

Meeting with Survivor Groups
22 July 2011

Minister's Speaking Note

- At the outset I want to thank you all for coming. I want to thank in particular those who have travelled long distances to be here. I have met many of you before. This is the first opportunity I have had in my capacity as Minister for Education & Skills to formally meet with you and I look forward to working constructively with you all.
- The State responded to residential institutional abuse through a range of measures – it established the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse so that the claims of abuse could be investigated and the story told; it established the Residential Institutions Redress Board so that redress could be paid without going through the courts; it funded the National Counselling Service, funding the Origins Tracing Service and it introduced the legislation to underpin the Education Finance Board funded through moneys received from the religious congregations..
- While people have views on how some processes operated the fact remains that the commitments were delivered upon. The State delivered on its commitment to provide funding for redress. The Ryan Commission has reported - the story has been told and the claims of the abused vindicated. The Irish public are in no doubt as to what happened in residential institutions. The counselling and tracing services continue to be funded. The Government is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Ryan Report.
- Following the publication of the Ryan Report the religious congregations were asked to make a further contribution against the backdrop of the State having funded virtually all of the costs. In their initial response the congregations offered some €10m in cash as well as some property. It was decided to use the €10m cash to establish a statutory fund to benefit victims of residential institutional abuse.

- As you know the previous Government had undertaken work in relation to this matter and had made certain decisions which were outlined to you in April 2010. I fully appreciate that such decisions were made over a year ago, that there has been a delay on delivering decisions. However, I want to personally assure you that much work has been undertaken since then. This has included consideration of the property offers by congregations and the consultation regarding, and preparation of legislation for, the proposed Statutory Fund, all of which has taken time. A general election and a change of Government and the unprecedented economic crisis faced by the country have intervened also. However, this Government, which took up office in March, has now had an opportunity to consider the whole issue.
- A number of decisions have been taken by the Government. These include the decision to proceed with the establishment of a Statutory Fund to provide ongoing support for survivors. The Government has also decided to the enactment of legislation to facilitate the closure of the Redress Board. The memorial recommended in the Ryan Report is to advance to competition stage. We are also committed to continue to press the congregations to meet a 50:50 share of the costs.
- You will be aware also that a consultation process was undertaken last year in relation to the proposed Statutory Fund and I understand that a number of you contributed to that process. I might add that the consultation process included a significant input from UK survivors and I greatly welcome and acknowledge that. The results have been set out in a document that you have been given.
- The consultation process identified a range of views in relation to establishment of a Statutory Fund including some views that the money should just be paid directly to former residents. However it also highlighted the fact that survivors continue to have many needs such as housing, medical services and so on. Having considered the views carefully the Government has decided to proceed to establish the Fund. Many comments submitted during the consultation

process in relation to the administration of the Fund and putting in place a simple application process have been taken on board. The draft Scheme that you have been given sets out the main features of the Bill: it is still a draft and submissions can be made in regard to it. Any comments you make on the General Scheme would be welcome and will be considered. It would be my hope that the draft Bill itself will be published in the autumn and enacted by the end of the year.

- The key features of the proposed Fund are as follows:
 - Its focus will be solely on former victims of abuse and in order to achieve this, eligibility will be confined to those who received an award from the Redress Board;
 - The Fund will be able to provide services itself or in effect commission public agencies to provide specific services across a range of areas. These services include counselling, psychological support services and mental health services, educational services and housing services with other services being added if required;
 - Funding for survivor groups currently provided by the Department of Education and Skills for the provision of information and referral services will cease. Provision has been made for the Statutory Fund to consult with those affected by the performance of its services and it will be open to the Fund to consider funding services to abuse victims including services provided by groups,
 - The Fund will be easy to access and provision is being made to allow the Redress Board to notify the Fund of the name, address and date of birth of award recipients so that applicants to the Fund will not have to be asked to establish their residence in a scheduled institution again.

There is of course much detail in the documentation and I will welcome any views you want to submit between now and the passage of the legislation through the Oireachtas in the Autumn.

- I should say also that it is intended that existing support measures such as the National Counselling Service and the Origins Family Tracing Service will continue to be available to help survivors.
- In total some €10m will be available to the Fund. Already congregations have paid €1.05m of this amount. A number of congregations had advised that they would make their contributions once they had sight of the proposals for the Fund and I will be impressing on them that they should now make their contribution. I should point out that it will take a number of years before the full contribution is paid into the Fund. However, the €1m is more than sufficient to enable the Fund itself to be established and to commence its work of supporting survivors.
- As you know, the previous Government raised the issue of congregations meeting 50% of the cost of the response to abuse which is expected to reach €1.36bn. However, the offers from the 18 congregations to date are significantly short of the €80 million needed to meet half the costs. I will be meeting the congregations this afternoon and I will be impressing upon them the need to share the costs with the taxpayers.
- The consultation process undertaken last year indicated clearly that there are needs still to be met. What I am trying to achieve is something that will be of real benefit of the most needy victims of abuse
- In conclusion I want to make clear that it would be my intention to work with you all over the next while. It would be my hope that we will be able to say then that we have made a tangible difference to the lives of a great number of survivors

- Thank you for your attention. I would now like to afford the opportunity for each group represented here to respond. While each group will have limited time to speak today you will be able to submit further views in the coming months.