

THE STORIES NETWORK

(Convened by Healing Through Remembering)

Response to NIO Consultation: Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past

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**Submitted
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A: Background to this response

1. This response to the Consultation on *Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past* is submitted by the Stories Network.
2. The Stories Network (hereafter 'the Network') is *a network for those gathering and sharing personal narrative related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland*. The Network comprises a diverse membership of skilled oral history practitioners, researchers, and archivists with extensive and deep experience of working with individuals and communities affected by the conflict (see the members' biographies at **Section D** below).
3. The Network is hosted and chaired by Healing Through Remembering (HTR). HTR is an independent initiative comprising a diverse membership with different political perspectives, all working on a common goal: how to deal with the legacy of the past relating to the conflict, and in so doing, build a better future. The organisation has identified five over-arching themes that give focus to the challenges associated with dealing with the past: *Storytelling (Oral History and Narrative)*; *Truth Recovery and Acknowledgement*; *Commemoration*; *a Living Memorial Museum*; and *a Day of Reflection*. Since 1999, HTR has conducted extensive consultation, research, and engagement on these themes, including conferences, exhibitions, site visits, and other local, regional, and international networking.
4. With regard to *Storytelling* in particular, this has included:
 - Convening a dedicated working group on this theme in 2001.
 - Conducting *An audit of personal story, narrative and testimony initiatives related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland* (2005, see **Annex 1**).
 - Convening a conference on *Storytelling as the vehicle?* (2005, see **Annex 2**).
 - Developing an agreed framework of *Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work* (2009, see **Annex 3**) on the basis of practice, research, and experience.
 - Establishing the *Stories Network* to succeed the working group (2014, see **Annex 4**).
 - Delivering a *Briefing Paper on the Oral History Elements of the Stormont House Agreement* (2015, see **Annex 5**).
5. Given the Network's specialist focus on oral history, this response provides feedback specifically in regard to the proposals to establish an Oral History Archive (OHA) and associated questions. The comments submitted are informed by and build upon the engagement, practice-based experience, research, and documentation outlined above.
6. We are mindful that our comments and feedback below have foregrounded concerns and questions that we have in relation to the proposals in the Consultation. We wish to underline that all of this feedback is offered in a considered, constructive spirit: we remain open to and ready for further engagement in relation to any questions that may arise from this process.

B: Key feedback and recommendations

Before outlining our responses to the specific OHA questions posed in the Consultation, we wish to register the following key points of feedback:

1. **We welcome the inclusion of oral history as a core element of the Consultation:** As members of this Network, we are passionate about oral history and committed to good and ethical practice. We believe a safe, structured, and accessible approach to collecting and preserving oral histories is a very important part of remembering, sharing insights, and dealing with the legacies of the past. Carried out effectively, it holds enormous positive potential for individuals and families affected by the conflict, and for wider society. Without such a commitment to accessibility and safety, however, oral history initiatives can exclude and harm individuals and communities; the case of the Boston Tapes¹ is a high profile example that has illustrated the complexity of collecting oral histories, and the damaging exposure that can occur. It is unthinkable that we, as a society, might risk unnecessary negative outcomes for victims, survivors, and communities that have already been hurt and divided as a result of the conflict. It is therefore vitally important that any next steps following this Consultation take into account the extensive learning and applied experience that exists in this region regarding ethical, safe, and accessible practice.
2. **As members of the Stories Network we constitute a key repository of this learning and applied experience:** As demonstrated in our biographies (see **Section F** below) and the publications appended to this response (see **Annex 1-xxx**):
 - We are attuned to the needs of people engaging in oral history in this region and at this time;
 - We are well-versed in the legal obligations attaching to this work;
 - We have worked together as a diverse group for an extensive period of time to problem-solve and co-design agreed principles and standards;
 - We understand the technical challenges related to collection and preservation; and
 - We embody a network that connects grassroots communities, professionals, academics, and international bodies.
3. We have also, in the past, invited statutory bodies (specifically the Public Records Office for Northern Ireland, PRONI) to engage with us and join this working group: as part of this public response to this Consultation, we reiterate that invitation now.
4. **Based on all of the above:** While we have identified issues and concerns with the Consultation proposals for the OHA below, our comments and feedback are intended to add value to this important discussion of the role of oral history in dealing with the past.

¹ See: "Attempt to access former IRA man's Boston College tapes 'replete with errors' court told" (*Irish Times*, 16 January 2018): <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/attempt-to-access-former-ira-man-s-boston-college-tapes-replete-with-errors-court-told-1.3357750>

5. **We believe the only way the OHA concept can work, is via collaborative engagement with existing archives and repositories that can remain in their established and trusted locations:** We acknowledge that this is not the model outlined in the Consultation. We are convinced by our experience in this area that the proposed model will not enable inclusive, participative, or voluntary engagement, and that therefore it will not work. We are confident that the model proposed will fail to deliver meaningful outcomes in terms of addressing the legacies of the past, or a proportionate return in relation to the investment of public resources.
6. **We are concerned that, despite the fact there is a significant level of oral history and storytelling activity ongoing across the region (our Network comprises representatives from only a small number of these existing projects) the Consultation document does not explain how the proposed OHA would interact with existing initiatives or historical archives.** It is important to understand in advance that people will not readily come forward to a government sponsored archive to share their stories – it will take considerable resources to outreach, build relationships, and network to build confidence and trust, as well as to gather, record, and properly store the stories. This will require genuine and long-term engagement with community groups working in this area that have already developed trusted relationships, not merely inviting them to submit collections to the new archive or making token nominations of a few select individuals to a Steering Committee.
7. **Moreover, the proposals in the Consultation document do not reflect the three strands of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement:** They give sole responsibility for the OHA to be established as one archive in one part of these islands, whereas ideally, as an initiative designed to deal with the past, it should be a collaborative project between Ireland, Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the diaspora.
8. The decades-long process of engagement that we have conducted in this area as a dedicated working group has shown that the key to successful and inclusive oral history practice in relation to the conflict, within this densely populated landscape of existing initiatives and records, is to **establish protocols for developing ‘a collection of collections’** – i.e. a collection of existing and new oral history archives and initiatives embedded in the places where people have demonstrated they are content to share their story, linked by pathways and technical solutions that enable shared access and engagement, and supported by a collective commitment to resource preservation, outreach, and sustainable practice. This approach can be conceptualised as a hub and spokes model,² where select aspects or samples of multiple collections are shared or networked to a central platform, signposting visitors to collections that remain housed and managed in their ‘home’ locations. The way to deliver a model like this is to establish an inclusive and representative working group of stakeholders in this field, to collectively design an operational plan for the way forward.

