Special edition on Stormont House Agreement

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Crunch time for Stormont House Agreement legacy institutions

Ten months on from the dust settling on the December 2014 Stormont House Agreement (SHA) it is now crunch time with the UK Government poised to introduce the implementation legislation – the Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill – into Parliament. In our view the SHA on paper does provide a basis to deal with the past in a human rights compliant manner, provided it is implemented in good faith. The SHA provided for the following new institutions to deal with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict:

- **The Historical Investigations Unit (HIU)** 'an independent body to take forward investigations into outstanding Troubles-related deaths'
- **An Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR)** 'to enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the deaths of their next of kin'
- **An Oral History Archive** 'to provide a central place to share experiences and narratives related to the Troubles'
- **An Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG)** 'to oversee themes, archives, and information recovery'

Outside the official process there has also been plenty of activity. CAJ and academic experts from Queens and Ulster University drafted our own unofficial Model Bill to demonstrate what the legislation should look like if implemented in good faith and in a human rights compliant manner. This covers all four SHA legacy institutions, including the IRG. In partnership with Amnesty International and the two universities a conference was held on a draft of this unofficial legislation. A report was produced and recently launched, as were a set of Gender Principles for dealing with the legacy of the Past developed by the Legacy Gender Integration group.

Whilst consultation on draft legislation never materialized, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) did publish a 'Summary of Measures' document outlining what it is planning to put in the bill. Since that time a draft of the legislation itself has also been widely leaked. There are serious concerns however that a number of the provisions proposed by the NIO are somewhat removed from what was agreed under the SHA and from the requirements of human rights compliance. The HIU has had its powers and independence watered down, particularly stark are the introduction of 'national security' caveats over its powers of disclosure, and restrictions on its caseload. There are questions as to whether the Oral History Archive, will be sufficiently independent. With the NIO documents including the monty-pythonesque line that "In order to ensure the independence of the OHA and that it is protected from political control or interference... the OHA will be under the direction and control of ...a senior civil servant". The IRG is not even in the legislation. There are also still issues to iron out over the ICIR. In recent months the media have focused primarily (and somewhat misguidedly) as to whether this Commission will be able to offer general 'amnesties'. The SHA and the NIO proposals are clear that this is not the case. This is not to say that the process is unredeemable, yet reminiscent of the process following the Patten Report the NIO has produced proposals that depart from the SHA. This special edition of Just News is composed of four articles written by four members of the drafting team of the unofficial Model legislation on each of the respective SHA institutions.

Contents

The Historical Investigations Unit (HIU): assessing the NIO policy proposals

This article will critique the proposals for the HIU in relation to five key issues namely: HIU Powers to obtain official documents, HIU caseload; HIU powers of onward disclosure; Staffing, independence and equality; HIU independence - governance.

This paper refers to three documents. The Model Bill provides a human rights compliant means in which way in which the Stormont House Agreement might be implemented, drafted by CAJ and a group of academics and individual experts. The NIO Policy Paper is a document issued by the Northern Ireland Office in the past month summarising their intentions for the SHA legislation. The Draft Bill is a document produced by the NIO that has been widely leaked and reproduced in the media in the past two weeks. It is worth emphasising that this is a draft still subject to negotiation before its formal introduction into Parliament. All is still to play for.

Daniel Holder, CAJ; © by Stan Nikolov

Powers to obtain official documents

The starting point for all HIU investigations, whether into republicans, loyalists or the state will be the existing files and materials held by the state. Previous legacy investigations have been hampered by lack of access to official documents but in the SHA the UK government makes an unequivocal commitment to full disclosure to the HIU, with no 'national security' or other qualification. In order to make this commitment a reality the HIU will need (separate to its broader policing powers) a clear disclosure power compelling state agencies to hand over the documents it needs for its investigations, including powers that set aside obligations of secrecy. Such powers already exist for agencies like the Police Ombudsman or Criminal Cases Review Commission, and are provided for in the Model Bill.

Clause 22 of the Model Bill provides a detailed disclosure power composed of all the elements we deemed necessary to ensure the commitment to full disclosure was realised, it:

- Places a duty on any public authority to comply within a reasonable timescale with a request to provide or allow access to the HIU to information it holds;
- Sets up an internal specialist disclosure unit in the HIU to facilitate such requests;
- Explicitly provides that other legislation (e.g. the Official Secrets Act) or other obligations of secrecy/confidentiality does not prevent disclosure to the HIU;
- Empowers the HIU to direct that relevant documents held by public authorities are not destroyed;
- Makes it an offence for public authorities to fail to comply with a disclosure request or conceals, alters or destroys the information it holds.

The NIO policy paper reiterates the UK Governments commitment to full disclosure to the HIU and places no 'national security' or similar qualification on disclosure to the HIU. It states that the actual bill: "will include a duty on UK government bodies to provide the HIU with such information, documents or other material, information and documentation as it may reasonably require for the purposes of, or in connection with, the exercise of its functions."

It then goes on to state similar disclosure duties will be placed on devolved bodies including the PSNI before, confusingly, running in to the separate issue of the policing powers the HIU will also have available for its investigations. Clause 12 of the leaked draft Bill contains the HIU power to seek disclosure from a list of defined 'relevant authorities', it also sets aside obligations of confidentiality or other restrictions on disclosure. This clause is quite detailed, what however is notable by its absence is any sort of sanction on a 'relevant authority' for failing to make timely disclosure. By contrast criminal offences are created to prevent HIU officers from providing the information they receive to families outside the tight 'national security' restrictions the leaked Draft Bill would impose. There is also a provision allowing the HIU to require 'assistance' from the PSNI 'for the effective use of' material made available. It would be of concern if the thinking behind this is to allow the sub-contracting of some of the disclosure work to legacy units within the police themselves. What the SHA provides for is the transfer of HET files to the control of the HIU, which the Chief Constable has expressed a willingness to do.

Whilst it obviously won't be dealt with by a Westminster bill there is also the question of disclosure by the Irish authorities to the HIU. The NIO Policy Paper (presumably with Dublin's consent) does deal with this issue – stating that arrangements are being put in place to ensure the HIU will have full cooperation from 'all relevant Irish authorities'. It states Dublin is committed to parallel legislation to the Westminster bill or even a treaty 'if necessary' to make this happen. Unless clear disclosure duties are already covered in existing legislation or policing cooperation treaties – such a move would be necessary. This is also a welcome commitment. Like above the devil will of course be in the detail of the actual legislation.

