

Consultation on the Inquiry Rules for the Truth Recovery Public Inquiry

Truth Recovery Programme
The Executive Office

Wednesday 23 September 2026

The closing date for responses is Tuesday 17 November 2026

Email: trpconsultation@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

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Part A: Consultation Process

How to respond to the consultation

We will accept responses to the consultation in any format; however, we have outlined the key ways to respond to this consultation.

Online questionnaire

- The online questionnaire can be found here
<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/teo/consultation-on-public-inquiry-rules-for-truth-rec/>
- An Easy Read version is available here
<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/teo/easy-read-consultation-on-public-inquiry-rules/>

Email

You can request an editable pdf version of the questionnaire shown on the [Department's website](#) by contacting us at trpconsultation@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk. You can then complete this, save it and send it to us as an attachment, at the email address above.

Hard Copy

Alternatively, should you wish to complete a paper copy of the questionnaire, please contact us at trpconsultation@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk or phone **028 9052 0063** for a hard copy, then post it to: -

Room E4.05,
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast
BT4 3SL

Events

The consultation exercise will also be supported by a number of online information sessions: -

- Monday 5 October 2026, 4.00pm to 5.30pm
- Thursday 8 October 2026, 2.00pm to 3.30pm
- Tuesday 20 October 2026, 6.00pm to 7.30pm
- Thursday 22 October 2026, 10.00am to 11.30am

If you wish to register, please contact us by email trpconsultation@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk .

Additional sessions can be offered to individuals and groups; please contact us at the email above to arrange.

Support

For support in responding to the consultation please contact us by email trpconsultation@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk or phone **028 9052 0063**.

The closing date for responding to the consultation is Tuesday 17 November 2026.

PART B: Background to the Consultation

B.1 What is the purpose of the consultation?

The purpose of the consultation is to seek your views on the proposed Rules that are set out in order for the procedures to be observed during the Inquiry as allowed for in clause 28 of the [Inquiry \(Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses\) and Redress Scheme 2026 Bill \('the Bill'\)](#).

The Bill states the purposes and structure of the Inquiry and also sets out the broad powers the Chairperson has in relation to: -

- how the Inquiry operates, public access to the Inquiry and any restrictions;
- designation of core participants and legal representation arrangements;
- procedures for gathering and hearing evidence and questioning witnesses;
- disclosure and confidentiality;
- reporting and records; and
- awards for legal costs and expenses

The proposed Rules provide further detail on how the above powers work in practice. They are closely based on the secondary legislation from the Inquiries Act 2005 - [The Inquiry Rules 2006](#).

The Bill, which was passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 30 June 2026, does not come into operation until it achieves Royal Assent, which is being sought. The Rules can then be brought before the Assembly for their consideration, before they are made into law. Your views will help inform this process.

All survey questions are optional, and you only need to answer the questions that are most relevant and important to you.

B.2 What is the primary legislation?

The Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill was passed on 30 June 2026 and will become a law (an Act) following a process called Royal Assent which is likely to be in Autumn 2026.

This is called the primary legislation; it sets the main things that the new law aims to do including key elements like:

- the procedures for conducting the Inquiry; and
- that it operates in a fair, transparent and consistent manner.

B.3 What is secondary legislation?

Secondary legislation provides more detail on what will happen in practice and is required for the function and operation of the Public Inquiry to make sure the Inquiry is fair and consistent.

A form of secondary legislation is called a rule. The rules set out the necessary procedures, requirements and standards needed to implement and enforce the Act. They allow laws to be updated and applied more quickly and efficiently.

B.4 What does the document do?

This document explains what each proposed rule will do. It is for victims and survivors, family members and representative organisations. It tests whether the proposed rules are:

- clear
- fair
- transparent
- workable in practice.

B.5 Why are we consulting and why the specific duration?