² Examples of this approach in relation to curating, connecting, and enabling access to various media, including audio content, already exists: see for example the ‘Digital Public Spaces’ initiative led collaboratively by the BBC, BFI, Tate, British Library, Arts Council England, FutureEverything, The Creative Exchange, and others. See: <http://futureeverything.org/ideas/digital-public-spaces-2/>

9. Working collaboratively in a hub and spokes model could offer important benefits for existing and new oral history initiatives. For example, a key challenge facing all oral history archives is the fact that distributed collections may be hosted by organisations dependent on short-term funding that cannot provide a long-term guarantee of preservation. Working collaboratively offers an opportunity to overcome that challenge by incorporating strategic planning and mobilisation of resources, including technical support to overcome obstacles to ensuring futureproofed content and long-term preservation of the collective.
10. **On this basis, we recommend the proposed OHA concept should be amended to prioritise the establishment of a representative working group of stakeholders from across the region. The purpose of the working group should be to collaboratively design an operational plan aimed at establishing a collection of existing and new oral history initiatives that are linked to enable shared access and engagement, and supported by a collective commitment to resource preservation, outreach, and sustainable practice.**
11. **We believe it would be an error to attempt to establish a new archive housed within a government body:** We recognise that the proposal outlined in the Consultation is for a new archive held by PRONI, and that a perceived benefit of this approach would be to start collecting narratives ‘afresh’ on the basis of new, robustly risk-averse/mitigating, and orderly protocols. PRONI, the National Archives in London, the National Archives in Dublin, and other existing archives are all important stakeholders in this discussion and any next steps, and should be included in the working group that we propose should co-design the collection of existing and new oral history initiatives (see point 4 above). These government bodies, and PRONI specifically, however, are not the right bodies to house and manage such a collection.
12. We have come to this conclusion based on an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a government archive such as PRONI in relation to the following key dimensions of the oral history process: **collection, preservation, access, and engagement.**
13. To summarise this analysis:
 - a. In terms of the requirements to deliver a quality oral history initiative, PRONI’s key strength lies in its specialist capacity to **preserve** records.
 - b. A secondary benefit offered by PRONI is its capacity to facilitate public **access** in principle to those records; however, there are weaknesses in this area (see [c] below).
 - c. To build trust, encourage inclusive access from a wide range of communities, and generate an audience for the materials gathered, PRONI would need to **conduct extensive outreach and engagement.** While PRONI does not operate in this way, this mode of working is already core to existing grassroots-level initiatives. In the event of establishing a comprehensive archive or collection of archives and initiatives, this requirement will need to be reviewed in line with OHA’s vision and guiding principles (see points [16] and [17] below): it is likely this outreach will need to extend beyond local and regional networks to engage international audiences and partners in

dynamic and evolving relationships as the collection grows. While PRONI has a role to play in this process, it does not have the capacity, nor is it the remit of an official archive, to lead on the development of these contacts and relationships.

- d. Finally and most importantly, PRONI's capacity to **collect** oral histories is limited. Our experience shows that collecting and recording oral histories is a resource-intensive process: to deliver a quality initiative there will be a requirement for a body of staff that can develop a good rapport and trusted interpersonal relationships with people who wish to share their stories. This profile correlates strongly with the wide range of community-based initiatives that have led the development of oral history work across the region. It does not, however, describe PRONI. Critically, this team will require training and ongoing support to identify and manage risks and legal obligations: this will need to be resourced, alongside appropriate investment in technical capabilities. **The proposals for the OHA in the Consultation are not costed:** this gives us concern that neither the NIO nor PRONI has either scoped or secured the necessary resources required to deliver this unique initiative to a high standard. This is a critical flaw, which would fundamentally undermine the viability of the project.
14. **On this basis, we recommend that the proposed OHA concept should not be housed or managed by PRONI, but incorporate a collection of new and existing initiatives linked by a central platform. PRONI, together with the National Archives in London and Dublin are key stakeholders among many that should be included in the working group that designs the collective way forward.**
15. **We recommend this process should include careful strategic consideration – specifically: scoping and costing exercises – of the key areas of work that will underpin the process. These will include, among others: *collection, preservation, access, and engagement.***
16. **The information provided in relation to the OHA in the Consultation document is very limited, and conveys a sense that the proposed Legacy Institutions, including the OHA, would be established structurally separate to one another.** While we recognise there was a need for brevity in the Consultation materials, the information provided did not reflect the complex reality of conducting oral history work in a deeply divided post-conflict environment, nor did it clarify the overall purpose and long-term vision that the OHA is envisaged to fulfil *as part of the new and improved system* for dealing with the past.
17. **We recommend that the development of a clear vision, mission/purpose, and specifically defined values and guiding principles for the OHA should be treated as a priority. This should include careful consideration of *process* as well as structure, taking into account the pathways that people engaging with the OHA and other Legacy Institutions may need to follow, and how to facilitate the constructive, safe flow of people, information, and ideas through the overall system for dealing with the past.**
18. The development of the OHA's vision, mission, and values can draw on the wealth of existing good practice in the community/voluntary, academic, and public sectors: extensive scoping of

existing initiatives and consolidation of good practice has already been undertaken.³ HTR has also developed a considered framework of *Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work* (2009, see **Annex 3**): these are summarised in Table 1 below, but we recommend that this brief report is reviewed in full by the NIO when collating responses to this Consultation.