The HIU Caseload

A second issue concerns which cases the HIU be empowered to deal with and what will be the scope of its investigations. In relation to the latter, clause 10 of the Model Bill sets out on the face of the legislation a range of matters an Article 2 compliant investigation must include, to avoid the concept of 'criminal investigation' being narrowly construed. The NIO Policy Paper states that the HIU will have to produce and publish a 'Statement' on how it would conduct its investigations, including how it will ensure they are Article 2 compliant.

The SHA provides that HIU is to investigate outstanding 'Troubles-related deaths', taking on both the outstanding HET and Police Ombudsman caseloads (both of which related to pre-1998), and other cases, which have been previously investigated, where there is 'new evidence.' There is no cut-off date in the SHA for these cases. There are international obligations to independently investigate deaths (ECHR Article 2), as well as other matters such as torture (ECHR Article 3). We have reflected this in the Model Bill under clause 11. This would empower the HIU to take on some post-1998 cases and ECHR Article 3 cases in certain circumstances to ensure compliance with international human rights obligations.

The NIO Policy Paper sticks to investigating deaths and state that the HIU's remit will have a cut off date of deaths which occurred before the 10 April 1998 (the date of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement). It remains unclear how the state intends to discharge both its Article 3 obligations and independent investigative obligations in those post-1998 cases whereby neither the Ombudsman nor PSNI would have the remit or required independence to deal with them.

The NIO Policy Paper reiterates that the HIU will take on the outstanding HET and Police Ombudsman legacy caseloads and that this will include HET cases that require re-examination. There is also provision for the HIU to re-investigate cases on the request of families in light of a 'new fact' emerging. The Leaked Draft Bill however further restricts the HIU case load. Perhaps to avoid defining 'conflict-related death' the draft relies on only including deaths which were already on the HET or OPONI legacy caseloads, which will replicate a gap for cases which were missing from them.

The leaked Draft Bill does allow investigations of the HET and OPONI legacy cases that those institutions never got to start. It is not clear if, for example, the approximately 50 cases of RUC shootings will be included given they could not be dealt with by either HET or OPONI. Whilst there is a separate provision allowing for cases whereby deaths were caused directly by 'crown servants', this is limited to cases which were on the HET lists, and therefore may cover British Army but not RUC killings.

There is provision for 'incomplete' HET and OPONI legacy cases to be taken on by the HIU. There is however a level of discretion on the part of the PSNI and OPONI to decide which cases were completed, which will be contentious for those reports which have been contested as flawed. There is a process whereby families can argue that the HET report was not 'complete', but there are a number of hoops to jump through. A family must have written to the HET about its investigation and received a written response stating that the process will be reconsidered or reopened. This is not going to work for families who did not or could not engage with the HET on a report, particularly after the HET itself was stood down and it was not possible to correspond with them. If a family received a revised report, or confirmation from the PSNI that the original HET report stood, the case is also considered 'completed', regardless of any outstanding concerns. There is also a provision to allow the HIU, PSNI and the Department of Justice (but not families) to agree that the PSNI keep particular investigations if they are at an advanced stage.

In relation to 'new fact' provisions the international obligation under the ECHR is that "where there is a plausible, or credible, allegation, piece of evidence or item of information relevant to the identification, and eventual prosecution or punishment of the perpetrator of an unlawful killing, the authorities are under an obligation to take further investigative measures" (see Brecknell v UK [71]). There is provision in the leaked Draft Bill for cases to be reopened on the basis of new facts, but it falls below this standard in a number of ways. For the HIU to open a case on the basis of 'new facts' a number of tests must be first satisfied. Firstly, that the 'new fact' (or its relevance to the death) was not previously known to the PSNI/OPONI. This therefore does not cover instances where evidence was overlooked or ignored in the original investigation. The ECHR obligation is to investigate on the basis of evidence which could lead to the 'prosecution or punishment' of perpetrators. The word 'punishment' is important as this includes disciplinary sanctions. However, the leaked Draft Bill restricts this to misconduct by RUC officers in 'grave or exceptional' circumstances, and not misconduct of any other state agency. Furthermore it appears to only allow investigation provision if the RUC officer in question is still capable of being disciplined. This would mean cases could not be reopened on grounds of misconduct if the officer had retired.

Another feature of the official proposals as they stand is that they go to extraordinary lengths to state that HIU investigations into criminal matters will be operationally separate from investigations into Police misconduct. This appears designed to make explicit that HIU policing powers are not available when misconduct is being investigated, yet it is not clear why this would require such a degree of operational separation.

Finally, whilst studiously avoiding the term, the leaked Draft Bill provides that a final ground for re-investigating a case is when there are reasonable grounds for the HIU to believe that there has been collusion. The definition provided however appears designed to restrict what will be officially classified as collusion to those instances where a 'crown servant' had "intended to achieve an unlawful or improper purpose" through an action which was itself a criminal offence or alternatively grave or exceptional. Given that collusion took place within a deliberately created legal lacuna where there were 'no rules', this threshold might be hard to reach.. The definition of 'crown servant' is also at best ambiguous. It explicitly includes RUC officers and members of the armed forces, but does not single out MI5, despite the agency having been singled out elsewhere in the bill in for example the definition of 'relevant authority' for disclosure. Instead the category of an 'office or employment' under the Crown is included, and it is not clear what this is to cover.

HIU powers onward disclosure

The SHA provides that the only statutory duty on the independent HIU not to include certain information in its reports to families and publications will be that of ensuring it does not make disclosures that would jeopardize the safety of individuals. This is reflected in the Model Bill as a duty on the HIU Director. This provision is also provided for in the NIO proposals, save that the power is vested in the Department of Justice rather than the HIU, which gives a Minister a role in what are supposed to be independent reports.

What is more concerning however, and entirely outside the letter of the Stormont House Agreement, is that in addition to this power the Secretary of State herself is to be granted a power to veto the contents of reports on the deliberately vague ground of 'national security'. Furthermore a system is to be established which takes the national security doctrine to another level, whereby the public authorities disclosing documents to the HIU are under a duty to pre-classify them as documents which contain 'national security' information, which then binds the HIU not to disclose them to families. As there is no definition of 'national security' this in essence amounts to government and the military having carte blanche to stamp 'not to be disclosed to families' on the documents it provides, and removes the powers of what is to be an 'independent' body to make decisions as to what it is safe to disclose.

