

## Stories Network Response to NIO Proposals on dealing with the past (2021)

The Stories Network\* rejects the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) proposals to legislate against legacy prosecutions. The Network also rejects the suggestion that Oral History/Storytelling should be treated as a principal or primary mechanism for dealing with the past. Our informed view as practitioners and advocates of Oral History/Storytelling with local and international expertise is that such processes are a valuable and necessary **part** of how society deals with the legacy of conflict but are no substitute for moral and procedural justice, and therefore should complement rather than replace or be accorded priority over the existing systems. Furthermore, we find the inadequacy of these plans is compounded by the lack of transparency and the unilateral decision making that has been adopted by the NIO. The proposals and the way they have been formulated and communicated manifest a contempt for public consultation that undermines trust and will be counterproductive to our society's progress on legacy issues.\*\*

**\*The Stories Network'** is a network for those gathering and sharing personal narrative related to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. The Stories Network is hosted and chaired by Healing Through Remembering. As a diverse group of individuals with considerable experience of such work, the Stories Network brings years of experience and expertise to the discussion on legacy issues.

\*\*In 2009 Healing through Remembering produced ***Ethical Principles for Storytelling and Personal Narrative***. These have been widely disseminated and positively received as a reputable basis for a range of oral history legacy projects.

*The principles state: "There should be a structured and holistic approach to dealing with the past in order to address the variety of needs and issues that exist and that will emerge. Storytelling is one of a number of interrelated approaches ..... There needs to be coordination within and between all these areas. There is need for transparency in the formation and workings of all processes in order to build enough trust for them to operate successfully and to ensure the most benefit for society. Trust must be built at all levels and honesty in engagement is vital to maintain trust. The principle of reconciliation means fostering understanding through recognition and acknowledgment, to move our society towards a positive peace with the knowledge that as a society, "Yes, we have suffered, but we have also caused hurt."*

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