Table 1: Summary of HTR Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work

THEMATIC AREA		PRINCIPLES	
1	SOCIETY	1	Meaning making
		2	Looking to those affected
		3	Protection from harm
		4	Compassion/Empathy
		5	Education
		6	Reconciliation
2	INDIVIDUAL	1	Free and informed consent
		2	Protection of individual autonomy / self-determination
		3	Participatory justice
		4	Empowerment
		5	Inclusion
		6	Equality
		7	Distributive justice
		8	Honesty
3	PROCESS	1	Accountability
		2	Transparency
		3	Inter-connectedness
		4	Context-specific
		5	Collective benefits
		6	Legal obligation

19. **We recommend that the HTR framework of *Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work* (2009) should form the basis for discussion and development of the OHA vision, mission, and values.**

³ See for example HTR's *An audit of personal story, narrative and testimony initiatives related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland* (2005) at **Annex 1**, and the resources developed as part of the INCORE at Ulster University's *Accounts of the Conflict* initiative (<http://accounts.ulster.ac.uk/repo24/>).

20. Further to recommending these ethical principles, we wish to underline that international best practise increasingly highlights the importance of a gender-sensitive analysis of conflict, including its impact on individuals, families, and communities, and the process of dealing with the past.⁴ To date, the steps that have been taken to deal with the past relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland have not taken gender into specific consideration. In 2015, the Legacy Gender Integration Group noted that:

*There are clear gender patterns to victimhood and survival. The vast majority of those killed in the conflict were men. The majority of surviving family members are women. Women are a significant presence in victims' organisations in providing and receiving services. Moreover, one's experience of conflict and one's conflict legacy needs are heavily shaped by gender. Victimhood is gendered, as are coping strategies.*⁵

The Legacy Gender Integration Group recommended 10 key *Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past* (see **Annex 6**): these principles are summarised in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Summary of Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past

REF	PRINCIPLE
1	Gender Integration: Fully integrate gender into the processes for dealing with the past
2	Process-orientation: Understand gender and dealing with the past as a process, not an event
3	Empowerment, Participation, Ownership and Control: Prioritise victim ownership and control of process
4	Inclusivity: Be inclusive and accommodate complexity
5	Addressing Structural Obstacles: Recognize and redress structural obstacles to inclusion
6	Holistic Approach: Respond to the whole victim and survivor
7	Giving Voice and Being Heard: Honour individual stories
8	Macro Analysis: Be attentive to the bigger picture
9	Equality and Diversity: Value gender expertise and lived experience
10	Local and Global Learning: Craft bottom-up local responses that draw on international good practice

⁴ See for example:

- United States Institute for Peace: *Gender Inclusive Framework and Theory* (2018), available at: [https://www.usip.org/publications?issue_areas\[0\]=56](https://www.usip.org/publications?issue_areas[0]=56)
- Conciliation Resources: *Gender in Peacebuilding* (2014), available at: http://www.c-r.org/downloads/CR_Gender_peacebuilding.pdf
- Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, Colombia: *The Colombian Peace Agreement: The Opportunity to Build Peace* (2016), available at: http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/The_Colombian_Peace_Agreement_the_opportunity_to_build_pace.pdf

⁵ See: **Annex 6: Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past** (Legacy Gender Integration Group, 2015), available at: <https://caj.org.uk/2015/08/17/gender-principles-dealing-legacy-past/>

21. The Gender Principles outlined in **Table 2** above support and enlarge upon the spirit of the HTR *Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work*, which is to understand the whole individual in context, and empower them to share their story as part of an inclusive and safe process. **On this basis, we recommend that any next steps to develop, design, and implement the OHA should incorporate a gender lens informed by international good practice, and by the initial work undertaken in this area by the Legacy Gender Integration Group (see Annex 6).**

Question 1: Current system

Question 1: Current system for addressing the past

Do you consider that maintaining the current system for dealing with the issues of the past through legacy inquests, PSNI and OPONI investigations is the right approach, or do you think there is a need for reform?

- 1.1 There is definitely a need for an improved, coordinated approach to dealing with the past in relation to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. We agree with this recognition, stated the Consultation document (page 17).
- 1.2 While the current approach to oral history and narrative relating to the conflict is an area of vibrant, community-led activity, it is fragmented and under-resourced.
- 1.3 Existing initiatives and historical records are vulnerable: typically housed within community and voluntary sector organisations that rely on short-term funding, they:
 - Face risks in relation to viable long-term preservation, and
 - Face technological challenges in relation to upgrading content to accessible and future-proofed formats.