The Inquiry Rules help with the formal commencement of the Inquiry. The consultation period was chosen to give individuals adequate time to consider the proposals and submit their views, while also allowing the secondary legislation to be in place and the inquiry to open at the earliest opportunity.

B.6 Terminology

These are difficult and sensitive matters, and we acknowledge that the language and terminology used here is especially important. We also understand that there are different views on the most suitable terminology, and we do not wish to add to anyone's distress.

We have tried to use sensitive terminology and language, noting there is not always a consensus. However, on occasion, we may need to use different language in the development of the Rules.

B.7 Support

Whilst the focus of the consultation is on the Rules, we are conscious of the impact that considering these issues may have on people whose personal experiences have given rise to the need for these proposals.

The Executive Office (TEO) offers support services through the Victims and Survivors Services (VSS), for victims and survivors, and information on how to access these services is available at [Emotional Support for Victims and Survivors of Mother & Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundry Institutions - Victims and Survivors Service](#). VSS can be contacted via telephone on 028 9031 1678 or email: - enquiries@vssni.org on the support services available.

B.8 Confidentiality

The Executive Office is committed to protecting your privacy. Further information on how we use and protect your personal data is available in our [privacy notice](#). **Individuals responding in a personal capacity are not required to provide their name or contact details, and responses will be treated anonymously.** TEO will not attribute any information provided to an individual respondent.

B.9 Impact Assessments

In accordance with the Executive Office's obligation under Section 75, an equality screening has been conducted on the Inquiry Rules and can be found [here](#). The screening concluded that there would be no significant implications for equality of opportunity and, therefore, an equality impact assessment is not required.

B.10 What happens next?

After the consultation closes, TEO will review and analyse the responses received and make any necessary changes. The Department will complete the required processes to facilitate scrutiny of the Rules by the Executive Office Committee and the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Rules will then be subject to further consideration by the Assembly.

PART C: Questionnaire - About You

The following 10 questions help us understand, who is responding to the consultation.

Please note, we are particularly interested in the views of those affected or with experience of the institutions and their pathways and practices.

Question 1 is the only question which is required. In **Question 2 to Question 10** below we ask about you as an individual.

However, you **do not** have to answer them. If you do not want to answer a question, then leave it blank and move on to one that you do wish to answer.

We ask these questions to:

- find out if people from different backgrounds are taking part;
- help to make sure everyone has a fair chance to be heard;
- check if there are any barriers that make it harder for some people to take part.

This helps us consider our equality duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and identify any groups who may face barriers to participation.

The information is used for monitoring purposes only and helps us assess whether our policies and services promote equality of opportunity for everyone.

TEO is committed to protecting your privacy. For more information about what we do with your personal information please see our [privacy notice](#).

TEO will not attribute any information provided to an individual respondent.

Q1: Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? [required question]

An individual (please go to question 2) ☐

On behalf of an organisation ☐

If responding on behalf of an organisation, please tell us your organisation's name.

(please go to question 11)

Q2. Have you been affected by any of the following (please select all that apply)?

Mother and Baby Institution ☐

Magdalene Laundry ☐

Workhouse ☐

Other institution ☐

None of the above ☐

If you have selected 'Other institution', please specify:

Q3. Which of the following describes you (please select all that apply):

Someone who was admitted to an institution ☐

Someone born to a mother who was in an institution ☐

Family member of either category above ☐

Other ☐

If you have selected 'Other', please specify:

Q4. Are you currently a resident in Northern Ireland?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If No, please indicate where you currently live

Republic of Ireland ☐

Great Britain ☐

Rest of Europe ☐

America ☐

Canada ☐

Australia ☐

Other ☐

If you have selected 'Other', please specify:

Q5. What is your age?

Under 16 ☐

16-24 ☐

25-34 ☐

35-44 ☐

45-54 ☐

55-64 ☐

65-74 ☐

75-84 ☐

85+ ☐

Q6. What is your religion?