The idea that how someone died in the Troubles, at whose hands and whether any agents of the state were involved, should remain a 'state secret' is a troubling concept. A national security veto can clearly be used to cover up human rights violations, or even matters that are just 'embarrassing' for a government. In our experience such 'national security' vetoes provide enormous powers of direction and concealment that can be regularly deployed to obstruct investigations. Government may argue that the operational methodologies of the security forces need to be kept under wraps but 'national security' is neither restricted to such a question nor is there a case for the covering up of obsolete and illegal methodologies that are never supposed to be used again.

Staffing, independence and equality

The HIU is to be an independent body. Under Article 2 of the ECHR there is a legal obligation that those working in the HIU have no connection to the persons or organisations that may be the subject of their investigations. The practice of organisations like the Police Ombudsman in its legacy investigations is that former members of the RUC or security forces are usually debarred to prevent conflicts of interest arising. Our Model Bill has followed this approach, and also debars persons who at any time have been paramilitaries from employment with the HIU. The NIO Policy Paper states however that the official legislation will not debar persons with former policing or security roles. It does however go on to state the obvious that recruitment will need to be within what is permitted within the law (i.e. Article 2) and defers that responsibility to the HIU Director. The NIO Policy Paper also provides that the HIU will be able to include secondments to its staffing, which raises independence questions. The Leaked Draft Bill actually provides that the Department of Justice will in fact make decisions on who can be seconded to the HIU.
A second issue is that investigative bodies have tended to be overwhelmingly male dominated. Our Model Bill seeks to counter this through a statutory duty to take reasonable steps to ensure a gender balance, and to ensure staff have necessary experience and aptitude to take a gender-sensitive approach The official proposals are silent on such matters.

Independence – governance

The SHA provides that the Northern Ireland Policing Board will oversee the work of the HIU and further guarantees the HIU will be an independent body. Our Model Bill dealt with this in a number of ways including provisions for financial independence by way of monies being allocated by Parliament, adequate powers for the Policing Board to oversee the HIU and for the HIU Director to be a 'corporation sole'.

The 'corporation sole' model – used for the Police Ombudsman and Director of Public Prosecutions – vests all the power of the institution in the sole office holder. We took the view that, providing there is not a perverse appointment, this model is the best in relation to ensuring the HIU's independence and preventing interference by a sponsor department. Back in 2012 the Department of Justice had proposed changing the model for the Police Ombudsman away from 'corporation sole' to a multi-member commission. CAJ counselled against some sort of collective body given as heading an investigative unit is a quasi-judicial role in which the post holder must satisfy themselves that the investigation into the relevant matter has been robust and all evidential opportunities have been followed up rather than one to be subject to some sort of 'negotiation' between **members with different perspectives. CAJ stated "It is right that this kind of function is exercised by an individual who is publicly accountable for it. It would be quite wrong for such conclusions and decisions to be subject to a process of debate and compromise within a collective body. In investigating […] the issue is not reflecting the different interests, currents and attitudes within Northern Ireland society but of exposing wrongdoing without fear or favour and of vindicating proper actions equally robustly when appropriate."** The proposal was rejected and the Police Ombudsman remains a corporation sole.

The SHA is not specific but the NIO Policy Paper sets out that the HIU will not be a 'corporation sole' but rather a 'body corporate' sponsored by the Department of Justice. It elaborates that the HIU "will consist of both Executive and non-Executive members within its management board, including the HIU Director." Whilst the document does state the HIU Director will have 'operational control' this does move towards the model of having a multi-member commission. There are other provisions of concern in relation to governance. The Department of Justice is to have a key role in funding the HIU, which given its track record in relation to legacy funding to the Police Ombudsman is going to raise concerns among families. Finally, and entirely outside the terms of the SHA, which is crystal clear the oversight body for the HIU is the Policing Board, the NIO Policy Paper seeks to restrict the role of the Policing Board to only oversee the HIUs work when it is working on 'transferred' matters (that is devolved matters). It sets out that whenever HIU investigations touch on 'national security' or any other 'non-transferred' matter the NIO want the line of accountability of the HIU to then switch to the Secretary of State herself. This is despite the very actions of government and its agencies being among the matters under investigation by the HIU.

Report on the conference on the Model Bill earlier this year

All is still to play for to get the legislation right. What has been leaked out to date however falls short of being compliant both with human rights standards and the SHA itself.

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The Stormont House Oral History Archive, PRONI, and the Meaning of Independence

The Role of the OHA

The immediate public response to the NIO report has focused on the Historical Investigations Unit (HIU) and the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR). Less attention has been paid to the OHA, a body tasked with providing 'a central place for people from all backgrounds to share experiences and narratives relating to the Troubles and to draw together existing oral history projects.'

Dr. Anna Bryson, QUB; © by Stan Nikolov

The scope of both the HIU and ICIR is necessarily limited: they have specific prosecutorial and information recovery functions. The OHA by contrast holds the potential to broaden the canvas on dealing with the past and to address hitherto neglected themes such as rural experiences of conflict, gender and class dimensions of violence, mental health, and generational shifts. Building on a significant corpus of existing accounts and resources it can go beyond narrow political interpretations of the past and provide important alternatives for those who wish to tell their story in full and in context, at a time and place that best suits their needs.

Political Independence

None of this will happen easily. From the outset the OHA will need to strike a delicate balance between creativity and sensitivity, courage and probity. The single most important principle – upon which it will flourish or fall – was agreed upon by the two governments and the five main political parties in Northern Ireland and enshrined in the Stormont House Agreement. It is that 'the Archive will be independent and free from political interference'.

Achieving that independence requires a keen sense of history. This is not the first attempt to create an oral archive of 'experiences and narratives related to the Troubles'. In the course of the last decade I have served on the Advisory Board of half a dozen such initiatives and know that, if there is consensus on anything, it is that political interference must be avoided at all costs.

