

Press Release

Closing date for Acknowledgment Forum announced

Issued: 6th March 2014

Embargoed until Thursday 6th March 2014 at 11am

Please note – the Inquiry would welcome publication and broadcast of the closing date and time for applications to the Acknowledgement Forum.

The Chairman of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, Sir Anthony Hart, has announced the closing date for applications from individuals who wish to speak to the Inquiry's private and confidential Acknowledgement Forum. The closing date will be Wednesday 30th April 2014 at 17.00 hours.

The Chairman made his announcement at Banbridge Courthouse at the commencement of the seventeenth day of the Inquiry's oral evidence sessions [at 10.30am approx. on Thursday, 6th March].

In announcing the closing date, the Chairman said:

"It is necessary to bring the Acknowledgment Forum application process to a close to facilitate the Forum informing the work of the Statutory Inquiry. 30th April 2014 has been chosen as the latest possible date that will allow the Forum to see everyone who wishes to speak to it, and at the same time allow it enough time to prepare its report."

Applications to participate in the Inquiry's public hearings closed on 29th November 2013. By that date, 434 individuals had applied to speak to the statutory Inquiry and/or the Forum.

However, since that date, it has still been possible for individuals to apply to speak to the Forum, and 56 further applications have been received to date. Any further applications must be received as soon as possible, and no later than 30th April.

So far, the Acknowledgement Forum has interviewed 308 individuals. Anyone who suffered childhood abuse or neglect in one of the Northern Ireland institutions covered by the Inquiry's terms of reference between 1922 and 1995 can apply to speak to the Forum.

The Forum sits on a regular basis in Belfast and in Derry/Londonderry, and elsewhere as necessary. Each applicant normally speaks to two Panel members. The meeting provides applicants with the time to talk of their experiences while in residential childcare. They are supported in doing so in a sympathetic way. The Forum will ensure that applicants are heard in a room which is comfortable, private and safe.

HIA Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

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Applications can be requested from the Inquiry helpline 0800 068 4935 (freephone from landlines within the UK) or downloaded from the Inquiry's website www.hiainquiry.org and returned electronically to general@hiainquiry.org.

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Notes to Editors

1. Following an inter-departmental task force report, the Northern Ireland Executive, on 29th September 2011, announced there would be an Investigation and Inquiry into historical institutional abuse.
2. On 31st May 2012, the First Minister and deputy First Minister announced the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, and advised the Assembly of the Chair of the Inquiry and of the Panel Members for the Acknowledgement Forum.
3. An amended terms of reference to widen the scope of the Inquiry from 1922 - 1995 was announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 18th October 2012. See <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-ofmdfm-191012-ministers-widen-historical>
4. The Inquiry has a remit to investigate physical, emotional and sexual childhood abuse, and childhood neglect which occurred in residential institutions in Northern Ireland over a 73-year period up to 1995.
5. For the purposes of this Inquiry "child" means any person under 18 years of age; "institution" means anybody, society or organisation with responsibility for the care, health or welfare of children in Northern Ireland, other than a school (but including a training school or borstal) which, during the relevant period, provided residential accommodation and took decisions about and made provision for the day to day care of children; "relevant period" means the period between 1922 and 1995 (both years inclusive).
6. The Inquiry is chaired by Sir Anthony Hart, assisted by Panel members Geraldine Doherty and David Lane. Acknowledgement Forum Panel members are: Beverley Clarke, Norah Gibbons, Dave Marshall QPM and Tom Shaw CBE. Biographical details are available on the Inquiry website: www.hiainquiry.org
7. The Inquiry is formally established under The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 which became law on 19th January 2013.
8. Public hearings commenced on 13th January 2014, and are currently being conducted in the former Banbridge Courthouse. Details regarding sitting weeks can be found at www.hiainquiry.org
9. **All media requests for information should be directed to the Inquiry's Press Officer, Liz Fawcett, on 028 9020 0811 or 0771 943 5662, or at liz@lizfawcettconsulting.com**

CHAIRMAN: SIR ANTHONY HART SECRETARY: ANDREW BROWNE