Question 2: Principles

Question 2: Stormont House Agreement proposals - engagement with legacy institutions		
Does the proposed approach help to ensure all groups of people can effectively engage with the legacy institutions?	YES	NO
If no, please suggest additional measures that would improve this for specific groups:		
Any further comments:		

- 2.1 We are concerned that these principles are unhelpfully general, generic, and without specific meaning or substance for the complex new processes described in the Consultation.
- 2.2 As noted in **Section B** above, we recommend the existing HTR framework of *Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work* (2009, see **Annex 3**) should form the basis for discussion and development of the OHA vision, mission, and values. These are summarised in Table 3 below. We recommend the report at **Annex 3** is reviewed in full by the NIO when collating responses to this Consultation.

Table 3: Summary of HTR Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work

THEMATIC AREA		PRINCIPLES	
1	SOCIETY	1	Meaning making
		2	Looking to those affected
		3	Protection from harm
		4	Compassion/Empathy
		5	Education
		6	Reconciliation
2	INDIVIDUAL	1	Free and informed consent
		2	Protection of individual autonomy / self-determination
		3	Participatory justice
		4	Empowerment
		5	Inclusion
		6	Equality
		7	Distributive justice
		8	Honesty
3	PROCESS	1	Accountability
		2	Transparency
		3	Inter-connectedness
		4	Context-specific
		5	Collective benefits
		6	Legal obligation

Question 9: OHA – Method

Question 9: Oral History Archive		
Do you think that the Oral History Archive proposals provide an appropriate method for people from all backgrounds to share their experiences of the Troubles in order to create a valuable resource for future generations?	YES	<input checked="" type="radio"/> NO
Any further comments:		

- 9.1 We welcome the inclusion of oral history and storytelling as a core element of the Consultation; however, based on the experience of the Stories Network, the proposals for the Oral History Archive do not provide an appropriate method for people from all backgrounds to share their experiences of the Troubles.
- 9.2 **Section B** above details key concerns that, based on the experience of the Stories Network, we believe need to be addressed before any next steps are taken in relation to developing the OHA. Below, we have reiterated relevant key points stated in Section B. We have then outlined further important points for consideration.

Key feedback and recommendations:

- 9.3 **We believe the only way the OHA concept can work, is via collaborative engagement with existing archives and repositories that remain in their established and trusted locations.**
- 9.4 We are concerned that, despite the fact there is a significant level of oral history and storytelling activity ongoing across the region (our Network comprises representatives from only a small number of these existing projects) **the Consultation document does not explain how the proposed OHA would interact with existing initiatives or historical archives.**
- 9.5 Moreover, **the proposals in the Consultation document do not reflect the three strands of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement:** they give sole responsibility for the OHA to be established as one archive in one part of these islands, whereas ideally, as an initiative designed to deal with the past, it should be a collaborative project between Ireland, Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the diaspora.
- 9.6 **We recommend the proposed OHA concept should be amended to prioritise the establishment of a representative working group of stakeholders from across the region.** The purpose of the working group should be to collaboratively design an operational plan aimed at establishing a collection of existing and new oral history initiatives that are linked to enable shared access and engagement, and supported by a collective commitment to resource preservation, outreach, and sustainable practice.
- 9.7 **We believe it would be an error to attempt to establish a new archive housed within a government body.**

9.8 We have come to this conclusion based on an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a government archive such as PRONI in relation to the following key dimensions of the oral history process: **collection, preservation, access, and engagement.**

9.9 To summarise this analysis:

- a. In terms of the requirements to deliver a quality oral history initiative, PRONI's key strength lies in its specialist capacity to **preserve** records.
- b. A secondary benefit offered by PRONI is its capacity to facilitate public **access** in principle to those records; however, there are weaknesses in this area (see [c] below).
- c. To build trust, encourage inclusive access from a wide range of communities, and generate an audience for the materials gathered, PRONI would need to **conduct extensive outreach and engagement.** While PRONI does not operate in this way, this mode of working is already core to existing grassroots-level initiatives. In the event of establishing a comprehensive archive or collection of archives and initiatives, this requirement will need to be reviewed in line with OHA's vision and guiding principles (see points [15] and [16] below): it is likely this outreach will need to extend beyond local and regional networks to engage international audiences and partners in dynamic and evolving relationships as the collection grows. While PRONI has a role to play in this process, it does not have the capacity, nor is it the remit of an official archive, to lead on the development of these contacts and relationships.
- d. Finally and most importantly, PRONI's capacity to **collect** oral histories is limited. Our experience shows that collecting and recording oral histories is a resource-intensive process: to deliver a quality initiative there will be a requirement for a body of staff that can develop a good rapport and trusted interpersonal relationships with people who wish to share their stories. This profile correlates strongly with the wide range of community-based initiatives that have led the development of oral history work across the region. It does not, however, describe PRONI. Critically, this team will require training and ongoing support to identify and manage risks and legal obligations: this will need to be resourced, alongside appropriate investment in technical capabilities. **The proposals for the OHA in the Consultation are not costed:** this gives us concern that neither the NIO nor PRONI has either scoped or secured the necessary resources required to deliver this unique initiative to a high standard. This is a critical flaw, which would fundamentally undermine the viability of the project.

9.10 **On this basis, we recommend that the proposed OHA concept should not be housed or managed by PRONI, but incorporate a collection of new and existing initiatives linked by a central platform.** PRONI, together with the National Archives in London and Dublin are key stakeholders among many that should be included in the working group that designs the collective way forward.

