



# Annual Report 2021-22

*This Annual Report is submitted to the Executive Office pursuant to paragraph 14(1) of Schedule 1 to the Victims' Payments Regulations 2020.*

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## Foreword

In presenting this first Annual Report, I wish to acknowledge the perseverance and fortitude victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland Troubles have demonstrated on their journey towards securing the establishment of the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme. I recognise their continued efforts to enable acknowledgement for all victims and survivors of the Troubles.

The Victims' Payments Regulations 2020 came into force in full on 29 May 2020. These Regulations established the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme and govern the operation of the Victims' Payments Board. On 24 August 2020, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland designated the Department of Justice to implement the Scheme.

The Scheme opened for the receipt of applications on 31 August 2021, with panel sittings commencing in November 2021 and the first payments being made by the end of December 2021. As President, I am committed to the effective and efficient discharge of the functions of the Victims' Payments Board in accordance with the legislative framework by which we are bound. Subject to that, I am determined to extend the Scheme as widely as possible. Additionally, the Board seeks to educate and assist applicants, stakeholders and advisors, with a view to refining and improving the process where possible. This report details the performance of our functions, some of our challenges and identifies opportunities for improvement.

During this first year, despite the continued impact of the global pandemic, members and staff of the newly established Victims' Payments Board have demonstrated their commitment to fulfilling our core purposes, which are to acknowledge the harm suffered by those injured in the Troubles and to promote reconciliation between people in connection with Northern Ireland's troubled past. We have progressed at pace key pieces of work to establish effective and efficient business systems for determining applications as expeditiously as possible.

There has been significant cooperation and support received from the Executive Office and the Department of Justice in addressing staffing, accounting requirements and business planning needs to enable the Scheme to become operational within a challenging timeframe. Throughout the period of this Report, we progressed our crucial work by engaging extensively with victims and stakeholders; developing IT solutions in support of critical business processes; embracing new opportunities for digital and virtual working; and operating effectively within challenging financial allocations.

As of the end of March 2022, the Victims' Payments Board had received a total of 2,047 applications. Sixteen panel days had been held, resulting in the issue of 21 determinations and four adjournments. A further 75 cases had been listed for hearing.

In terms of the establishment of the Scheme, it is important to acknowledge the significant input and contribution from the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors, the Victims & Survivors Service, those who provide support for victims and our key stakeholders.

I also want to convey my thanks to all Board members and staff for their dedicated and professional service in these unprecedented times.

I look forward to continuing to work with you all over the course of 2022 - 2023 as we deliver our statutory responsibilities and work collaboratively to secure positive outcomes and maintain confidence in the Victims' Payments Board as an open, responsive and effective organization which values and respects the community it has been called upon to serve.

**The Honourable Mr Justice McAlinden  
Victims' Payments Board President**

## Background

1. Under section 10 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019, the Secretary of State was required to bring forward legislation by 31 January 2020 providing for a scheme of payments to those living with injuries sustained in Troubles-related incidents (TRIs). The Victims' Payments Regulations 2020 (the Regulations) were duly laid before Parliament on 31 January 2020. The Scheme established by these Regulations is known as the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme (the Scheme).
2. The Scheme's purpose is:

“to provide those living with permanent disablement caused by injury through no fault of their own in a Troubles-related incident with payments primarily in acknowledgement of the acute harm which they have suffered. The scheme will also provide a measure of recognition of the implications of living with disablement caused by a serious Troubles-related injury and the associated impact of such disablement on carers, who are often family members; and recognition that in many cases coping with the disablement caused by the serious injury had an adverse financial impact on individuals and their families.”<sup>1</sup>
3. Under the Regulations, an independent Victims' Payment Board (VPB) was established to oversee the Scheme.
4. On 26 August 2020, The Executive Office (TEO) designated the Department of Justice (DoJ) to discharge responsibility for the provision of the Secretary and staff to undertake the administrative functions of the Board. A project team was immediately established to carry out the preparatory work and to put in place the key mechanisms required to effectively administer the Scheme. The remit of the project team was to:
  - agree the composition of the Board;
  - seek appointment of a President to oversee the Scheme;
  - develop processes and procedures to administer the Scheme;
  - appoint an administrative team to deliver the Scheme;
  - develop application forms;
  - appoint a software specialist to develop an online application system;
  - appoint a Healthcare Provider to assess the degree of relevant disablement of applicants;
  - arrange for the appointment of Board Members to oversee governance of the Scheme and to adjudicate on applications.
5. Mr Justice McAlinden was appointed interim President on 6 November 2020 supported by Mr Paul Bullick (DoJ) who was appointed interim Board Secretary. On 1 March 2022 Mr Justice McAlinden's appointment as President of the VPB was confirmed by the then Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan.
6. On 23 February 2021, 26 interim members were appointed as VPB Board members.

