

OPENING STATEMENT

Executive Summary

Context of the Inquiry

1. On 12 March 2015, the Home Secretary established a statutory inquiry into the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have discharged their duty of care to protect children against sexual abuse. I accepted the Home Secretary's invitation to Chair the Inquiry and took up my position on 13 April 2015. Following a statutory consultation process, the Home Secretary set the terms of reference for the Inquiry and announced the appointment of the four members of the Inquiry Panel: Professor Malcolm Evans OBE, Ivor Frank, Professor Alexis Jay OBE, and Drusilla Sharpling CBE. They each have long experience and considerable distinction in their relevant fields of expertise.
2. This Inquiry was established in the context of increasing reports of child sexual abuse in a number of institutions, including in the BBC, the NHS, in children's homes and in schools. At the same time, allegations of sexual offending involving children have been made against people with prominent positions in public life, including those in the media and in Parliament. There have also been growing reports of failures within the police to investigate such allegations, and failures within the Crown Prosecution Service to prosecute them.
3. The information and statistics currently available do not give a full account of the scale of child sexual abuse across England and Wales, but estimates suggest that one child in every 20 in the United Kingdom has been sexually abused. In 2014, police statistics show that there were more than 28,000 recorded sexual offences where the victim was aged under 16. There are likely to have been many more offences that were not reported to the police.
4. The sexual abuse of children over successive generations has left permanent scars not only on the victims themselves but on society as a whole. As in Australia, Northern Ireland, Jersey and Scotland, the level of public concern in England and Wales has resulted in calls for an overarching inquiry to look at the whole picture, to learn the lessons of the past, to take stock of child protection procedures that are currently in operation, and to set a new course for the future.
5. This is the largest and most ambitious public inquiry ever established in this jurisdiction. We must investigate a huge range of both state and non-state institutions and we must carefully consider all of the evidence we receive to ensure that our recommendations provide an enduring legacy for future generations. It would be wrong to underestimate the scale of that task. But I am determined to ensure that the Inquiry does not become bogged down with delays. Many victims and survivors have

already waited far too long for recognition of the abuse they have suffered. So my sincere hope is that it will be possible to conclude the Inquiry's work before the end of 2020 and we will publish regular annual reports until then.

Structure of the Inquiry

6. To complete our task we must travel from the corridors of power in Westminster to children's homes in the poorest parts of the country, to hospitals, GP's surgeries, schools, churches and charities. We must investigate local authorities, the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the NHS, the BBC and the armed forces. We must put difficult questions to politicians, bishops and other faith leaders, head teachers, police officers, regulators, inspectors and public officials of all kinds. And we will carry on asking questions until we get answers.
7. In order to manage the vast range of work effectively, the Inquiry has divided the institutional sectors under investigation into five broad workstreams. Each workstream will be led by a member of the Inquiry Panel, or by me. The workstreams are:
 - Allegations of abuse by people of prominence in public life - which I will lead.
 - Education and religion - led by Panel member, Prof. Malcolm Evans OBE
 - Criminal Justice and law enforcement - led by Panel member, Drusilla Sharpling CBE
 - Local authorities and voluntary organisations - led by Panel member, Prof. Alexis Jay OBE
 - National and private service organisations - led by Panel member, Ivor Frank.
8. The Inquiry will be guided by three principles. It will be **comprehensive, inclusive, and thorough**. Those three principles are reflected in the division of the Inquiry's work into three Core Projects: the Research Project, the Truth Project, and the Public Hearings Project. Together, the evidence received in all three projects will inform the Inquiry's overall conclusions and recommendations.

The Research Project

9. Under the guidance of Professor Jenny Pearce OBE and our Academic Advisory Board, the Research Project will involve a comprehensive literature review to bring together, for the first time, analysis of all the published work addressing institutional failures in child protection. We will also commission sector-specific research to better understand the scale of the problem and to identify recommendations for change. The Research Project is already under way.

The Truth Project

10. The Truth Project will allow victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to share their experiences with the Inquiry. Those who wish to take part will attend a private session in London or in one of our regional centres to share their experience with a member of the Inquiry. Their accounts will not be tested, challenged or contradicted. Every person who shares their experience with the Inquiry will be given the

opportunity to leave an anonymised message to be published alongside the Inquiry's reports.