- 9.11 **We recommend this process should include careful strategic consideration – specifically: scoping and costing exercises – of the key areas of work that will underpin the process.** These will include, among others, the issues highlighted above: collection, preservation, access, and engagement.
- 9.12 **The information provided in relation to the OHA in the Consultation document is very limited, and conveys a sense that the proposed Legacy Institutions, including the OHA, would be established structurally separate to one another.** While we recognise there was a need for brevity in the Consultation materials, the information provided did not reflect the complex reality of conducting oral history work in a deeply divided post-conflict environment, nor did it clarify the overall purpose and long-term vision that the OHA is envisaged to fulfil *as part of the new and improved system* for dealing with the past.
- 9.13 **We recommend that the development of a clear vision, mission/purpose, and specifically defined values and guiding principles for the OHA should be treated as a priority.** This should include careful consideration of process as well as structure, taking into account the pathways that people engaging with the OHA and other Legacy Institutions may need to follow, and how to facilitate the constructive, safe flow of people, information, and ideas through the overall system for dealing with the past.
- 9.14 **We recommend that any next steps to develop, design, and implement the OHA should incorporate a gender lens informed by international good practice, and by the initial work undertaken in this area by the Legacy Gender Integration Group (see Annex 6).**

Further important points for consideration:

- 9.15 **The indication that some stories may be destroyed is ethically questionable** and would represent a serious **disincentive** for people to contribute their stories to the archive. Moreover, it is **unnecessary** from a practical standpoint: if the archive is proposing to only hold oral histories [i.e. digital/audio materials] and their relevant written catalogues, there can be no question of space/storage constraints.
- 9.16 There are many questions and procedural issues that must be considered and resolved before any actual delivery activity can be undertaken. These questions form the *starting point* for a working group discussion and include, for example:
- a. How will this archive be used?
 - b. Why should this resource be held in a government archive?
 - c. How has PRONI demonstrated its capacity to manage this process? Storytelling experts with experience of working with archives and with PRONI specifically have found that the PRONI infrastructure struggles to manage the current prison memory

archive. The capability of PRONI to coordinate a wider range of methods and sources – which would be inevitable in the process of collating existing archives from a diverse range of communities – is questionable.

- d. Why can the stories not reside where they have done for years – in the communities where the story tellers feel safe, at home, and supported to tell them – and also be appropriately archived to ensure preservation?
- e. How will the process be resourced? In the extensive and varied experience of the *Stories Network*, good practice oral history is a labour intensive activity, and yet this is an uncostered proposal.
- f. How will the OHA conduct outreach and engagement across communities?
- g. How will people be supported to engage and share their stories?
- h. How will the OHA ensure inclusive and equal access for people with a disability to the process, and to the various materials gathered?
- i. How will staff be trained to gather stories, and to identify, manage, and report risk (including both vulnerability and potential criminality)?
- j. How will the archive, presumably an IT platform, be resourced (for development and maintenance), and how will it be secured and future-proofed?
- k. How will permissions, informed consent, right of withdrawal, and copyright management be handled?
- l. What about material that people want to archive or embargo in ways that are different to PRONI protocols?
- m. What about additional materials – for example, that have been produced via radio, television, film, plays, and other footage and audio sources, as well as other craft/art materials and media?
- n. How will the OHA go about developing an audience for the archived material?
- o. How will the OHA link with other relevant sectors, such as education, museums, etc?
- p. How will this process handle and manage the integration of audio material in different formats, and ensure that these are preserved and accessible into the future? (Future-proofing IT solutions, adapting to new technologies.)
- q. Regarding the proposed ‘factual’ timeline – what has this to do with oral history? This question is important: there are many aspects of people’s very different experiences

that do not fit an elegant, orderly narrative – which would, in any case be contentiously selective; all of these perspectives and true experiences should be reflected, preserved, and made available to share in the way that they are told.

- 9.16 Given the complexity of these questions, the range of advice that will need to be researched and taken on board, and the relationship building that will need to underpin a robust discussion of these and other issues arising, it is reasonable to suggest that **the design and delivery of the OHA should include a realistic lead-in time.**
- 9.17 Further to the points raised above, we recommend our previous *Briefing Paper on the Oral History Elements of the Stormont House Agreement* produced by the *Stories Network* (see **Annex 5**) is reviewed in full by the NIO when collating responses to this Consultation.

Question 10: OHA – Engagement

Question 10: Oral History Archive

What steps could be taken to ensure that people who want to share their experiences of the Troubles know about the Archive and are encouraged to record their stories?

- 10.1 We welcome the inclusion of oral history and storytelling as a core element of the Consultation.
- 10.2 As outlined in **Section B** and our response to **Question 9** above, based on the experience of the Stories Network, the proposed OHA raises significant questions. Below, we have highlighted key points for consideration, including a reiteration/further discussion of relevant points in Section B and Question 9.

Key feedback and recommendations:

- 10.1 The OHA as it is described in the Consultation is not a risk-free process, and will be perceived as potentially too dangerous to engage with; if anything, the archive as it is described in the proposals will collate a sanitised version of people’s experiences that will not reflect the full range of life stories relevant to the conflict.
- 10.2 The feedback that members of our Network have received from families affected by the conflict emphasises reasons to NOT share their stories. The issues they cite are varied and include, for example:
- **Geographical issues:** ‘We live in Dublin and always have; why would we send our stories to Belfast?’
 - **Trust:** Some have had previous negative experiences of engaging with PRONI or other official bodies, which leads them to feel they should not trust these organisations with their personal stories.
 - **Changing political context:** Some are afraid that the fragile and changing political circumstances in Northern Ireland could mean that the stories they share with an official government body could be used for purposes other than oral history.
 - **Right of withdrawal:** Some feel that they would need a clear guarantee of the right and process to withdraw their stories from such an archive at any time they wish to, whether due to the wider political context or changes in their own circumstances.
 - **Existing networks:** Some have already recorded their narrative with an existing initiative, and do not want to start the process over again – but *do* want their story to be considered part of this record and social/cultural heritage.