The inclusion of the OHA in the 'single legislative vehicle' for the implementation of the past-related elements of the Stormont House Agreement presents a welcome opportunity to enshrine the independence of the archive in statute. However, what has been officially proposed is that the OHA be established as part of the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

PRONI

There are some logistical and practical arguments for housing the Archive at PRONI. It is the official archive for Northern Ireland and is undoubtedly an invaluable resource for the preservation and archiving of public and private documentary records. Significant resources have also been spent on new purpose-built premises in the Titanic Quarter. However, the effectiveness of the OHA will be determined not by the location of its repository but rather by its model of governance.

The NIO proposes that the OHA will be 'under the direction and control' of the Deputy Keeper of the Records at PRONI. As stated quite explicitly in her most recently published annual report, 'PRONI is a division of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and, as such, operates under the direction and control of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who is also the Keeper of the Records'. In an effort to address the obvious potential for direct political interference it is suggested that the OHA will have 'operational independence' and that the Deputy Keeper 'who is a senior civil servant' will make decisions about the procedures, conduct and contents of the archive. It is furthermore suggested that 'Ministers will not have access to oral history records until they have been published by the Deputy Keeper'.

Hmmm. It will be clear to anyone familiar with the culture and practice of the public service that this amounts to a fig leaf. We consulted with one very senior former civil servant on the workability of this version of independence. His reply was instructive: There may be, if you like, metaphysical seconds in which a senior civil servant has operational autonomy, but to whom is he or she accountable for the remainder of that minute, hour, day and week?

The issue of ministerial control of documents is but one element of a much wider conundrum. Departmental civil servants are bound – and rightly so – by a system of administrative subservience to democratically elected representatives. In practical terms this amounts to at least a measure of subservience to the minister of the day. A cursory glance at PRONI's annual reports demonstrates that, under the watch of Sinn Féin Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín, the organisation has prioritised the theme of 'Promoting Equality and Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion' and the development of 'North-South co-operation'. Operational independence is well and good in theory but, in light of organisational impulses and constraints, it is difficult to envisage a career civil servant closing his or her ears when the political piper calls a tune.

Outreach and Engagement

The need for independence and freedom from political interference speaks to the fundamentally important issue of public perception. Buy-in from a suitably broad range of contributors cannot and should not be taken for granted. The NIO Summary of Measures rightly states that 'all engagement with the OHA will be voluntary'. There is, however, no mention of the necessary outreach in Ireland, North and South, and in Britain – to raise awareness, test interest, avoid duplication, build trust and secure participation. It is very easy for those who have not previously engaged in this type of work to underestimate the time and effort that goes into such preparatory work.

Acknowledging that PRONI has no previous experience of collecting oral history material, the NIO proposes that 'interviews will be conducted under the direction of the Deputy Keeper by expert practitioners'. In some respects this appears to be putting the cart before the horse. Would it not be more appropriate to give the 'expert practitioners' a seat at the decision making table, enabling them to help shape and direct the development of the archive? And to whom will these expert practitioners be under contract and answerable to – the Deputy Keeper or his or her parent Department?

Drawing Together and Working with Existing Projects

Oral history by its nature is predicated on co-operation and trust: a top-down model simply will not work. The Stormont House Agreement thus rightly states that the OHA will 'attempt to draw together and work with existing oral history projects'. The NIO model seeks to address this by noting that the OHA will 'receive and preserve oral histories collected by others'. This departs significantly from any notion of shared authority or mutually beneficial partnership and will do little to allay the fears of existing oral history groups that the proposed central archive might serve to dilute, diminish or even threaten their organisation. (In the interests of transparency it would be useful to see some detail on the extent of consultation with existing stakeholders and the nature of any proposed working arrangements.) The NIO document goes on to note that the 'OHA will maintain a catalogue of closed interviews which will be preserved by PRONI but only available by signposting to relevant organisations'. This, it suggests 'allows existing voluntary / community projects to preserve their interviews at PRONI but to continue to have exclusive publications rights'. Again the issue of independence is critically important. Existing groups should note, for example, that the moment PRONI accepts their collection for long-term preservation it assumes responsibilities in the eyes of the law and the application of 'exclusive publications rights' will be mediated by PRONI's interpretation of their responsibilities and obligations.

Reconciling Risks

The NIO quite rightly emphasises that the OHA 'will not be exempt from any court order served for the release of information in an oral history held by the archive, including requests for disclosure in relation to criminal investigations'. This was underlined in the mid-70s when PRONI sought to broaden the scope of its private records to include material relating to the Troubles. These were withheld from public access and stored in what was colloquially referred to as 'the fridge'. However, once the existence of the material came to the RUC's attention, it was duly handed over with unfortunate repercussions for both the contributors and civil servants involved. In more recent times the unfolding Boston College Tapes controversy has underlined in the sharpest possible terms that, under current legislation, oral history archives cannot offer a cast-iron guarantee of confidentiality.

There is nonetheless a danger that the proposed Archive could become overlaid by an excessively bureaucratic and legalistic approach. PRONI notes in its most recent report that it 'is risk-averse in its preservation of the archive'. There can be no compromise on issues of ethical and legal probity but at the same time we need to ensure that those tasked with leading this archive are willing and able to seek creative and courageous ways of facilitating contributions from people of all persuasions.

Our Model

Balancing the practical and logistical case for housing the archive at PRONI with the compelling need to guarantee independence, we settled on the following as a way forward. PRONI – subject to the necessary checks and balances – could function as the shell for the proposed Oral History Archive but the governance model that we propose has statutory independence. It would be established by the First and Deputy First Minister, acting jointly, and governed by three Executive Directors (one of whom would be appointed in consultation with the Dublin government). A strong and diverse Advisory Board would represent the interests of existing oral history projects and networks and would assist the Executive Board with the development of strategy and policy, objectives and priorities. This pluralist body would also oversee complaints, financial regulation and the submission of reports to the Implementation and Reconciliation Group. The day-to-day work (research, outreach, interviewing, archiving and administrative support) would be undertaken by a Secretariat, under the direction of the Executive Directors. The necessary skills and attributes for all office holders are set out in some detail in our Model Bill.

To ensure adherence to international best practice at every stage of the process we make provision for a detailed code of practice (with particular guidelines for work with specific groups such as victims and young people). We also propose a central 'training the trainers' model as a cost-effective way of enabling the OHA to operate with as much flexibility and reach as possible.

