performance Framework development and operation including reporting and tracking
- Risk Management Framework development and operation including reporting and tracking
- Production of narrative elements of Annual Report
- Regular engagement with the Northern Ireland Office in relation to sponsorship requirements under the Framework Document
- Outreach initiatives to meet and engage with a wide range of interested individuals and groups through a range of different approaches
- Development and publication of products to enable the public to easily understand aspects of the Commission's work or to input to design and improvements.
- Activities to understand public sentiment towards and understanding of the Commission
- Strategic and Operational Plans
- Respond to media enquiries and explain the Commission's work to the media
- Updates to the Commission's website, including audio-visual content
- Equality scheme and disability scheme consultation responses and provided to the Equalities Commission Northern Ireland. Further or amended activities identified and embedded in Commission's planning
- Provision of expert advice to other business units to support discharge of equalities and disability duties, including screening of policies
- Input to responses to public correspondence regarding the Commission's approach and activities
- Beginning planning and policy design work for the development of Historical Record
- Carry out an audit of inequalities (ongoing to next year) to support development of an action plan, which will be consulted on and submitted to the Equalities Commission

- Provision of information by the Commission in accessible formats and languages.
- Glossary of terms so that the Commission uses language appropriately and sensitively, based on feedback

Alison Beckett

Budget:

RDEL: £2.21m

General Counsel

Objectives

- To provide, oversee or arrange for the provision of all legal services to the Commission to enable it lawfully to exercise its statutory functions and achieve its objectives

Key Deliverables

- Provide effective legal advice to the Commission as required to exercise its statutory functions and achieve its objectives, including to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Provide legal support and management in the presentation of the Commission's position in respect of legal proceedings, whether brought by or against the Commission or where the Commission has joined proceedings.

Steven Bramley

Budget:

RDEL: £0.8m

AME: £0.5m

(subject to forecast updates based on the number of cases the Commission receives)

Programme Establishment Directorate

Objectives

- To develop initial operational policies, procedures, staffing models and ways of working for information recovery and findings
- To support Investigations Directorate, Strategy Directorate and Chief Commissioners functions to refresh and update operational policy and procedures after go-live, as part of establishing a focus on continuous improvement
- To hand over to the Commission and close establishment programme by the end of October 2024 including recording of lessons learned

Key Deliverables

- Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model checklist for all at the Commission involved in design work to use is updated in light of initial use.
- Test processes and interaction with the Commission from the perspective of requesting individual or families.
- Core teams hired and operational, with our Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model to supporting requesting individuals and families embedded across all teams.
- Operational manuals and core operational policies for Case Support, Information Recovery and Findings complete.
- Staff training modules on operations and information recovery developed and Investigations Directorate and COO Directorate supported to deliver them.
- Information Security policies, protocols and ways of working developed and accepted by Investigations Directorate and COO Directorate so that they are in place.
- Programme closure report and handover to the Commission's core teams.

Tristan Pedelty

Budget:

RDEL: £1.8m

Work Plan 2024-25: Annex - Milestones

Quarter 1

April – June 2024

- 11 April 2024: Consultation on Trauma Informed Practice to close, following which definitions on Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model will be developed
- April - June 2024: More information will be made available about how to make a request of the Commission
- 1 May 2024: ICRIR begins operations to discuss requests for investigation with families, victims and survivors
- 10 May 2024: Consultation period closes
- 17 May – completion of the Disability Action Plan consultation
- Mid-May: Response to consultation published
- 30 May – conclusion of the Equalities Scheme consultation
- First phase of recruitment completed and second phase of open competitions begins
- External Assurance Group meets to provide independent view of Commission's operating policies
- Handover of further operating policies and processes developed for the Commission from the Programme Establishment Team

Quarter 2

July - September 2024

- Carry out an audit of groups representing disabled people's interests by end July 2024
- Begin audit of inequalities
- Appointment of next Chief Executive Officer
- Publish Annual Report and Accounts
- Begin preparation for next year's work plan and three year business plan and funding requirements
- Handover of further operating policies and processes developed for the Commission from the Programme Establishment Team
- Second phase of open recruitment competitions underway
- Board reporting metrics improved

Quarter 3

October – December 2024

- The Programme Establishment team conclude work and complete lessons learned
- Business plan development for financial year 2025-26

Quarter 4

January – March 2025

- Work Plan for next financial year finalised