- 10.3 Importantly, feedback from families has also indicated that the concept of an influential steering or working group that involves representatives from the community seems to mitigate some of these concerns.
- 10.4 **We believe the only way the OHA concept can work, is via collaborative engagement with existing archives and repositories that remain in their established and trusted locations.** We believe this is the only way that the OHA will ensure a wide and inclusive process that encourages people who want to share their stories to engage.
- 10.5 **We recommend the proposed OHA concept should be amended to prioritise the establishment of a representative working group of stakeholders from across the region.** The purpose of the working group should be to collaboratively design an operational plan aimed at establishing a collection of existing and new oral history initiatives that are linked to enable shared access and engagement, and supported by a collective commitment to resource preservation, outreach, and sustainable practice.
- 10.6 **The process for establishing such a working group and the representatives on it will be vitally important for generating public confidence and buy-in to the OHA.**
- 10.7 **We believe it would be an error to attempt to establish a new archive housed within a government body.**
- 10.8 We have come to this conclusion based on an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of a government archive such as PRONI in relation to the following key dimensions of the oral history process: *collection, preservation, access, and engagement*.
- 10.9 **For the purposes of responding to Question 10: *collection and engagement* are key concerns.** However, they cannot be isolated entirely from the overall process.
- 10.10 To summarise this analysis:
- a. In terms of the requirements to deliver a quality oral history initiative, PRONI's key strength lies in its specialist capacity to *preserve* records.
 - b. A secondary benefit offered by PRONI is its capacity to facilitate public *access* in principle to those records; however, there are weaknesses in this area (see [c] below).
 - c. To build trust, encourage inclusive access from a wide range of communities, and generate an audience for the materials gathered, PRONI would need to *conduct extensive outreach and engagement*. While PRONI does not operate in this way, this mode of working is already core to existing grassroots-level initiatives. In the event of establishing a comprehensive archive or collection of archives and initiatives, this requirement will need to be reviewed in line with OHA's vision and guiding principles (see points [15] and [16] below): it is likely this outreach will need to extend beyond local and regional networks to engage international audiences and partners in

dynamic and evolving relationships as the collection grows. While PRONI has a role to play in this process, it does not have the capacity, nor is it the remit of an official archive, to lead on the development of these contacts and relationships.

- d. Finally and most importantly, PRONI’s capacity to **collect** oral histories is limited. Our experience shows that collecting and recording oral histories is a resource-intensive process: to deliver a quality initiative there will be a requirement for a body of staff that can develop a good rapport and trusted interpersonal relationships with people who wish to share their stories. This profile correlates strongly with the wide range of community-based initiatives that have led the development of oral history work across the region. It does not, however, describe PRONI. Critically, this team will require training and ongoing support to identify and manage risks and legal obligations: this will need to be resourced, alongside appropriate investment in technical capabilities. **The proposals for the OHA in the Consultation are not costed:** this gives us concern that neither the NIO nor PRONI has either scoped or secured the necessary resources required to deliver this unique initiative to a high standard. This is a critical flaw, which would fundamentally undermine the viability of the project.

- 10.11 **On this basis, we recommend that the proposed OHA concept should not be housed or managed by PRONI, but incorporate a collection of new and existing initiatives linked by a central platform.** PRONI, together with the National Archives in London and Dublin are key stakeholders among many that should be included in the working group that designs the collective way forward.
- 10.12 **We recommend this process should include careful strategic consideration – specifically: scoping and costing exercises – of the key areas of work that will underpin the process.** These will include, among others, the issues highlighted above: collection, preservation, access, and engagement.
- 10.13 **The information provided in relation to the OHA in the Consultation document is very limited, and conveys a sense that the proposed Legacy Institutions, including the OHA, would be established structurally separate to one another.** While we recognise there was a need for brevity in the Consultation materials, the information provided did not reflect the complex reality of conducting oral history work in a deeply divided post-conflict environment, nor did it clarify the overall purpose and long-term vision that the OHA is envisaged to fulfil *as part of the new and improved system* for dealing with the past.
- 10.14 **We recommend that the development of a clear vision, mission/purpose, and specifically defined values and guiding principles for the OHA should be treated as a priority.** This should include careful consideration of process as well as structure, taking into account the pathways that people engaging with the OHA and other Legacy Institutions may need to follow, and how to facilitate the constructive, safe flow of people, information, and ideas through the overall system for dealing with the past.

- 10.15 **We recommend that any next steps to develop, design, and implement the OHA should incorporate a gender lens informed by international good practice, and by the initial work undertaken in this area by the Legacy Gender Integration Group (see Annex 6).**

Further important points for consideration with regard to engagement:

- 10.16 **The indication that some stories may be destroyed is ethically questionable** and would represent a serious **disincentive** for people to contribute their stories to the archive.

- 10.17 There are many questions and procedural issues that must be considered and resolved before any actual delivery activity can be undertaken. These questions form the *starting point* for a working group discussion and include, for example:

- a. How will this archive be used?
- b. Why should this resource be held in a government archive?
- c. Why can the stories not reside where they have done for years – in the communities where the story tellers feel safe, at home, and supported to tell them?
- d. How will the process be resourced? In the extensive and varied experience of the *Stories Network*, good practice oral history is a labour intensive activity, and yet this is an uncoded proposal.
- e. How will the OHA conduct outreach and engagement across communities?
- f. How will people be supported to engage and share their stories?
- g. How will the OHA ensure inclusive and equal access for people with a disability to the process, and to the various materials gathered?
- h. How will staff be trained to gather stories, and to identify, manage, and report risk (including both vulnerability and potential criminality)?
- i. How will permissions, informed consent, right of withdrawal, and copyright management be handled?
- j. What about material that people want to archive or embargo in ways that are different to PRONI protocols?
- k. What about additional materials – for example, that have been produced via radio, television, film, plays, and other footage and audio sources?
- l. How will the OHA go about developing an audience for the archived material?

m. How will the OHA link with other relevant sectors, such as education, museums, etc?