To avoid a narrow and inward-looking approach we have tailored the governance structure to ensure meaningful participation and input from agencies 'throughout the UK and Ireland'. In particular we emphasise that victims and survivors residing outside Northern Ireland must not be demeaned by what could be perceived as an invitation to make a token contribution to a Belfast-centric initiative.

To mitigate the possibility of the Archive becoming an anodyne repository of 'safe' and unchallenging narratives, we propose to disapply the Data Protection Acts and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 until such times as accounts have been published. This is not designed to encourage information about crimes that have not been processed and fully determined by the courts – the code of practice and training programme will make it abundantly clear that no such information can be accepted. Rather it simply acknowledges the considerable sensitivity of 'experiences and narratives related to the Troubles' and the need to encourage and facilitate as a wide a range of contributions as possible.

Whilst contributions to the archive should, for the most part, be accessible online, we suggest that opportunities should also be provided for people to hear and share their respective stories in a central, inclusive and welcoming space.

Cast in the right mould the OHA could make a valuable contribution to the process of dealing with the past and, ultimately, to reconciliation. Unfortunately the Summary of Measures proposed by the NIO fails adequately to address the foundational principle of ensuring independence. Past experience dictates that grasping the nettle of reconciliation requires long-term vision and a departure from penny-wise, pound-foolish approaches.

In the short time now available for consultation we urge political representatives and key stakeholders to reflect on the proposed measures and in particular to consider the alternatives put forward in our Model Bill.

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Independence, Inadmissibility and Information Verification in the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval Proposals

The SHA describes the ICIR as an independent body to be established by international treaty between the UK and Irish Governments that will enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the Troubles-related deaths of their next of kin. Over the past few months, the plans for the ICIR have sparked considerable controversy in the media focusing primarily (and somewhat misguidedly) on the whether this Commission will be able to offer amnesty to persons responsible for crimes connected to Troubles-related deaths. The short answer to that question is 'no' and I will explain below why this is the case. Much of this speculation arguably resulted from the limited amount of detail on the ICIR in the SHA and the absence of any official consultation on its provisions in the months since the Agreement was reached. The NIO paper is the first official publication to outline what form the ICIR will take. As the ICIR will be established by a treaty between the British and Irish governments, which will then be implemented in legislation in each jurisdiction, it is assumed that the NIO paper reflects the consensus position reached by both governments on the ICIR.

Producing the Model Bill

During 2015, I have been working on the ICIR as part of a team of academics (from QUB and TJI) and practitioners (from CAJ) that have drafted an unofficial Model Bill on the past-related elements of the SHA (including a Model Treaty on the ICIR). Our aims in undertaking this work were:

- to explore how the Agreement could be implemented in practice, in a way that would be human rights compliant and answer the needs of victims and broader society
- to seek to influence the official drafting of legislation while reflecting a human rights based approach and the perspectives of civil society
- to stimulate public debate on the form that the past-related institutions should take

For these reasons, we decided to put forward practical proposals within the parameters of the Agreement, rather than producing what we would think of as a perfect model. We shared a draft of the Model Bill at a high profile conference in May 2015 and the final text was launched in September 2015.

Given that the Model Bill was drafted to comply with the terms of the SHA, it is unsurprising that there are areas of convergence between our proposals and those contained in the NIO policy document. However, there are also areas of significant divergence. This article will use the Model Bill and Treaty as a basis to evaluate the proposals outlined in the NIO's policy paper in respect of some of the most significant issues for ensuring the independence, legitimacy and effectiveness of the Commission.

Who can be a Commissioner?

Ensuring ICIR's independence will be vital to its credibility and likelihood of being able to successfully retrieve information for victims' families. A key component of independence relates to the appointment and tenure of the Chair and other Commissioners. The SHA is largely silent on the eligibility criteria for the Commissioners, stating only that the Chair must be of international standing. The NIO Policy Paper gives slightly more detail stating that collectively the commissioners should 'have experience of: working with victims and survivors; legal and judicial proceedings; and security and policing'.

It is welcome that the NIO policy paper sets out the necessary composite skill set of the Commissioners. However, in our Model Bill we sought to create more robust eligibility criteria to ensure that appropriately experienced and independent persons are appointed. We recommend that all Commissioners:

- have qualities and experience which are likely to command the respect and confidence of all participants in the functions of the Commission, including victims and survivors, governments, security services and former members of paramilitary organisations
- be independent, and perceived to be independent, of all persons likely to be subject to information retrieval procedures
- be impartial, and perceived to be impartial
- have experience and skills which make the Commissioner suitable to handle sensitive information and to make judgments about its reliability;
- neither have nor expect to have any financial or other interests that are reasonably likely to conflict with the exercise of their functions as Commissioner.

In line with international best practice standards on truth recovery we further recommend that both governments seek to ensure that at least two of the commissioners are women.

What should be the functions of the ICIR?

The SHA only briefly states that the Commission will be established to 'enable victims and survivors to seek and privately receive information about the deaths of their next of kin'. The NIO policy paper simply restates this objective and does not provide a detailed list of the Commission's functions. However, the following functions are referred to at different points in the policy paper:

- developing a network of intermediaries who can be approached to identify individuals who may have information relating to Troubles-related deaths and who may act as an interlocutor in providing information to the ICIR
- establishing procedures to check the information received by the ICIR before reporting to families, in order to be satisfied that it is reasonable to rely on it. This may include use of a variety of information sources, interview and analytical techniques.
- dealing sensitively with families' requests for information, including explaining the particular role of the ICIR and the outcome and support they may expect
- supporting families in identifying the information they are seeking, where appropriate
- producing reports for victims and survivors
- reporting to the IRG and supporting governments

Much of the day-to-day functions of the ICIR will be established once the Commission is created. For that reason, our Model Treaty suggests that among the ICIR's initial tasks should be to establish a Code of Practice in consultation with relevant stakeholders. However, we also felt that was necessary to specify some functions of the Commission within the Model Treaty, which include some of the functions contained in the NIO paper. In particular, We believe that the ICIR should conduct outreach with all key stakeholders throughout its work in order to build awareness of the powers of the ICIR and to encourage people to engage with it. We further recommend that it should be appropriately staffed and resourced to enable it conduct research and analysis to identify possible sources of information and verify information received, and to provide meaningful support to victims and survivors during and where appropriate after their engagement with the ICIR.