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<sup>1</sup> A Legal Framework for a Troubles-related incident Victims Payment Scheme – Government Response

7. The Scheme became fully operational on 31 August 2021 with the placing of an advertisement by the DoJ in the Belfast Gazette. Under the Regulations, the Scheme has a finite life of five years from 31 August 2021, which can be extended by the Secretary of State.
8. Throughout the reporting year, the Scheme has been required to provide and maintain high quality, responsive services against a backdrop of the continued challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic; further development of a novel and innovative Scheme; significant staff recruitment and retention issues; an increasing volume of applications; emerging legal/other challenges; and further digital enhancements and process improvements.

## Membership and functions of the Board

9. As President of the VPB, the Honourable Mr Justice McAlinden has responsibility for the leadership and strategic direction of the Board, and for the efficient and effective implementation and delivery of the Scheme.
10. The Board comprises legal, medical and ordinary members appointed as judicial office holders by the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission to determine applications under the Scheme. Board members also have responsibility for assisting the President with corporate governance requirements such as policy development, quality assurance, financial and risk management.
11. The panels who make the determinations are normally comprised of one legal member who acts as chair, one ordinary member and one medical member. Appeals against panel decisions are determined by new panel members who were not involved in the original determination. Although there is scope within the Regulations to appoint one person panels constituted by a legal member for certain hearings, this has not been availed of to date, with the emphasis on training and building experience of all panel members. Panel members are wholly independent in the performance of their duties with each member having an equal say in determinations.
12. NIJAC progressed recruitment competitions for 30 interim Board members, composing ten members for each group (legal, medical and ordinary). This initial recruitment resulted in the appointment of ten legal, ten ordinary and six medical members. These members were appointed on 23 February 2021 on an 18-month contract, which was subject to an additional six-month extension.
13. A further recruitment competition resulted in the recruitment of 12 permanent medical members, with competitions for the appointment of permanent legal and lay members being at an advanced stage by 31 March 2022.
14. As of 31 March 2022, the Board members were:

<b>Legal Members</b>	<b>Ordinary Members</b>	<b>Medical Members</b>
Casey, Ms L	Campbell, Mr M J	Acheson, Dr P S
Gibbons, Mr J F	Carson, Mr J R	Elwood, Dr S L
Heaney, Mr M C	Donnelly, Mrs C M	Gilmore, Dr S
Hutchinson, Mrs M M	Goss, Ms M	Kelly, Dr J
Irwin, Ms E	Greene, Mr B	Lavery, Dr G G
Jordan, Miss D M	Hogan, Mrs R M	Leetch, Dr R J
McKaigue, Mrs P	Laird, Mrs R	Mageean, Dr R J
Overing, Ms T	McCullagh, Dr P	McCreech, Dr G
Scott, Mr M C	Moss, Mrs A	McCullagh, Dr M R
Thompson, Mrs L T	Southern, Ms P E	McGarvey, Dr D
		Pratt, Dr W M
		Ryans, Dr R I
		Watt, Dr L
		Weir, Dr P
		Wright, Dr P

15. The Board's statutory functions, duties and powers can be summarised as follows:

- to receive and administer applications made to the Scheme;
- to determine entitlement to, and the amount of, payments in respect of injury caused by a Troubles-related incident;
- to develop guidance and make arrangements for the assessment of degree of permanent disablement;
- following determination, to notify applicants regarding eligibility to, and amount of, payments as soon as reasonably practicable;
- to constitute panels to assess and determine applications and appeals, conduct further assessments and undertake reviews of determinations;
- to facilitate the provision of independent advice and support to applicants;
- to develop operational policies and procedures;
- to appoint advisors to assist the VPB;
- to provide an annual report on the exercise of its functions.

