



SEMINAR REPORT

CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

THURSDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2014

MALONE HOUSE, BELFAST

CONTENTS

1.0	Background	3
2.0	Attendance	3
3.0	Seminar proceedings	3
3.1	Conference structure	3
3.2	Context	3
3.3	Workshops	4
4.0	Feedback	5
4.1	Conference content	5
4.2	Workshops	6
4.3	General commentary	7
5.0	Evaluation	8
6.0	Conclusions and recommendations	9
6.1	Conference content	9
6.2	Workshops	10

1.0 Background

On 6th February 2014 the Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVS) held a seminar on the forthcoming Dealing with the Past (DWP) Conference, to be held on the 25th February 2014.

The purpose of the event was to:

- Provide groups and individuals with information on the forthcoming Conference;
- Provide an opportunity for participation in the Conference; and
- Facilitate the voices of as many victims and survivors as possible.

The seminar also sought to seek views and ascertain appetite for group and individual participation the Conference workshops.

2.0 Attendance

There were 45 attendees at the seminar from across the victims and survivors sector including groups and service deliverers, statutory agencies, members of the Victims and Survivors Forum and individuals.

3.0 Seminar proceedings

The seminar was facilitated by Adrian McNamee, Head of Policy, Research and Development, at CVS.

3.1 Conference structure

Adrian McNamee provided an overview of the DWP Conference. Attendees were advised that proceedings for the day would include a Welcome by Commissioner Kathryn Stone; a presentation from the Forum Working Group on DWP; an address from a Government Minister (to be confirmed); reflections on the Haass Paper by Professor Kieran McEvoy; two workshops; and observations on DWP, facilitated by Brian Rowan and Susan McKay.

Partners for the Conference are the Queen's University of Belfast, Healing Through Remembering (HTR), University of Ulster and the Transitional Justice Institute (TJI).

Full agendas and booking forms were provided to all attendees.

3.2 Context

Adrian advised that the DWP Conference was part of the Commission's 2013/14 Work Programme.

The Conference is intended to provide the Commission with a mechanism to engage with the wider sector and to hear as many views and voices as possible.

The role of the Forum was highlighted, and specifically that, in law, it is the place for consultation and discussion. Attendees were advised that the Forum is due to issue their second advice paper in February 2014, which will provide insights on DWP.

Adrian advised that CVS had been approached by various groups to have a role at the Conference. The seminar would provide an opportunity for those present to advise the Commission if they would like a role during the workshops.

3.3 Workshops

An overview of the Conference workshops was provided. Attendees were advised there will be two workshop sessions, one morning, and one after lunch. Four workshops will be held in parallel with approximately fifty participants in each workshop.

Workshop subject areas at the Conference will be:

- Acknowledgment;
- Truth;
- Justice; and
- Reparations.

The aims and format for each workshop were summarised to attendees as:

Acknowledgement	<p>Aim: Victims and survivors have expressed the need for acknowledgement and an apology – how best can this be addressed?</p> <p>Format: HTR Chair of the Workshop; Professor Kieran Mc Evoy will set the context/latest developments; Member of the Forum DWP Working Group will outline the Forum’s latest work; group participation.</p>
Truth	<p>Aim: Victims and survivors need to know the truth of what happened – how is this best achieved?</p> <p>Format: HTR Chair of the Workshop; Dr Louise Mallinder will set the context/latest developments; Member of the Forum DWP Working Group will outline the Forum’s latest work; group participation.</p>
Justice	<p>Aim: Victims and survivors need justice – how is this best achieved?</p> <p>Format: HTR Chair of the Workshop; Professor Gordon Anthony will set the context/latest developments; Member of the Forum DWP Working Group will outline the Forum’s latest work; group participation.</p>

Reparations	<p>Aim: Victims and survivors need reparations – how is this best achieved?</p> <p>Format: HTR Chair of the Workshop; Dr Luke Moffett will set the context/latest developments; Member of the Forum DWP Working Group will outline the Forum’s latest work; group participation.</p>
--------------------	--

Conference delegates will attend one workshop in the morning and one in the afternoon. CVS will allocate delegates to workshops based on spaces available and order of preference.

After the presentation there was an opportunity for a Q&A session and an opportunity to provide CVS with feedback on the dynamics of the Conference.

4.0 Feedback

Aims and objectives, content, style and delivery of the workshops were discussed at length. Particular emphasis was placed on the dynamics of the workshops and potential participation from groups and individuals.

4.1 Conference content

Attendees welcomed the opportunity to contribute to conversations on issues relating to DWP.

There was consensus from attendees that having a Conference was a positive step and a valuable method of engagement for the victims and survivors sector.

There was agreement that the balance of information and participation was suitable. Most attendees shared the view that with academics providing factual information and insights on DWP issues, it should provide an opportunity for an informed discussion.

One attendee stated that many victims and survivors groups were not supportive of TJI’s perspectives. The Commission stated that the Conference was a partnership initiative, with industry experts providing an academic and legal overview of keys issues pertaining to DWP.

The Commission was also asked to investigate the feasibility of including other academics during the Conference proceedings. It was agreed that a list would be provided to CVS for consideration.

Discussion ensued regarding the inclusion of the Haass proposals in the Conference agenda. The Commission advised that the inclusion of an overview of the Haass proposals was to inform delegates, from a factual point of view, the content of the proposals.

Several delegates expressed a desire for a workshop summary/Q&A session at the end of the day's proceedings. The view was expressed that an enhanced role during the Observations session would provide an opportunity for inclusive conversation that would also inform everyone of the range of opinions discussed at all workshops.

