



Dr Patricia Canning

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Northumbria academic part of panel to probe mother-and-baby homes in Northern Ireland

A Northumbria University academic has been appointed to a panel which will look to serve a future public inquiry into historical institutional abuse of women and girls through Northern Ireland's so-called mother-and-baby homes.

[Dr Patricia Canning](#), a researcher in forensic stylistics, linguistics, and discourse analysis at Northumbria, will form part of the 10-person

independent Truth Recovery Programme Panel.

Establishment of the independent panel was a key recommendation in the Truth Recovery Design Panel's report on mother and baby institutions, Magdalene Laundries and workhouses in Northern Ireland, which was published in October 2021.

The report outlined the need for an integrated truth investigation which consisted of an independent panel and a statutory public inquiry.

Dr Canning is an applied linguist specialising in forensic texts and contexts. Her work includes the investigation and analysis of police reporting, particularly the attribution and deflection of blame through individual and institutional language choices.

Dr Leanne McCormick, from Ulster University and Professor Sean O'Connell, of Queen's University Belfast, will share the role of chair of the independent panel. Both have significant experience and expertise in this area.

"I'm honoured to be taking up this important role and am privileged to be working with such a diverse and experienced team," said Dr Canning.

"Our work will develop the excellent research conducted by scholars at Ulster University and Queen's University, Belfast, and subsequently by the Truth Recovery Design Panel.

"I am completely committed to the panel's remit, and to ensuring that those most affected by institutional injustices remain central to the work that we do."

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have received around 80 reports of alleged crimes at mother and baby homes, workhouses and Magdalene Laundries since officers launched a major investigation into the institutions on October 6, 2021.

Many of the women felt coerced into giving up their children and the PSNI said reports included some from mothers who have never met their children.

The Truth Recovery Programme Panel will complete its work within 24 months – a key focus will be primary research via oral testimonies before presentation of findings, analysis, and conclusions.

[The Linguistics group](#) at Northumbria University is one of the strongest centres for research in cognitive linguistics not just in the UK, but internationally. The Centre hosts the journal *Cognitive Linguistics*, the flagship journal in the field, and has an established reputation for research into language learning and teaching.

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