16. The Regulations set out the Scheme's guiding principles which are:

- the need to prioritise, and be responsive to, the needs of victims of Troubles-related incidents;
- the need to be transparent and to communicate effectively with the public and victims of Troubles-related incidents;
- the need for the Scheme to be straightforward and simple to navigate;
- the need for applications to be determined without delay;
- the need for personal data to be handled sensitively.

## Operation of the Board

17. The VPB is a body corporate and operates independently of, and at arm's length from, TEO under the provisions of a [Partnership Agreement](#). That Agreement sets out the framework for the effective governance, financing and operation of the VPB and is available to read on the VPB's website. The VPB has autonomy to operate as a separate legal entity with its own governance arrangements. A Financial Management Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has also been agreed between TEO and DoJ in respect of the Scheme. The MoU sets out arrangements for funding the VPB's work and the reporting arrangements between TEO and DoJ in support of VPB work.



18. The VPB Secretary is responsible for the day-to-day operations and for providing effective leadership and management of the administration team and Board Secretariat.
19. The Board's administration team supports the President and Board members when determining entitlement to payments under the Scheme. A skilled and committed workforce is critical to the successful achievement of our corporate aims and objectives and to meet the challenging performance measures agreed for the coming year, 2022/23. Staff numbers are forecast to increase and the Board will seek to ensure the full complement of staff is secured and retained to enable the highest possible operating efficiency throughout the life of the Scheme.
20. Following an open and competitive tender process, Capita have been contracted by DoJ to assess the degree of permanent disablement suffered by applicants to the Scheme. There has been intensive work with Capita to put this contract in place. The Board monitors continuously the operation of the contract to ensure it is fit for purpose and has the needs of victims at the front and centre of all processes. To this end, as part of the lead up to the commencement of the Scheme, Board Members have carried out significant, detailed work in reviewing, amending and approving [Guidance to Health Care Professionals Regarding the Assessment of the Degree of Relevant Disablement](#).

## Board committees

21. The Business Assurance Committee (formerly known as the Governance Committee) and the Rework Committee were formed in September 2021.

### Business Assurance Committee (BAC)

22. The purpose of the BAC is to support the Board and the Secretary, as Senior Accountable Officer (SAO), by:
  - providing assurance in respect of strategic business planning, risk, governance and internal controls, and
  - developing corporate policies and guidance.
23. During the reporting period, the BAC had two legal members, two medical members and three ordinary members.
24. As of the end of March 2022, the BAC had considered and finalised the following documents:
  - Whistleblowing Policy;
  - Fraud Prevention Policy and the Fraud Prevention Plan 2021-22;
  - Panel letters of determination and payment calculators;
  - Guidance Note on the Principles of Natural Justice;
  - Guidance Note on the Priority of Applications.
25. The Committee had also commenced work on the VPB Business Plan for 2022-23.

## Rework Committee

26. The Rework Committee's primary task is to filter requests from VPB panels for rework requests in relation to Capita assessment reports. VPB panels refer cases where the panel considers the Capita assessment is of concern to the Committee. Before referring the matter as a rework request to Capita, the Committee and indeed the initial panel, must be satisfied that the report contains errors so significant that they will either:
- jeopardize the accuracy of the rounded percentage disablement; or
  - risk significant harm to the applicant (such as inclusion of harmful information).
27. As of March 2022, the Rework Committee had a membership of three medical members, three legal members and four lay members. At that stage, one rework request had been made, which was accepted by the Rework Committee and forwarded to Capita for consideration.
28. In addition to processing rework requests, the Committee met remotely on a monthly basis with Capita for clinical governance meetings. This has enabled monthly feedback to Capita on issues relating to rework requests and assessments, with Capita providing updates on the progress of assessments and reworks. These meetings also involve standardisation exercises which the Committee members undertake. These enable the Committee to gain insight into the Capita approach when assessing, and they provide better understanding of the healthcare guidance in action as well as the training processes undertaken in-house by Capita.
29. The Rework Committee were shocked and saddened to lose one of its founding members Jim Carson, who passed away suddenly in July 2022. The Committee's thoughts remain with his family. Jim was a man of great wisdom and experience, all of which he brought to his work with the Committee. He was a true gentleman and is missed and fondly remembered by his Rework Committee colleagues. Jim was a very valued member of the VPB and the Rework Committee's thoughts are echoed by the entire Board.