11. Participation in the Truth Project will be more than an exercise in catharsis. It will enable the Inquiry to piece together a broader picture of the scale and nature of institutional child sexual abuse in England and Wales. It will enable victims and survivors to contribute to the creation of shared knowledge; and it will enable the Inquiry to reach conclusions about why such crimes went unreported, and undetected, for so long. The first Truth Project hearings are expected to start in October 2015.

The Public Hearings Project

12. The Public Hearings Project will resemble a conventional public inquiry, where witnesses give evidence on oath and are subject to questioning by counsel. The Inquiry will select case studies from a range of institutions that appear to illustrate a wider pattern of institutional failings.
13. A hearing may relate to a particular individual who appears to have been enabled to sexually abuse children in institutional settings. Or it may relate to an institution that appears to have demonstrated repeated failings over a number of years. Evidence is likely to be taken from both representatives of the institutions under investigation and from victims and survivors of sexual abuse. Each hearing will last for around six weeks and we expect to hold up to 30 separate hearings. Collectively, the evidence heard in the range of case studies will assist the Inquiry in drawing conclusions about the patterns of child protection failings across a range of institutions in England and Wales.
14. The Inquiry does not have the power to convict abusers of criminal offences or to award compensation to victims and survivors. But it will use its fact-finding powers fully to make findings against named individuals or institutions where the evidence justifies it. The first Public Hearings will commence in 2016.

Engagement with Victims and Survivors

15. The experiences of victims and survivors will be the core currency of the Inquiry. We want to hear from anyone who was sexually abused as a child in an institutional setting like a care home, school, or a religious, voluntary or state organisation. We also want to hear from anyone who reported their sexual abuse to a person in authority like a police officer or teacher where the report was either ignored or not properly acted on. Anyone who wants to get in touch with the Inquiry can do so via our dedicated helpline, by email, post or online.
16. We have established a Victims and Survivors' Consultative Panel (VSCP) as an integral part of the Inquiry. Members of the VSCP will advise the Inquiry on its engagement with victims and survivors generally and will also assist in the substantive work of the Inquiry. We have also established a Victims and Survivors'

Forum as a self-nominating network to discuss the work of the Inquiry and to contribute its views on progress.

Headquarters and regional centres

17. In addition to our Millbank headquarters, we are setting up offices across England and Wales to make it easier for victims and survivors to share their experiences. Some offices will also hold formal hearings as part of the Public Hearings Project, at which members of the public will be welcome. We expect the first office outside London to open in Autumn 2015.

Appointments and Budget

18. All key appointments have now been confirmed, including:

- Secretary to the Inquiry, John O'Brien
- Counsel to the Inquiry, Ben Emmerson QC
- Solicitor to the Inquiry, Martin Smith of Fieldfisher, and
- An Academic Advisory Board, led by Prof. Jenny Pearce OBE.

19. They are supported by a carefully selected team, including a team of junior counsel and a dedicated complement of Secretariat staff.

20. The Home Secretary has approved a delegated budget of £17.9m for the coming year. This is a large sum but it is essential to meet the Inquiry's core operational requirements. I will be publishing the details of how the money is to be spent on the Inquiry's website in the next few days. However, reducing the level of child sexual abuse in this country is not a choice between competing priorities, it is an imperative. Its value cannot be calculated in purely monetary terms. It is the inherent right of every child to experience a childhood free of sexual abuse and intimidation – to be allowed to grow up and develop without trauma. And it is the inherent right of every adult who was sexually abused as a child to hold those responsible to account, individually and collectively. That is what this Inquiry aims to achieve.

Concluding remarks

21. This Inquiry will be unable to do its work properly without the support and assistance of victims and survivors, who we encourage to come forward to share their experience. But we will also be unable to complete our work satisfactorily without the support and assistance of the institutions we are investigating. I want to lay down a challenge to those institutions that have a duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse. Take a proactive stance towards the Inquiry - review your files, records and procedures voluntarily and take the initiative to self-report instances of institutional failure, rather than waiting for us to come and see you. Above all, review your current safeguarding policies to make sure they are consistent with best practice, and take whatever steps you can to provide a safer environment for children now.

Contact details

The Inquiry is now open for business. We can be contacted:

by telephone, on our Helpline: 0800 917 1000
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