



Independent
Commission for
Reconciliation and
Information Recovery
Survey Summary 2023-24

July 2024

Introduction

The Commission wants to work in a way that best serves those who have been affected by the Troubles/Conflict and gives full effect to its statutory powers and duties. From the outset the Commission has been clear about its desire to involve people in its development, listening and learning from them, so that we build a Commission that works for people.

This publication gives an overview of findings from a range of polling, focus groups and surveys carried out over the past year. This includes awareness of and attitudes towards the ICRIR and views on how we operate. Other consultations have taken place on areas of policy design and more broadly. The findings have provided the Commission with insight into how awareness and understanding of it is changing over time.

We have commissioned surveys and focus groups using independent market research companies, and conducted two online surveys ourselves. The underlying data sets can be [found on the Commission's website](#).

The Commission selected LucidTalk (Belfast based) and Opinium (London based) to conduct the independent research on its behalf, ensuring reach across all communities in Northern Ireland and Great Britain and an independent approach to the work carried out. Both organisations are members of the British Polling Council (BPC) and as such must adhere to the highest professional standards. LucidTalk is the only polling and market research company based in Northern Ireland and Ireland that is a member of the BPC.

The Commission has also conducted extensive engagement with a range of stakeholders, including victims and survivors and representative groups and has sought regular reviews and contributions to the development of our work from the Commission for Victims and Survivors.

The Commission will continue to seek constructive dialogue and input to its work through a continuous improvement plan being developed and published in Autumn 2024.

What people have told us so far:

Independent research

Surveys

We commissioned two online surveys from Opinium Research and LucidTalk, conducted in November 2023 and March 2024. Both surveys aimed to discover the level of public awareness of the Commission, and opinions on its proposed work, and each asked for views related to the Commission's current phase of work. For example, the survey in November 2023 sought views on conditional immunity, while in March 2024 the survey asked respondents about the Commission's approach to report writing.

Survey 1 – November 2023

The views of 1,382 people in Northern Ireland, aged 18 and over, were recorded. This group reflected the gender, age, location and constitutional position of the general adult population of Northern Ireland.

In addition, the views of 2,000 people in Great Britain, aged 18 and over were recorded. This group reflected the adult population according to age, gender, education, location, working status and political affiliation.

The survey found that:

- Two thirds of people polled (67%) knew something of the Commission. This ranged from knowing a lot, to having heard the name. However, only a quarter of them believed it was taking the right approach.
- Nearly nine out of 10 people (87%) believed that reconciliation is needed in Northern Ireland. Eight out of 10 believed that providing new information to victims, families and survivors will aid reconciliation.
- From a list of possible outputs, retrieving information for families was anticipated to have most positive impact, followed by setting out a convincing factual account of serious incidents related to the Troubles/Conflict.
- Three quarters of participants saw it as important that the Commission complies with the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, and nearly as many (71%) said it should also comply with the European Court of Human Rights.
- A majority (59%) of people thought it unlikely that the Commission will achieve its goal of promoting reconciliation.
- Just over a quarter of respondents, 27%, were confident the Commission would be impartial.
- Half the number of people polled were opposed to the Commission granting conditional immunity in exchange for information recovery. *(Following a February 2024 judgement in the High Court, conditional immunity is not available as a means of obtaining information, and the United Kingdom Government has committed to maintaining this position).*

- Nearly half of respondents, 46%, thought the Commission should be able to extend the deadline for information requests beyond summer 2029.

Survey 2 – March 2024

The views of 1,292 people in Northern Ireland were recorded. As in November, this group reflected the gender, age, location and constitutional position of the general adult population in Northern Ireland. The views of 2,000 people in Great Britain, aged 18 and over, were also recorded.

Key findings include:

- Awareness of the Commission increased by 12 percentage points (15%) since December 2023, with 79% knowing something of it.
- The views around the need reconciliation have remained largely the same with only a slight downward shift from 87% to 85% between surveys.
- Similarly the likelihood of the Commission achieving its goal of promoting reconciliation remained largely the same with a small shift from 59% to 63%.
- Retrieving information for families and giving factual accounts were still seen as the most likely ways to make the most positive impact.
- Asked about the Commission's approach to producing reports, 74% of people wanted them to use plain language and address specific questions, and 77% wanted reports to be made available in various different formats and 55%, approved of the Commission's approach to ensuring accuracy.
- More than half the people polled (55%) fully approved of the role of Case Support Workers in engaging with victims, survivors and families; 35% approved to an extent, but had some reservations and questions about this.