## Overview of the Board's Work in 2021/22

### Engagement with victims and stakeholders

30. Since the launch of the Scheme in August 2021, we have continued regular dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders who were instrumental in the run up to, and during, the project launch stage of the Scheme.

### Victims' Groups

31. TEO has provided funding to the sectoral groups to employ staff to support applicants through the application process.

32. We met regularly with the victims' representative groups throughout the implementation of the Scheme and we continue to discuss key issues, as and when they arise.

33. The key victims' bodies and groups we engage with are:

- the Commission for Victims and Survivors;
- the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS);
- WAVE Trauma;
- Relatives for Justice (RFJ);
- the Ely Centre;
- the South East Fermanagh Foundation (SEFF);
- the Ashton Centre.

34. These meetings provide a very useful forum to share feedback and highlight issues to ensure lessons are learned and improvements made.

35. There continues to be a strong emphasis by the VPB to encourage applicants to engage with the sectoral groups who are available to provide free advice and guidance to support them through the application process. There is clear evidence that applications channelled through the sectoral groups are of much higher quality, which aids efficient and timely processing. The administration team continue to provide and receive regular feedback to and from the groups that represent and support victims.

36. The administration team supporting the VPB continues to review and update the guidance for applicants in a continued effort to improve the quality of applications received.

### Capita

37. The VPB Operational Team conduct regular engagement with Capita to monitor their performance and the operation of the contract generally. This is done through regular Contract Management Meetings, monthly update meetings on areas of concern and ensuring through regular review that operational processes are fit for purpose. Regular clinical standardisation and operational meetings are held to review processes and recommend improvements as the Scheme is taken forward.

38. VPB, TEO, DoJ and Capita also hold joint sessions with the victims' groups monthly. These sessions provide an opportunity for the groups to ask questions and seek clarification on

elements of the application and assessment process, as well as to identify opportunities for service improvements. One of the key issues has been undue delay in the retrieval of medical information. There has been regular engagement with information providers and the Department of Health to improve response times and the quality of the information received.

#### TEO & DoJ

39. There are regular meetings between TEO, DoJ and the VPB administration team in respect of accountability, oversight and general overview of the scheme administration.

#### DOH & Health Trusts

40. The VPB Administration team hold weekly meetings with colleagues in DOH and the Health Trusts as we continue to work towards the creation of a dedicated Regional Model to enable a central point of contact for all Trusts. Once in operation, we hope this regional team will provide much-needed support for the smooth running of the application process through the efficient return of medical evidence requested from primary and secondary healthcare facilities.

## Establishing the Scheme

41. Extensive work was carried out in the early part of this reporting period to design and implement the Scheme across several work streams as detailed below.

### Staffing

42. Recruitment of staff to the VPB team has been a challenge and reflects the position across the NICS and other sectors in recent times. Further, the NICS has held a number of recruitment competitions which has offered promotion opportunities to staff and led to some staff moving to other departments. This has posed challenges to the retention of VPB staff. The team now has 67 staff in post, however, more staff are required and we continue to work with NICS HR to address this shortfall. A hybrid working policy has been set up and implemented across the relevant workforce.

43. All staff working within the VPB team must also be security cleared to CTC level often leading to long delays in the recruitment process.

44. New staff have also required substantial training, including on the novel systems and processes involved in operating the Scheme.