No religion ☐

Catholic ☐

Presbyterian ☐

Church of Ireland ☐

Methodist ☐

Baptist ☐

Free Presbyterian ☐

Brethren ☐

Protestant – not specified ☐

Christian – not specified ☐

Buddhist ☐

Hindu ☐

Jewish ☐

Muslim ☐

Sikh ☐

Other ☐

If you have selected 'Other', please specify:

Q7. What is your sex?

Male ☐

Female ☐

Prefer not to say ☐

Q8. What is your ethnic group? (Choose one option which best describes your ethnic group or background)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| White | ☐ |
| Irish Traveller | ☐ |
| White and Black Caribbean | ☐ |
| White and Black African | ☐ |
| White and Asian | ☐ |
| Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background, <i>please describe below</i> | ☐ |
| Indian | ☐ |
| Pakistani | ☐ |
| Bangladeshi | ☐ |
| Chinese | ☐ |
| Any other Asian background, <i>please describe below</i> | ☐ |
| African | ☐ |
| Caribbean | ☐ |
| Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, <i>please describe below</i> | ☐ |
| Arab | ☐ |
| Any other ethnic group, <i>please describe below</i> | ☐ |

If you have selected 'Any other', please specify:

Q9. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

Yes (please proceed to Q10) ☐

No (please proceed to Q11) ☐

Q10. Does your condition(s) or illness(s) reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

Yes, a lot ☐

Yes, a little ☐

Not at all ☐

PART D: Questionnaire – Rules

Definitions

Summary:

Rule 2 - explains the key terms used throughout the Rules. It defines words like ‘award’, ‘applicant’, ‘bill’, ‘core participant’, ‘counsel’ ‘qualified lawyer’, ‘recognised legal representative’, ‘warning letter’ or ‘witness’, etc. so they are understood and applied consistently.

It also defines some of the terminology used regarding communication including by post, email, and by access to the Inquiry’s document management system.

The ‘Inquiry team’ is also defined as comprising the Inquiry Panel, legal staff who are acting for the Inquiry, expert advisers and the administrative team.

Q11. Are you content with the definitions in Rule 2?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Inquiry Communications

Summary:

Rule 3 - Governs the methods for issuing Inquiry documents whether they are delivered in person, left at a postal address, posted, sent by email or uploaded to the Inquiry document management system with email notification.

A person entitled to receive documents must inform the Inquiry Secretary how they wish to receive them.

Rule 4 - Specifies the ways in which documents may be given or sent by a person to the Inquiry or a member of the Inquiry Team. This includes leaving at the Inquiry address, posting, emailing or uploading to the Inquiry document management system.

Any person sending documents to the Inquiry must have received the consent of the Inquiry Secretary to receive them in that manner and agree to send documents in the required format.

Q12. Are you content with Rules 3 and 4 on sending and receiving documents?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 3	☐	☐	☐
Rule 4	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Participants and Legal Representation

Summary:

Rule 5: - Core Participants: The Chairperson can decide who is a core participant, with their agreement. This is based on their involvement or interest in the Inquiry, including whether a person is a 'relevant person' as defined in clause 4 of the Bill. This status can end during or at the end of the Inquiry.

Rule 6 and 7: - Legal Representation: Core participants can choose a legal representative, who will be formally recognised. Others may also have recognised legal representatives if approved. People with similar interests may be asked to share a legal representative.

Rule 8: - Legal Teams: Even if a legal representative is shared, individuals can appoint additional legal support.

Q13. Are you content with Rules 5 to 8 on appointing core participants and legal representatives?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 5	☐	☐	☐
Rule 6-7	☐	☐	☐
Rule 8	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Evidence and Hearings – Procedures

Summary:

Rule 9: - Gathering Evidence: The Inquiry Panel must make a request in writing to any person they wish to provide evidence, a written statement, document or any other thing. They may also make written requests for further written or oral evidence. Requests will clearly explain what information is needed.