Confidentiality for Information Providers and the Fate of the Archives

The SHA envisaged that engagement with the ICIR would be voluntary for individuals who provide information . This means that the ICIR could not have the power to compel testimony. Instead, to enable the ICIR to build trust with any possible individual or intermediary information providers, the SHA had requirements that in order to ensure confidentiality the ICIR will:

- be entirely separate from the justice system
- not disclose information provided to it to law enforcement or intelligence agencies
- not disclose the identities of persons who provide information

These guarantees were restated in the NIO policy paper, which emphasised that confidentiality was important given that the ICIR does not test information to an evidential standard and any disclosure of the identities of alleged perpetrators could prejudice legal proceedings against them. The NIO went further in stating that Commissioners and staff will be placed under a statutory non-disclosure duty, breach of which will be punishable by law. We welcome this additional safeguard of confidentiality and have included similar measures in the Model Bill and Treaty.

However, our proposals diverge from those of the NIO with respect to the fate of the archives. The NIO proposes that to ensure confidentiality, the raw material and operating files held by the ICIR would be destroyed upon completion of its work. This will not include its reports to families. We are mindful that a guarantee to destroy information might reassure those considering providing information to the Commission; however, our proposals instead make arrangements for the archives to be held securely and confidentially for 50 years. We felt this was necessary as the ICIR has the potential to gather a wealth of information that may be useful for understanding Northern Ireland's history in the generations to come.

Prof Louise Mallinder, UU; © by Stan Nikolov

Inadmissibility and the Absence of Amnesty

The SHA stipulated that 'information provided to the ICIR will be inadmissible in criminal and civil proceedings'. Like the confidentiality arrangements, these inadmissibility requirements are designed to encourage possible information providers to cooperate with the Commission and they are based upon similar guarantees given to persons who provide information to the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains.

The SHA made clear that individuals who provide testimony to the ICIR are not granted any form of amnesty or immunity from prosecution and that, should evidence arise from other sources, individuals who cooperate with the Commission could still face prosecution for any crimes committed. This is the case even where the new information relates to the crimes that were the subject of the information provided to the ICIR. In other words, under the inadmissibility provisions, it is only the information provided that is protected, not the individual who provided it.

In its policy paper, the NIO extended the inadmissibility provisions to coronial proceedings. It further stated that the ICIR 'will be under a statutory duty to avoid having a prejudicial effect on legal proceedings'. It continues that this duty should govern all the ICIR's operations, including the timing of the release of reports to victims' families.Leaked extracts of the draft Bill on the ICIR state that all reports should be reviewed by the Secretary of State prior to their release to victims' families to ensure that the report does not contain any material that might prejudice legal proceedings.

In keeping with the SHA, and due to our belief that it is necessary in order to encourage information providers to come forward, our Model Bill and Treaty also include robust inadmissibility provisions. However, we believe that granting the Secretary of State power to automatically review all reports prior to their release to families would undermine the actual and perceived independence of the Commission.

Disclosure

The SHA was silent on the duties of public authorities to disclose information to the ICIR. However, it did provide that 'the ICIR will … be free to seek information from other jurisdictions, and both governments undertake to support such requests.' The NIO policy paper goes into more detail on this issue, stating that:

- engagement with the ICIR by public authorities will be voluntary
- the Bill and the equivalent Irish legislation will provide a mechanism to ensure that the ICIR is able to report to families without undermining its duty not to prejudice safety in, and the security of, the UK or Ireland. This mechanism will allow the ICIR to consult with the UK Government and Irish Government on whether reports that it proposes to disclose would pose such a risk in their respective jurisdictions.

These provisions leave it to public authorities to decide whether to disclose information to the ICIR and have the potential to limit information that the ICIR can disclose to victims' families. From the leaked extracts of the draft UK Bill on the SHA, it appears that the mechanisms currently proposed include firstly, creating a statutory duty on the Commission to refrain from doing anything in its functions which might prejudice national security; and secondly, to require the Commission to submit all reports for families to the Secretary of State to assess whether they contain material that might prejudice national security prior to their release to victims' families. These provisions echo some of the more problematic aspects of the sections of the draft bill relating to the Historical Investigations Unit and raise serious issues with respect to the potentially independence and credibility of the Commission.

In contrast, our Model Bill and Treaty stipulates that ICIR must be empowered to compel the production from public authorities of any information that it requires in the exercise of its functions, including from the Historical Investigations Unit. We felt that it is crucial that the ICIR be able to access sufficient sources to enable it to verify as far as possible the information it receives. Furthermore, we have declined to create a role for the Secretary of State to intervene in the operations of the Commission.

Information Verification

The SHA does not provide for the ICIR to have investigative powers nor does it address the extent to which information received by the ICIR should be analysed and verified before being transmitted to victims and survivors. In its policy paper, the NIO stipulates that the ICIR will not have investigative powers and on this basis, it states that the ICIR 'cannot be expected to verify information to the same standard of testing that would be expected in the criminal justice system'. However, the NIO policy paper recognised that the Commission would need to establish procedures for 'checking the information it receives before reporting to families, in order to be satisfied that it is reasonable to rely on it'. It notes that such information checking 'may include use of a variety of information sources, interview and analytical techniques.'

As I have previously explored on RightsNI blog, the drafting team for the Model Bill and Treaty agreed that in order for the ICIR to operate in a manner that is rigorous, credible and sensitive to victims and survivors, it is crucial that information received by the Commission is verified as far as possible before being transmitted to families. We suggest that the Code of Practice created by the Commission should elaborate the methods of verification and the Model Bill includes provisions to ensure that the ICIR is appropriately staffed and resourced to conduct this work. We also recommend that reports to victims' families identify the steps taken to verify information in order to allow families to judge for themselves how much faith they should place in the information received and to ensure transparency which is an overarching principle articulated in the SHA.

Duration

The SHA states that the ICIR should operate for no longer than five years and this position is reflected in the NIO policy paper. We were concerned that this might be too short a time period as the experience of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains suggests that it can take time to build trust with persons who have information. In addition, we are conscious that some victims may wish to allow the HIU to complete its investigations into their case before turning to the ICIR. As both bodies are operating in parallel, this may run the risk that the five-year limit would not leave the ICIR sufficient time to fulfil all requests for information retrieval. Our Model Bill therefore includes the possibility that the Secretary of State may extend the work of the ICIR.

