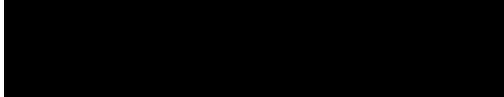


Stormont Castle
BELFAST
BT4 3TT



Nick Mitford
Clerk
Committee for the Executive Office
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast

5 November 2025

Dear Nick,

Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Bill

Following on from the Committee meeting on 01 October 2025 and the subsequent letters, the Department has provided a response (**Annex 1 – Annex 4**) for the following areas;

- I. **Annex 1** - exclusion of unmarried women before 1948 and whether an EqIA has been completed for the Bill;
- II. **Annex 2** - whether a modular approach could be considered in relation to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference;
- III. **Annex 3** - whether any cross-border jurisdictional discussions have taken place about the use of Public Interest Immunity, in relation to the Inquiry and the Redress Scheme Bill; and
- IV. **Annex 4** - engagement at political level following the NSMC plenary on 20th June 2025 and engagement at official level.

Yours sincerely



Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer

EXCLUSION OF UNMARRIED WOMEN PRIOR TO 1948

In response:

- Inquiry - Clause 4 of the Bill provides the definition of 'relevant persons' for the inquiry, including for workhouses. There is no distinction made on marital status and the inquiry's period of investigation is 1922 - 1995. For clarity, the inquiry does not exclude unmarried women prior to 1948.
- Redress - Clause 31 provides all those admitted (or whose mother was admitted) to a listed institution, for 'shelter and maintenance', are eligible for a Standardised Payment. There is no distinction made between married or unmarried persons. Schedule 2 to the Bill outlines the relevant period each institution was in operation, ranging from 1922 to 1990. For clarity, married and unmarried women prior to 1948 are eligible for a standardised payment if they were in one of the relevant Mother and Baby Institutions and Magdalene Laundries. No workhouse is listed and the rationale for this has been outlined in both public consultation documents and the Equality Impact Assessment. Singling out a specific cohort in the workhouse for redress at this stage presents a number of equality issues which must be balanced to have a bill which can be delivered.

A draft Equality Impact Assessment on the Bill was provided for the public consultation, and the final version is available online. This explores the potential impact on all the Section 75 characteristics, including marital status and sex.

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/truth-recovery-EQIA-for-legislation.pdf>

CONSIDERATION OF A MODULAR APPROACH IN THE INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

While most inquiries do hear and collect evidence in modules. The reporting can be modular, interim or just a final report.

The Department see the clear benefits of modular evidence gathering and modular / interim reports as utilised at other inquiries like The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

The final terms of reference for the inquiry will be set out by Ministers in consultation with the Chairperson and findings of the Independent Panel report.

It will be important to take the views of Inquiry Chair on the reporting approach and providing a timely, meaningful and focused inquiry particularly given the age profile of many victims and survivors.

ANNEX 3

WHETHER ANY CROSS-BORDER JURISDICTIONAL DISCUSSIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE ABOUT THE USE OF PUBLIC INTEREST IMMUNITY, IN RELATION TO THE INQUIRY AND THE REDRESS SCHEME BILL

There has been engagement with both private record holders (institutions) on records (for example, PRONI have digitised records for Fahan Baby Home in Co. Donegal which are relevant to this investigation) and future access to public records held in the Republic of Ireland (mainly in relation to records for Stamullen in Co. Meath).

Clause 17(2) provides that Public Interest Immunity applies to inquiry proceedings in the same way that it applies to civil proceedings in Northern Ireland. Normally, a Minister would have to provide a rationale to apply and then it would be considered by Inquiry Chair who may choose to grant or not. This is consistent with equivalent provisions in the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act (NI) 2013 and the Inquiries Act 2005 and also, with civil proceedings.

There are obviously different legal systems in operation both sides of the border, so there have not been specific discussions with the Irish Government on this. The discussion has centred more generally about how we work together to make sure the investigation can access the information it needs.

ANNEX 4

ENGAGEMENT AT POLITICAL LEVEL FOLLOWING THE NSMC PLENARY ON 20TH JUNE 2025 AND ENGAGEMENT AT OFFICIAL LEVEL

Ministers have had regular and positive engagement with the Irish Government as part of NSMC processes on this issue.

Ministers have directed and encouraged officials to maintain regular engagement with other jurisdictions. Officials have had regular meetings with counterparts in the Government of Ireland's Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE). Areas discussed have included, but are not limited to, benefit disregards for means-tested benefits, institutional contributions, unmarked graves, records and operational aspects of the redress process. Officials have also engaged with officials in Scottish Government with responsibility for Scottish Redress – mainly on the operational and policy aspects of the redress scheme.

This engagement with other jurisdictions to date has been positive and this will continue as the inquiry and redress processes continue to progress



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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[REDACTED]

2 October 2025

Dear [REDACTED]

Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill – Exclusion of unmarried women prior to 1948 and EQIA

At its meeting on the 1 October, the Committee received an oral briefing from Dublin City University and Queen's University Belfast in relation to the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

Following this oral evidence session, the Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further information further regarding the current exclusion of unmarried women prior to 1948 in the Bill and whether an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was conducted in relation to the Bill generally, and in particular on this group.

I would appreciate a response by Thursday 16 October 2025.

Yours sincerely

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