Rule 10: - Oral Evidence: Witnesses can give evidence in person or remotely by video link. Most questioning is done by Counsel to the Inquiry and the Panel. In some cases, legal representatives may ask questions, but only with the Chairperson's permission, having been given sufficient notice.

Rule 11: - Questioning Witnesses: Core participants will be told in advance when witnesses will appear. If they want a question asked, they must normally submit the question at least one working day in advance. The Counsel to the Inquiry decides how questions are asked, but the Chairperson has final control.

Rule 12: - Opening and Closing Statements: Legal representatives of core participants may make opening and closing statements if the Chairperson agrees. Participants without legal representatives may do so with permission.

Q14. Are you content with Rules 9 to 12 on gathering oral and written evidence, questioning witnesses and making statements?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 9	☐	☐	☐
Rule 10	☐	☐	☐
Rule 11	☐	☐	☐
Rule 12	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Evidence and Hearings – Potentially Restricted Evidence

Summary:

Rule 13: - Explains how the Inquiry deals with sensitive information when a request has been made to keep it restricted on public interest grounds, but a decision has not yet been made.

While the decision is pending, the information is treated as restricted to protect it from being shared more widely.

In some cases, the Chairperson may allow limited sharing of this information if it is necessary to help decide whether it should remain restricted. Before doing this, the Chairperson must give the person who provided the information, or the person who asked for it to be restricted, a chance to give their views.

Anyone who is given access to this information must keep it confidential. If they do not, they may face legal action.

This Rule aims to protect sensitive information while still allowing the Inquiry to make fair and informed decisions.

Q15. Are you content with Rule 13 on the treatment and disclosure of potentially restricted information?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Reports and Records - Warning Letters

Summary:

Rule 14: - Requirements: The Chairperson may issue a warning letter to anyone who may be criticised during the Inquiry. A person must receive a warning letter and have a chance to respond before any serious criticism is included in an Inquiry Report.

Rule 15: - Confidentiality: Warning letters must be kept confidential. Confidentiality can be lifted if agreed in writing. The letter can be shared with a legal representative. The letter must clearly set out the criticism, facts, and evidence. Anyone who breaks this confidentiality may face legal action. Confidentiality ends once the report is published.

Rule 16: - Content: A warning letter must clearly explain what the criticism is, facts behind it and the evidence supporting it.

Rule 17: - Evidence: When deciding how much weight to give to evidence, the Inquiry Panel must not take into account whether or not a warning letter was sent.

Q16. Are you content with Rules 14 to 17 on the use of warning letters?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 14	☐	☐	☐
Rule 15	☐	☐	☐
Rule 16	☐	☐	☐
Rule 17	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Reports and Records - Inquiry Reports

Summary:

Rule 18: - States that after a report is submitted to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, but before publication, a copy must be provided to all core participants and their legal representatives. The report must be kept confidential until publication. Any breach of this confidentiality can lead to legal action by the Chairperson.

Q17. Are you content with Rule 18 on issuing Inquiry reports?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Reports and Records - Records Management

Summary:

Rule 19: - During the Inquiry, the Chairperson must ensure that a full and well organised record is kept and when the Inquiry ends, the Chairperson must transfer the record to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

Q18. Are you content with Rule 19 on ensuring a record of the Inquiry?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Awards for Costs - Applications

Summary:

Rule 20: - Applying: A person can apply in writing to the Chairperson for costs (an “award”) at any time. Applications must clearly set out the work involved, costs and hourly rates for legal representatives and any support staff, along with supporting evidence. The Chairperson may request more information if needed.

Rule 21: - Approval: Awards relate to expenses, loss of time or for legal representation in relation to the inquiry, the detail of which will be outlined in a costs protocol. Institutions or their representatives cannot receive funding, except in exceptional circumstances.