- 10.17 Given the complexity of these questions, the range of advice that will need to be researched and taken on board, and the relationship building that will need to underpin a robust discussion of these and other issues arising, it is reasonable to suggest that **the design and delivery of the OHA should include a realistic lead-in time.**
- 10.18 Further to the points raised above, we recommend our previous *Briefing Paper on the Oral History Elements of the Stormont House Agreement* produced by the *Stories Network* (see **Annex 5**) is reviewed in full by the NIO when collating responses to this Consultation.

Question 12: IRG – Structure

Question 12: Implementation and Reconciliation Group		
Do you think the IRG is appropriately structured to allow it to review the work of the legacy institutions, to commission an independent academic report and promote reconciliation?	YES	NO
Any further comments:		

- 12.1 We are responding to this question because we recognise that oral history (whether as the OHA or in some other form) will be part of the new system; this being the case, we are concerned to highlight that the relationship between the IRG and any oral history process needs further clarification before any next steps are undertaken. Based on the information provided in the Consultation documents, we do not believe the IRG and its described interaction with the Legacy Institutions is appropriately structured to review the process or, critically, the content of the OHA.
- 12.2 **The information provided in relation to the OHA in the Consultation document is very limited, and conveys a sense that the proposed Legacy Institutions, including the OHA, would be established structurally separate to one another.** While we recognise there was a need for brevity in the Consultation materials, the information provided did not reflect the complex reality of conducting oral history work in a deeply divided post-conflict environment, nor did it clarify the overall purpose and long-term vision that the OHA is envisaged to fulfil *as part of the new and improved system* for dealing with the past.
- 12.3 We recommend that the development of a clear vision, mission/purpose, and specifically defined values and guiding principles for the OHA should be treated as a priority. **This should include careful consideration of process as well as structure, taking into account the pathways that people engaging with the OHA and other Legacy Institutions may need to follow, and how to facilitate the constructive, safe flow of people, information, and ideas through the overall system for dealing with the past.**
- 12.4 **Specifically, the relationship between the OHA and the IRG needs to be clarified:** The Consultation suggests selected findings from the OHA could be reflected in report on themes and patterns commissioned by the IRG. This is problematic:
- What about all the stories that have already been told, housed in initiatives across the region, which will be excluded from this analysis?
 - What about the stories that may be destroyed (under the current proposals) because they are deemed to not be of “lasting historical significance”?

Q12: IRG - Structure

As a network, we are fundamentally opposed to this notion of selective inclusion. This element of the relationship between the OHA and IRG needs further discussion, including consultation with and feedback from stakeholders in existing archives and initiatives.

C: Concluding note

1. As practitioners and researchers with both a passion for oral history and significant applied experience in its development and practice, we are very pleased that storytelling and personal narrative is included as a core element of the proposed Legacy Institutions.
2. We are mindful our comments and feedback have foregrounded concerns and questions that we have in relation to the proposals in the Consultation. We wish to underline that all of this feedback is offered in a considered, constructive spirit. The comments we have provided are informed by more than two decades of independent and collective working on this theme, and are committed to the ongoing development of good practice and positive relationships across our networks.
3. **Our reaction to the Consultation can be summed up by the observation that, in considering a way forward for the OHA, there is enormous positive potential to enable and resource an already vibrant and vital area of work, and to develop a strategic vision and plan for ensuring its sustainability.**
4. The key to unlocking that potential, is to develop a model that brings the relevant stakeholders together (from community-led initiatives, to academics, researchers, and official bodies) and enables a collaborative design process to agree an inclusive way forward, channelling expertise and resources into improving *collection, preservation, access, and engagement* with existing and new initiatives.
5. The comments that we have offered in this response have been submitted in the interest of developing that potential for better coordinated action and public engagement.
6. In addition to the information provided above, we wish to emphasise the following:
 - a. Any next steps will occur in the context of a plethora of existing and previous measures. We recommend that this should be explicitly recognised, and a clear engagement plan with user-friendly guides should be developed to show how the new **system** will work with existing stakeholders.
 - b. Any next steps must be treated as work in progress: each of the proposed Institutions should be structured in such a way as to incorporate regular review and adjustment of its practice. This should occur much more frequently than the proposed 5-year reporting format, enabling ongoing improvement on the basis of listening and learning as the process unfolds.
7. We are open to and ready for further engagement in relation to any questions that may arise from this process, and remain willing to assist in whatever ways we can.

D: The Stories Network – Members' Biographies

Anna Bryson

Anna is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Law at QUB. Her research has developed along three closely related lines: socio-legal studies, conflict transformation and oral history. She has conducted more than 200 in-depth interviews across a range of EU and RCUK-funded projects. These include: *The Peace Process: Layers of Meaning, Lawyers, Conflict and Transition, Brexit and Northern Ireland: The Constitutional, Conflict Transformation, Human Rights and Equality Consequences and Apologies, Abuses and Dealing with the Past*. She is a founding director of the Oral History Network of Ireland and is the UK Oral History Society's regional networker for Northern Ireland. She is a member of the AHRC Peer Review College and serves on the board of a number of NGOs including the Committee on the Administration of Justice, the Centre for Cross Border Studies and Diversity Challenges.