Minister David Ford, Patrick Corrigan and Kate Allen from Amnesty © by Stan Nikolov

Importance of Getting the ICIR Right

Many families who lost relatives during the Troubles have yet to receive adequate information regarding the circumstances of their relatives' death. The ICIR has the potential to provide an avenue for information coming to light that may not be available by other means. This in itself could potentially provide some comfort to victims and survivors. In addition, where the ICIR is able to identify the institutions or organisations responsible for the death this may provide a significant measure of accountability, particularly in cases where there is insufficient evidence to proceed to prosecution. Furthermore, the possibility of the ICIR yielding rich information on why particular crimes were committed may suggest useful areas of inquiry for the thematic analysis to be conducted under the auspices of the Implementation and Reconciliation Group. Finally, the ICIR could provide a forum for those with information to contribute voluntarily to dealing with Northern Ireland's past. This may make an important contribution to societal healing where it allows perpetrators to make some form of amends for their actions and also other members of the public to unburden themselves of information that they were previously afraid to disclose. However, for the ICIR to fulfil its potential in helping victims and survivors as well as Northern Irish society deal with its past, it is fundamental that the ICIR be given appropriate powers, personnel and resources to enable it to conduct its work rigorously, independently, fairly and transparently.

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The NIO Policy Proposals: Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG)

A major omission

The NIO proposal not to include in their Bill provisions on the IRG is a major omission. It is not just that the IRG will be omitted from their Bill. It does not even get a dedicated section in the NIO paper. Admittedly, the paper states that "one of the key commitments in the [Stormont House] Agreement is the establishment of the Implementation and Reconciliation Group". But surprisingly for a "key commitment", the paper gives the IRG cursory treatment at best, barely a couple of paragraphs in the context of the reporting requirements of other legacy bodies.

The paper baldly adds: "It is not currently envisaged that the IRG will be included in the Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill. However, the UK Government stands ready to assist on matters related to the IRG if requested to do so by the Northern Ireland parties." All this put together implies some distancing of the UK Government and downplaying of the IRG. But why?

At the two conferences organized by Amnesty International and the two universities on our Model Bill, I have sought to make the case for the IRG's inclusion in the new legislation. Here are my reasons.

The need to make the IRG happen

The biggest risk of omitting the IRG from the Bill is simply that it will not be established or that its establishment will be threatened by further controversy.

The IRG is not an insignificant body. Its main functions under the SHA will be to:

- oversee themes, archives and information recovery
- commission a report on themes from independent academic experts after five years
- prior to that, to undertake analysis and assessment based on an evidence base for patterns and themes
- conduct this process with sensitivity and rigorous intellectual integrity, devoid of any political interference
- promote reconciliation and support other initiatives that contribute to reconciliation, better understanding of the past and reducing sectarianism; and
- provide the context for the UK and Irish Governments (and others) to consider statements of acknowledgement.

These are self-evidently important tasks. In fact, while the other legacy institutions proposed by the SHA operate in discrete and arguably individualized areas (such as investigation in the case of the HIU), the IRG is the one body which has the potential for overall coordination and promotion of reconciliation.

If the Bill does not make provision for the IRG, its establishment will be left to administrative arrangements to be agreed between the local political parties in Northern Ireland. Its existence will therefore be at the mercy of the politics of the moment and history would suggest that without firm stewardship from the two governments, it may well flounder.

The need to define the IRG's tasks and methods

While the SHA outlines the IRG's main tasks, various elements of these need to be pinned down. What will be the nature of the IRG's oversight? What will be the interaction with the other legacy bodies? Who will fund it? For how long? Although the report on themes is to be commissioned after five years, what precisely does this mean? Can the IRG employ analysts and academics to do preparatory work on the evidence base? And so on.

Some of these questions, such as the handling of the report on themes, could be contentious. It is therefore best to fix these in Westminster legislation, in line with the other past-related elements of the Stormont House Agreement, and to do it at the outset. Once fixed, there will be less scope for the IRG to deviate from its tasks and more chance that the IRG will not only happen but will also function.

The need for independence

Of all the new legacy bodies, the IRG has the most potential to have a political feel, in that the majority of its members are appointed by the political parties. This carries with it the risk of politicization.

There are, however, two safeguards against this. One is that publicly elected representatives will not be eligible for appointment. The second is that the SHA stipulates that its process should be "devoid of any political interference". In addition, the IRG should act according to the general principles outlined in paragraph 21 of the SHA, which include upholding the rule of law, acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims and survivors, being human rights compliant, and being balanced, proportionate, transparent, fair and equitable.

Jeremy Hill, UU; © by Stan Nikolov

But without underpinning this in the Bill, independence and compliance with the principles could be left as a mere aspiration. If the IRG is legally bound to act independently according to the principles, that is a guarantee – or at least a firmer one. Moreover, since it is explicitly envisaged that academics will do the heavy lifting in terms of research into themes and patterns, the IRG will be much more likely to attract academics of the right quality and reputation if they have statutory protection that their research cannot be politically interfered with by the political nominees.

The need for public confidence

The success of all the legacy bodies will depend on the confidence they garner among the victims and survivors, the communities in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, the political parties, and the UK and Irish Governments. There have been so many disappointed expectations. The SHA and the new Bill are a real opportunity to deal with the legacy of the Troubles and to move reconciliation forward through a proper balanced and inclusive process.

So there is an overriding requirement to ensure that all the legacy institutions, including the IRG, are given the best opportunity to create that confidence. This is much more likely to happen if the IRG is not treated as some less significant add-on. With each attempt to deal with the past, the costs of failure are higher. The IRG and the other bodies cannot afford to fail.

The need for confidence of the British and Irish Governments and other key actors in the conflict

In addition to public confidence more generally, there will clearly be an onus on the IRG to secure the confidence of the two governments as well as other key actors in the conflict. The Stormont House Agreement envisages that the two governments will consider statements of acknowledgement based on the work of the IRG and would expect others to do the same.

If in the absence of a firm statutory footing the IRG were to descend into a political football, it is difficult to imagine the two governments, or indeed the other actors, constructing statements of acknowledgement based upon its work. Statements of acknowledgement have been powerful tools in promoting reconciliation in other situations in other countries. It is important that this opportunity is not lost in Northern Ireland through a lack of confidence and credibility in such a key institution – particularly when the means of ensuring that credibility are so easily attained.