Rule 22: - Awards for Legal Representation: If an award is granted for legal representation, conditions will be set, including what work is covered, hourly rates, spending limits, and how claims must be submitted. Fixed maximum hourly rates apply for legal professionals.

Rule 23: - Awards for Loss of Time: If payment is for loss of time, conditions will include limits on amounts, how claims are submitted and evidence required to support the claim.

Rule 24: - Awards for Other Costs: For any other costs, limits will be set, proof of expenditure provided and bills must be submitted in the required format.

Rule 25: - Notification: If an award is approved, the applicant (and their legal representative, if any) will be formally notified.

Rule 26: - Submitting and Assessing Claims: Once an award is approved and the applicant has been informed, they can submit bills for their costs or compensation. The bills must follow the agreed conditions and will be checked by the Inquiry’s Solicitor before payment is made.

Q19. Are you content with Rules 20 to 21 on applications for legal funding and the criteria the Chairperson must take into account before reaching a decision?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 20	☐	☐	☐
Rule 21	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Q20. Are you content with Rules 22 to 24 on setting limits on awards for funding related to legal representation, loss of time or other expenses?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 22	☐	☐	☐
Rule 23	☐	☐	☐
Rule 24	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Q21. Are you content with Rules 25 to 26 on communicating the outcome of an application for an award, submitting bills and their referral to the Inquiry Solicitor for assessment?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 25	☐	☐	☐
Rule 26	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Awards for Costs – Assessments

Summary:

Rule 27: - Assessment of an Award: When a bill is submitted, the Solicitor to the Inquiry will review within 21 days. If the full amount is accepted this becomes the final decision. If the amount is reduced the applicant can challenge it within 21 days. If the applicant does not respond within 21 days, the decision becomes final. All decisions must be in writing and sent to the applicant and their legal representative.

Rule 28: - How Claims are Assessed: Claims for loss of time are based on actual financial loss, or a reasonable estimate if this cannot be calculated.

Other costs must be reasonable and proportionate.

Any costs that do not meet the agreed conditions will not be paid.

Q22. Are you content with Rules 27 and 28 on reviewing and assessing claims?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 27	☐	☐	☐
Rule 28	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Awards for Costs – Appeals

Procedure where Legal Costs Assessment Not Agreed

Summary:

Rule 29: - Disputes about Legal Costs: If the Inquiry Solicitor disputes the bill in relation to legal expenses, they must write back to the applicant within 21 days explaining what is being challenged, why and a revised amount. The applicant must then provide a written response to the disputed bill. These deadlines can be extended by agreement. After considering the response the solicitor issues a final assessment within a reasonable time.

Rule 30: - Disputes about Other Costs: This provides a simpler process, if the disagreement is about non-legal costs. The Inquiry Solicitor reviews the bill again then issues a final decision within a reasonable timeframe.

Rule 31: - Review by the Chairperson: If the applicant still disagrees with the final decision, they can ask the Chairperson to review it. This request must be made in writing within 21 days of the final decision being sent. The Chairperson may decide the review based on written information and their decision is final. They must then tell the applicant and send the award to TEO within 28 days for approval and payment.

Rule 32: - Final Award and Payment: If no review is needed (or withdrawn) the Chairperson confirms the final amount and the award is sent to the Executive Office within 28 days for approval and payment.

Q23. Are you content with Rules 29 to 32 on resolving disagreements about costs?

	Yes	No	Not sure
Rule 29	☐	☐	☐
Rule 30	☐	☐	☐
Rule 31	☐	☐	☐
Rule 32	☐	☐	☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Powers of the Chairperson

Summary:

Rule 33: - The Chairperson is responsible for deciding how the Inquiry will be run, including where hearings take place and how witnesses give their evidence, unless the Rules already say otherwise.

Q24. Are you content with Rule 33 on the powers of the Chairperson to manage the Inquiry?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Not sure ☐

Please provide any further comments below:

Final Comments

Q25. Do you have any other comments to make regarding the draft Rules?