Murray Cameron

Murray Cameron is a Trustee of the Royal Ulster Constabulary GC Foundation and Project Manager of the Foundation's Oral History Project.

Sara Duddy

Sara Duddy LL.M is a caseworker with the Pat Finucane Centre, a human rights NGO that provides support and advocacy to families bereaved during the conflict. Sara is a qualified solicitor with experience in human rights and social justice.

Will Glendinning

Will Glendinning is the Coordinator of the Peace Building Charity Diversity Challenges. In that role he has worked on a number of story-telling projects, using ethical principles, dealing with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland: *Green and Blue Across the thin line, AFTERMATH, The Way We Were, SPIRAL*.

Rodney Green

Rodney Green is an independent facilitator, evaluator and researcher with community relations, peace building, youth work and community development the core focus of his work.

Claire Hackett

Claire Hackett is the manager of Falls Community Council's digital oral history archive *Dúchas* which records personal experiences of the conflict. She is a member of the board of *Healing Through Remembering* and of the board of *Relatives For Justice*.

Clifford Harkness

Clifford Harkness is the former Head of Collections Management at National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) and was responsible for the preservation and access of diverse multi-media archival collections, (including the sound archive based at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum).

Gráinne Kelly

Gráinne Kelly is a Lecturer in Peace and Conflict Studies, based at INCORE (International Conflict Research Institute), Ulster University. She recently led the research elements of the Accounts of the Conflict project, which aimed to establish a digital repository of stories and testimonies related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland.

Declan Keeney

Declan Keeney is a lecturer in Film Studies at Queen’s University Belfast. He is a member of the Projecting Conflict Sub-Group within the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice at QUB. As an active filmmaker Declan’s research is particularly interested in best practice around storytelling on film. His PhD entitled ‘The Issue of Emotion in Stories of Conflict’ explores the implications of emotive film work for the record of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Mary McAnulty

Mary McAnulty is a mediator and community activist. She works with Dara Training & Consultancy on a variety of oral history / storytelling projects including Borderlines, the Spiral project and A Sense of Place. She is currently collaborating with Gallery of Photography on Photo Albums of Ulster.

Roger McCallum

Roger McCallum is a Trustee of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Association and has been involved in a number of Oral History Projects including RUC narratives, 'Green and Blue', 'Border Roads to Memories' and 'Aftermath'.

Cahal McLaughlin

Cahal McLaughlin is Professor of Film Studies at Queen’s University Belfast and director of the Prisons Memory Archive (www.prisonsmemoryarchive.com). His most recent films include We Never Give Up II, on reparations in South Africa, and We Were There, on the role of women in the Maze and Long Kesh Prison. His publications include Recording Memories from Political Conflict: A Filmmaker’s Journey (2010, Intellect).

Paul McLaughlin

Paul McLaughlin is a retired journalist and PR specialist. He is development officer with the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association and has edited two books of personal histories relating to mixed marriage.

David McMullan

David McMullan is the Project Officer for the Border Roads to Memories and Reconciliation Project. The project provides an opportunity for border residents to remember and express their feelings, in relation to when the border roads were closed; through interviews and artefacts which are digitally recorded and made available to view online at borderroadmemories.com.

Damien Maddalena

Damien Maddalena is the owner of Elucidate, a Belfast-based creative agency that specialises in creative interpretation, interactive experiences and digital repositories. He has been active in many historical, educational and research-oriented projects, notably publishing “Legacy: A collection of personal testimonies from people affected by the Troubles in Northern Ireland” in print on behalf of BBC Northern Ireland.

Jenny Meegan

Jenny Meegan is Senior Faculty Manager in Social Sciences for The Open University and is based in Belfast. She has been involved in a range of storytelling projects about experiences of the conflict and is currently co leading an oral history project on the experiences of a group of Open University students who studied during the conflict in Northern Ireland and those who worked with them.

Michelle Moloney

Michelle Moloney is an independent researcher, oral historian and facilitator. She has worked on numerous oral history projects in Northern Ireland and cross border areas.

Sean Pettis

Sean is a programme worker with the Corrymeela Community. Sean has 15 years’ experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of community relations and active citizenship programmes as both a trainer of educators and a youth work practitioner. Sean has been involved in a number of Oral History projects, including Up Standing: Stories of Courage from Northern Ireland, a book and film that tells the stories of those who stood up to violence, prejudice and sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Kate Turner

Kate Turner is the Chair of the Stories Network. She is Director of Healing Through Remembering and manages all aspects of the organisation’s development in conjunction with the Board. With over 25 years’ experience in the voluntary sector Kate has been involved with Healing Through Remembering since its inception in February 1999.

E: List of documents appended to this response

- Annex 1: Healing Through Remembering (2005): *An audit of personal story, narrative and testimony initiatives related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland*
- Annex 2: Healing Through Remembering (2005): Conference report: *Storytelling as the vehicle?*
- Annex 3: Healing Through Remembering (2009): *Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Narrative Work*
- Annex 4: Healing Through Remembering (2014): *Are we there yet? Dealing with the Past in and about Northern Ireland – Storytelling Proposal*
- Annex 5: Healing Through Remembering (2015): *The Stories Network: Briefing Paper on the Oral History Elements of the Stormont House Agreement*
- Annex 6: Legacy Gender Integration Group (2015): *Gender Principles for Dealing with the Legacy of the Past* (available at: <https://caj.org.uk/2015/08/17/gender-principles-dealing-legacy-past/>)

Note: Annexes 1-5 listed above are available for download on the HTR website at the following link: <http://healingthroughremembering.org/resources/reports/storytelling-reports/>

F: Contact details

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