### Premises

45. The project team secured premises within Belfast City Centre for the administration staff with a view to further extending those premises.

### IT Systems

46. One of the early requirements of the Scheme was to develop a website and provide applicants with the ability to apply for the Scheme online. The project team worked with our IT developers to create the Online Application Portal in conjunction with a Case Management functionality to enable effective case administration. Hard copy (paper) application forms were also developed.

47. Appropriate IT equipment was provided for Board members and staff, alongside appropriate technological support.

### Guidance

48. Various guidance documents were also prepared including:

- Guidance notes on completion of online and paper application forms;
- Procedural Guidance Notes regarding past compensation, presence at a TRI or its immediate aftermath, definition of a TRI, etc.;
- Application checklist.

49. These are available on the [publication section](#) of the VPB website.

## Training of members

50. Extensive training has been provided since the inception of the Scheme. This has been necessary to ensure readiness of all Board members to make decisions properly and fairly under a novel legislative Scheme. During the period of this report, Board members and the Secretariat have had the benefit of training on the following topics:

- Legislation;
- Trauma;
- Board Governance;
- Panel Simulation;
- Payment Calculations;
- Capita Clinical Update;
- Gender Lens.

51. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, most training has been provided remotely. However, as time has progressed, some can now be accessed online as self-directed learning at a time to suit the individual member. This flexible approach has proven to be widely acceptable.

## Application and evidence-gathering process

52. Applications to the Scheme are made on the VPB-approved form (which can be found on the [VPB website](#)). The form can be submitted electronically or in hard copy during the period 31 August 2021 to 31 August 2026. Applications made outside these dates will only be accepted in certain circumstances.

53. Applications are prioritised from those who declare they have a terminal illness and/or those aged 80 years old or older.

54. All applicants are encouraged to provide relevant evidence and information in support of their application, with applications determined in a non-adversarial manner on the balance of probabilities. As a victim-centric approach is adopted to administering the Scheme, there is significant liaison with applicants and others to obtain necessary clarification or missing information. Essential documentary evidence (such as certified identity documents) is often not provided with applications, particularly if hard copy forms are used.

55. There are several administrative steps in the assessment process including seeking evidence to confirm a Troubles-related Incident (TRI), securing medical information to support disablement assessments and confirming if any other compensation has been received for the same injury.

56. The VPB has developed Information Sharing Agreements with a number of organisations to request relevant information on behalf of applicants. These include PSNI, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), VSS, Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Health & Social Care (HSC).

57. The process for assessing the completeness of applications is complex and each application has to be considered individually to determine its readiness to proceed to a panel. From the outset of the Scheme, one of the main challenges encountered in assessing applications is

that key information is missing and steps to obtain this information from applicants and other relevant organisations often takes time. This impacts the speed with which applications move through the assessment process.

58. Approximately one third of applications involve more than one TRI, and there have been applications with as many as 50 TRIs to be considered. These complex applications necessarily involve a lengthy evidence-gathering process to obtain key information and supporting evidence for each separate incident.
59. A common challenge encountered in the evidence-gathering process is that many of the incidents occurred long ago, at a time when record keeping may not have been to the same standard as today and records may no longer be available. The obtaining of supporting information and appropriate records from relevant organisations can take considerable time as there is reliance on third parties to provide this information.
60. The next step in the process is the assessment of the degree of permanent disablement. The VPB has appointed Capita to provide health care professionals to assess the degree of permanent disablement resulting from the injuries caused by a TRI/TRIs. This process includes consideration of medical notes and records, evidence provided by applicants and any relevant examinations. The health care professional provides the VPB with a report specifying the permanence and degree of relevant disablement, with reasons. In order to be eligible for a payment, the degree of permanent disablement must be 14% or more.
61. Throughout this reporting period, one in every two applications has been made by hard copy. These often take more time to be processed. Whilst efforts have been made to encourage applicants to use online applications, there has been an increasing reliance on the use of hard copy forms. We continue to work with the sectoral groups to encourage the use of online applications as we move forward.
62. The VPB keeps its operational procedures under review to streamline the processing of applications and to ensure each application is progressed with appropriate due diligence. Engagement with the sectoral groups has been a vital part of this process to identify areas for improvement.