Focus groups, December 2023-January 2024

Six focus group sessions took place focusing on awareness, perceptions of the Commission and its processes as well as confidentiality and managing expectations. In December 2023, 29 adults participated in three sessions via text and video call. In January 2024, 20 of these participants took part in three face-to-face sessions, designed to develop the themes identified in the December sessions.

All participants were aged 18 and over and from Northern Ireland, of Nationalist and Unionist identities, and others who did not identify as either. They represented people of different age groups, genders and locations. Most said they had experience of the Troubles/Conflict.

Key findings from the sessions:

- Generally, participants identified that the task set before the ICRIR is challenging and some were unsure how the objectives of (a) uncovering information through conducting reviews and (b) promoting reconciliation could operate in tandem.
- Most participants were aware of a new process to promote reconciliation, or they knew about the Commission.
- Many participants expressed concern that the Commission would not be independent from the UK government.
- Others felt that the Commission would not have sufficient powers to investigate individuals or organisations, especially those outside Northern Ireland.
- Participants emphasised the importance of trust in the independence of the investigations and staff, particularly in tight-knit communities where people know each other. They wanted to know what measures will be taken to ensure the Commission's processes and staff are independent and unbiased.
- The majority of participants thought the Commission should not operate a rigid policy regarding the order that cases are dealt with, but should adopt an approach which is reflective of the individual circumstances of each case, such as the ages of the people affected.
- Many people put a high priority on practical and psychological support for victims, survivors and families who engage with the Commission, as the process could be traumatic for them. They felt strongly that people should have a single, consistent point of contact, and receive regular, clear communication about decisions, actions and outcomes.
- Participants requested that as much information as possible, both during the investigation and the report writing stages, be shared with requesting individuals or families. However, they were aware of the need to balance transparency and public interest with confidentiality and safeguarding.

- Communication regarding the final report into an investigation was seen as particularly important, with a full briefing on contents for requesting individuals, to allow them to react and ask questions. It was suggested that a counsellor or therapist could also be present.
- Participants said they would like to see some collaboration in the writing of reports, and many thought it was essential that requesting individuals are given the opportunity to review reports before publication and suggest input or amends. They believed this participation could help promote reconciliation.

ICRIR research

Have Your Say: Phase 1, July-September 2023

The Commission invited people to take part in an online survey via its website, between 26 July 2023 and 10 September 2023. This survey focused on the aims and set up of the Commission. Notable findings from the 218 participants who responded include:

- 70% said that ‘talking and listening to victims and survivors of the Troubles/Conflict’ was the most important thing for the Commission to do during the setting up period.
- 86% of respondents thought that it was important for the Commission to regularly provide public updates on its work.
- 76% told us that ‘providing regular updates to families about how the examination of their cases is proceeding’ would help the Commission deliver its obligation to have regard to the general interests of those affected by Troubles-related deaths and serious injury in a meaningful way.
- Respondents felt that the two best ways to achieve independence were ‘setting up independent groups made up of external specialists’ (43%) and ‘asking for public input into proposals for how the Commission can work’ (40%).

Have Your Say: Phase 2, October 2023-January 2024

The Commission invited people to take part in two online surveys via its website, between 13 October 2023 and 2 January 2024. These surveys sought views on the operational delivery of the Commission. Notable findings from the 131 participants who responded include:

- 74% said the Commission should offer emotional support for people who engage with it.
- 74% wanted reports to contain as much detail as possible, and 64% wanted reports to be written in clear and plain language.

- 63% approved of the three types of investigation proposed by the Commission, to meet the different needs and circumstances of those who request information.
- 56% felt that it would be important for the Commission to demonstrate openness by keeping family members informed on the progress of investigations.

Conclusion

The Commission wants to work in a way that best serves those who have been affected by the Troubles/Conflict. The Commission is committed to learning from the surveys and focus groups outlined in this report. The findings have assisted in our planning and review of activities. This work will continue as part of our continuous learning exercises to be published in 2024.