4.2 Workshops

The Commission sought to identify up to four groups or individuals who wished to contribute to the discussion in each of the four workshops. This informal role would be after the Chair of the Workshop sets the context and a member of the Forum DWP Working Group outlined the Forum's latest work.

There was a strong consensus that there should be no formal speaking roles for groups; with a preference for more facilitated conversations.

Several attendees registered a desire to reduce the frequency of workshops from two to one. Adrian McNamee advised that rationale for two workshops was to facilitate as many voices as possible and provide the Commission with as much feedback as possible on the areas of Acknowledgement, Truth, Justice and Reparations.

Some attendees expressed concerns over the roles of the facilitators. Views included ensuring the flow of conversation, managing dominant voices, confidentiality and sensitivity. Adrian McNamee advised that each workshop will be chaired by a HTR representative and the group participation would be managed by an experienced HTR facilitator. Some attendees registered a desire for more than one facilitator per group due to the number of participants in each workshop.

There was also a view that breaking up the workshops in to smaller groups, in/around ten people, would facilitate more constructive and meaningful dialogue.

Attendees registered a desire for three/four main points to be agreed from each workshop. This could then be provided to Brian Rowan and Susan McKay during the Observation session at the end of the day.

Due to the sensitive and potentially emotive nature of the subject areas, it was highlighted by many attendees that the workshops should be a safe and comfortable environment for participants. Adrian McNamee advised that in addition to trained and experienced facilitators, there would be listeners/counsellors available on the day if needed.

4.3 General commentary

A discussion was held regarding the aims and objectives of the Conference. Some attendees required clarification regarding the purpose of the event and how it would be used to inform policy.

The Commission advised that the Conference would allow wide consultation and discussion with the sector to inform and advise the Commission.

The Conference will contribute to the Commission's objectives in meeting the following statutory duties;

- Promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests;
- Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors;
- Advising the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and anybody or person providing services for victims and survivors on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors; and
- Taking reasonable steps to ensure that the views of victims and survivors are sought.

The Conference would also enable the Commission to contribute to the wider debate on DWP and provide a better informed policy position, which will be incorporated into advice to Government.

Forum members highlighted the importance of the DWP working group, in providing a place for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors. Outcomes from the Conference would be used to complement and inform advice to Government and policy positions.

The experiences of victims and survivors from urban and rural communities were discussed by attendees. Some attendees highlighted that the nature of incidents, for example in Belfast compared to border areas, were often very different. Adrian McNamee reiterated that the workshops would provide an opportunity for discussion and added that invitations had been distributed to groups and individuals right across Northern Ireland.

One participant highlighted the trans-generational impact of conflict being interlinked with aspects of DWP. This view was also complemented by another attendee who stated that focusing not only on how we can cope with young people, but also looking at what we can learn from them is an approach worth exploring.

The importance of capturing information was discussed. The Commission advised that stenographers have been employed to capture commentary from the workshops and discussions during the Observation session with Brian Rowan and Susan McKay.

5.0 Evaluation

Twenty completed evaluation forms were returned to the CVS following the seminar.

Key feedback areas are summarised below:

Meeting expectations	30% of those completing the evaluation form rated the seminar as having 'fully' met their expectations with a further 50% rating it as having 'mostly' done so.
Content	40% rated the content as 'very good' and 60% as 'good'.
Discussion	Key to the success of this seminar was discussion. 65% of respondents rated discussion as 'very good' and 30% as 'good'.
Event administration, access, venue & catering	55% rated this area as 'very good' and 30% as 'good'.

Respondents were invited to provide further comments. Specific comments included:

"Broad range of views expressed. Genuine, respectful, non-biased, non-defensive."

"This was an excellent example of listening and responding."

"Thanks for this opportunity. It's the beginning of another phase of healing, deep peace and wellbeing in NI."

"Full floor participation excellent."

"More involvement from people and groups outside of Belfast."

"More inclusion of younger people as they seem to be under represented generally."

"Willingness of the Commission to listen and adopt the feedback."

The majority of delegates reported that the event was valuable in that it met expectations with the quality, content, standard of discussion, venue and event administration and presentation being of good quality.

6.0 Conclusions & recommendations

The purpose of the DWP Conference is to facilitate wide consultation and discussion with the sector to inform and advise the Commission.

In order to ensure that Conference delegates get the most from the event and the objective of informing the Commission and the DWP working group is met, this seminar was held to:

- Provide groups and individuals with information on the forthcoming conference;
- Provide an opportunity for participation in the conference; and
- Facilitate the voices of as many victims and survivors as possible.

The seminar also sought to seek views and ascertain appetite for group and individual participation Conference's workshops.

Feedback from attendees was positive. Most agreed that a Conference on the subject areas of Acknowledgement, Truth, Justice and Reparations was an appropriate mechanism to inform the Commission.

There were 45 attendees at the seminar from across the victims and survivors sector including groups and service deliverers, statutory agencies, members of the Victims and Survivors Forum and individuals. This indicates a high level of interest in the subject matter, content and rationale behind the Conference.

The seminar's overriding aim was to provide feedback to the Conference Project Board.

Feedback from the seminar, agreed by attendees, can be summarised below:

6.1 Conference content

- Investigate the feasibility of including other academics to be part of the Conference;
- Set clear objectives for the outcome of the Conference; and
- Explore the opportunity for workshop summaries/Q&A session at the end.

6.2 Workshops

- Consider reducing frequency of workshops from two per day to one;
- Assess the feasibility of more than one facilitator in each workshop;
- There should be no formal speaking roles for groups - more facilitated conversations;
- Breakdown into smaller groups for discussions;
- Agree three to four main points from each workshop; and
- Ensure that there is a safe environment for participants.

Feedback from attendees at the seminar will be presented to the Conference Project Board for consideration.