## Determinations

63. To be eligible, applicants must have sustained a permanent and qualifying disablement as a result of injuries caused by a TRI.
64. Where there is a potential issue with eligibility under the Scheme, a panel comprising members of the VPB may convene at an early stage to reach a determination regarding eligibility. This is done in advance of the application progressing to assessment by a health care professional. If the application is ineligible, applicants will be advised accordingly, with reasons provided.
65. For applications that have proceeded to assessment by a health care professional, the hearing panel is provided with the application form together with all relevant material that has been gathered, including medical evidence and the Capita assessment.
66. The panel determines whether a person is eligible for victims' payments under the Scheme. Prior to making a determination, it may be necessary for the panel to adjourn the hearing.

This may be to seek clarification from applicants, or for an application to be referred for rework (as mentioned above) or for reconsideration (where further relevant information may be available). An oral hearing may be offered if a panel considers it appropriate. Every reasonable effort is made by panels to examine existing evidence and to make determinations on the basis of sufficient and relevant information.

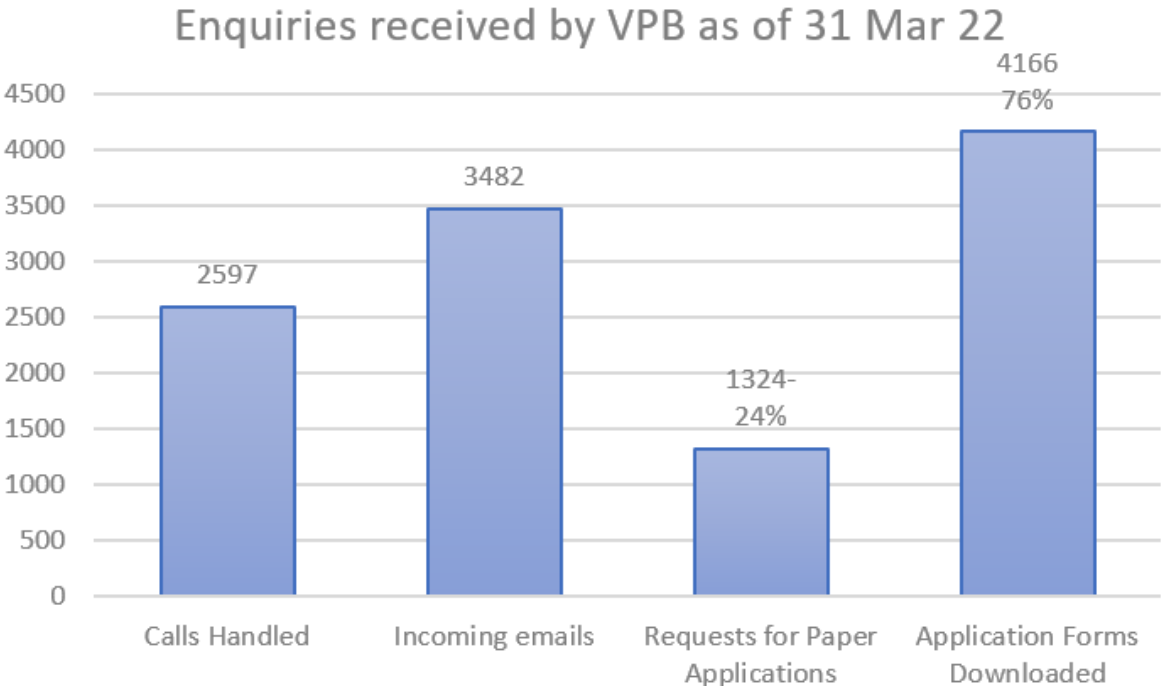
67. If an applicant is eligible for victims' payments, the panel will confirm the amount of any payments due. Deductions may be required to take account of other payments or previous compensation payments for the same disablement as per the Regulations.
68. In cases where the condition of the applicant does not allow the degree of permanent disablement to be assessed, an interim assessment must be made by the healthcare professional. This will then be reassessed within two years, although that period can be extended in certain circumstances.
69. A determination made by the VPB can be appealed within 12 months of the date the applicant was notified of the decision or assessment. However, the President of the Board may extend this period if he considers it equitable, having regard to the circumstances.
70. More detailed information on the application, determination and appeal process can be found on the [VPB website](#).