The need for clout

If the IRG is not included in the Bill along with the other three new bodies, it is difficult to see how it could carry equivalent political weight. It might find it difficult to fulfil its oversight duties in any meaningful way and to carry weight and influence in wider society. If the IRG is to "support other initiatives that contribute to reconciliation…and reducing sectarianism", it will need to have clout. And that clout is of course best given through statute.

Add-on or Key Commitment?

So will the IRG be treated as an "add-on" or a "key commitment"? If the IRG is downplayed, that raises a question not only about the IRG but also about the whole approach to deal with the legacy of the past. Will the Bill in practice have the effect of minimizing and restricting the new institutions? Or letting them fully fulfil their mandates as agreed in the SHA? If the latter, and if the IRG really is a key commitment, why shy away from giving the IRG a clear legal basis?

Jeremy Hill was Legal Adviser to the Consultative Group on the Past in Northern Ireland (the Eames-Bradley Group) in 2008-2009. Since October 2014, he has worked as a Visiting Scholar at the Ulster University on mechanisms relating to the past in Northern Ireland.

Civil Liberties Diary - Autumn 2015

10 June

The Court of Appeal reserved judgment on a challenge by a woman and her mother to a ruling that prevents women from Northern Ireland receiving free abortions on the NHS in England. The applicant was 15 years old when she and her mother travelled to England for a termination at a private clinic because, as a Northern Ireland resident, she was excluded from a termination on the NHS. The case is challenging a decision from the High Court which upholds this Northern Ireland exclusion.

The owners of Ashers Baking Company have lodged an appeal against the judgment finding them guilty of discrimination in their refusal to decorate a cake with a statement supporting same sex marriage. The appellants have asked the Court of Appeal to consider if the law is compatible with European Union law.

15 June

Nearly 20,000 rallied in Belfast City Centre in support of same sex marriage. The Assembly in Northern Ireland, the only part of Britain and Ireland where same sex marriage remains illegal, rejected a proposal calling for the introduction of same sex marriage for the fourth time.

16 June

A legal challenge has been brought to Belfast High Court, asserting that Northern Irish law discriminates against women seeking an abortion in cases of rape, incest and serious foetal abnormality. The Court heard that in 2013, 802 terminations were carried out in England on women who were resident in Northern Ireland. The case has been backed by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which asserts that the public consultation on abortion did not go far enough and that the situation in Northern Ireland is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

24 June

Two same sex couples have brought a High Court challenge to Northern Ireland's same sex marriage ban. The Court will hear that that to bar equal marriage is a fundamental discrimination of their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights. Further, the claimants argue that the use of Petitions of Concern to bar equal marriage means that there is no choice but to take this case to the Court.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has examined current arrangements on examining legacy probes two years on from its damning report on the PSNI. The follow-up examination reported that, while progress has been made, further improvements are needed to enhance public trust and confidence in legacy work.

In an open letter, 215 women admitted to procuring abortion medication online, either for themselves or for another person. The 215 women have asserted that they will begin to hand themselves in for prosecution at police stations, in response to the legal challenge brought on the 16th of June. So far no action has been taken against the women.

23 July

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Public Appointments has stepped down from his post a year early. His resignation is due to frustration at a lack of change in the way quango members are selected. He expressed particular concerns about the failure to address the pervasiveness of white, middle-aged males on the board of public bodies, as well as individuals sitting on more than one quango at a time.

The Victims Commissioner post, which was vacant for more than a year, has been filled by Judith Thompson. Prior to her appointment as Commissioner, Ms. Thompson was a skills advisor to the Northern Ireland Probation Board. She will take up the post with immediate effect.

CAJ
Committee on the Administration of Justice
Promoting Justice / Protecting Rights

Civil Liberties Diary - Autumn 2015

24 July

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has called on the British Government to consider launching an official inquiry into the death of Pat Finucane.

The Committee further urged authorities to establish the proposed Historical Investigations Unit as soon as possible.

The Northern Ireland Secretary of State, Theresa Villiers, has warned that there will be no renegotiation of last year's Stormont House talks, despite the current government impasse in implementing welfare reforms. Without the changes to the benefits system, the remainder of the Stormont House Agreement is under threat.

Northern Ireland Secretary of State Theresa Villiers has asserted that Kincora Boys' Home will not be included in the UK-wide abuse inquiry, despite the disclosure of secret state files on the abuse allegations. The Home Office said the files were uncovered during a fresh search of the archives. While the contents have not been made public, the Cabinet Office provided brief descriptions of the documents.

31 July

There has been an increase in prosecutions for racist and homophobic attacks in Northern Ireland, though the rates of prosecutions for sectarian crimes have fallen.

Statistics from the Public Prosecution Service indicate that 59% of hate crimes were prosecuted and nearly 95% of the most serious hate crimes resulted in a conviction during 2014/2015. The statistics further show a 15.8% decrease in the number of prosecutions for sectarian crimes.

3 August

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has published its submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The submission included a section in which it criticised the on-going practice of academic selection of children at age 11 in Northern Ireland. The Commission noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended the abolition of the 11-plus exams in 2008 but that two private tests have arisen to replace these 11-plus exams. The Commission suggested that the Committee may want to ask the government what measures it will take to put an end to the two-tier system.

18 August

The Independent Commission on Information Retrieval, a new commission tasked with gathering information on Troubles murders, will not name alleged perpetrators or disclose the identities of individuals who provide information. Further, the Commission asserted that its raw information and operating files should be destroyed when it ceases to operate. The Commission was one of the key proposals developed within the Stormont House Agreement.

20 August

Northern Ireland's ban on same sex marriage has resulted in another legal challenge. The case has been brought to the High Court by a gay couple who argue that the ban discriminates against their Christian beliefs.

If the case is unsuccessful, the claimants will try to obtain a declaration of incompatibility, meaning that the judge could rule that the current laws are incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

24 August

The PSNI has launched the first of its new local policing teams. The teams will be mobile and deployed to areas to deal with critical issues. Part of a broader restructuring of the PSNI, the teams are aimed to increase safety and security in Northern Ireland in the face of budget cuts and decreasing resources.

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