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Press release

Troubles 'Public History' project established

The Secretary of State has today announced plans for an independent Public History project relating to the Troubles in Northern Ireland

From: [Northern Ireland Office \(/government/organisations/northern-ireland-office\)](#), [The Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP \(/government/people/chris-heaton-harris\)](#), and [Lord Caine \(/government/people/lord-caine\)](#)

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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Lord Caine with Dr Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid and Lord Bew

Plans for an independent Public History project relating to the Troubles in Northern Ireland have today been announced by the Secretary of State, Chris Heaton-Harris.

This project will see up to five historians granted full access to UK state archives, to provide an independent and authoritative examination of the UK Government's policy towards Northern Ireland during the Troubles.

Prominent academics Lord Bew and Dr Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid will co-chair an independent advisory panel representing a range of expertise and historical perspectives.

The expert panel will make recommendations on key details of the project, including the selection of historians to write the 'Public History'.

Lord Caine, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, expressed the Government's commitment to the project by personally meeting panel members ahead of their first formal meeting in London this week. The Minister was keen to acknowledge the importance of the panel's independence in conducting their work.

Secretary of State, Chris Heaton-Harris, said:

"By opening up Government files to independent historians, including the records of previous administrations and those held across different departments and agencies, this Public History will help allow for a fuller examination of the Troubles than has ever been possible before.

"I am grateful to Lord Bew, Dr Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid and the panel members, whose exceptional knowledge and insight will play a key role in advancing public understanding of Northern Ireland's difficult past."

Lord Bew said:

"I have long advocated for this Public History, and for opening sensitive information to scholars in the interest of securing a fuller picture of the state's role during the Troubles."

"I am delighted to co-chair this varied panel of eminent historians, which is reflective of the broad consultation we have had with over 40 academics. I am grateful to everyone who has taken the time to share their views, which have shaped the form of this project."

Dr Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid said:

'As a historian, I am supportive of any endeavour to widen access to archival sources. I welcome the Government's commitment to doing so via a transparent and rigorous process, and following extensive consultation with the academic community.'

"In line with the recommendations made by Sir Joseph Pilling, this panel is eager to engage with as broad a constituency as possible during the course of this project and I look forward to collaborating with researchers across these islands in the coming months."

The panel's terms of reference is available to view below.

Note to Editors:

This project will be akin the Government's long standing Official History series, which began in 1908, involving independent historians appointed by the Prime Minister granted privileged access to closed files beyond the normal provisions of the Public Records Act.

Previous examples of official histories include the Official History of the Falklands Campaign (published in 2007) and the Official History of the Royal Navy in World War II (published in volumes between 1954 and 1961).

In 2008, Sir Joseph Pilling published a review of the Official History series, making a number of recommendations to increase the transparency and relevance of the programme: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a79a123e5274a684690af21/future-plans-government.pdf>
(<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a79a123e5274a684690af21/future-plans-government.pdf>)

Any queries can be sent to the Northern Ireland Office, as sponsoring department: PublicHistory@nio.gov.uk

The panel will shortly invite historians interested in writing the public history to submit expressions of interest through jobs.ac.uk (<http://jobs.ac.uk/>).

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