# Statistics

## Engagement with the public

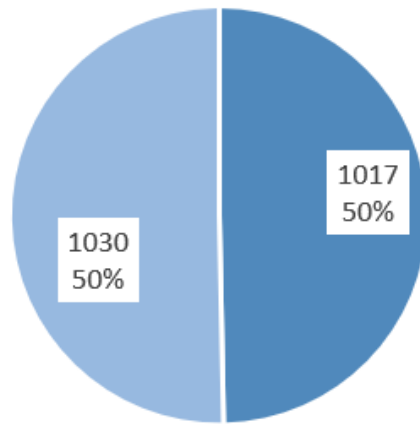
The Board administrative team has coordinated a wide variety, and significant number, of engagements with the public as the Scheme has been implemented. The chart below summarises the enquiries received for the period of this report.



## Applications to the Scheme

The Scheme opened for applications on 31 August 2021 and the first cases were heard on 30 November 2021. There were **2047** applications to the Scheme (of which 61 were withdrawn). The chart below compares applications made through the online portal and on paper.

## Applications Received as of 31 Mar 22

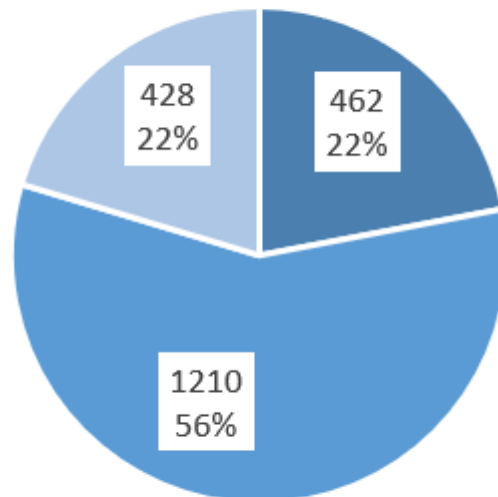


■ Paper ■ Online

### Profile of applicants

The breakdown of age groups based on the total number of applications received as of 3 April 2022 was:

## Age Profile of Applicants



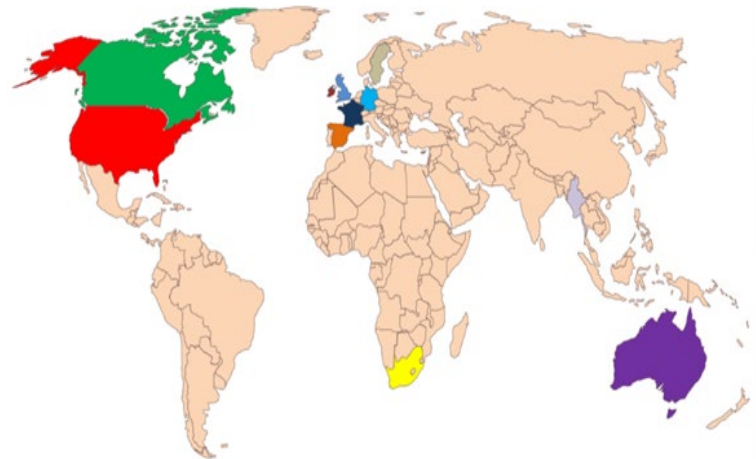
■ <50 ■ 50-69 ■ >70

As the height of the Troubles occurred throughout the 1970's, it is not surprising that most applicants fall within the age range 50 to 69 years.

### Country of origin of applications (outside NI)

The VPB has received **191** applications from outside Northern Ireland with **86%** coming from Great Britain and Republic of Ireland and the rest spread across a wide variety of other countries as set out in the table below and illustrated on the map.

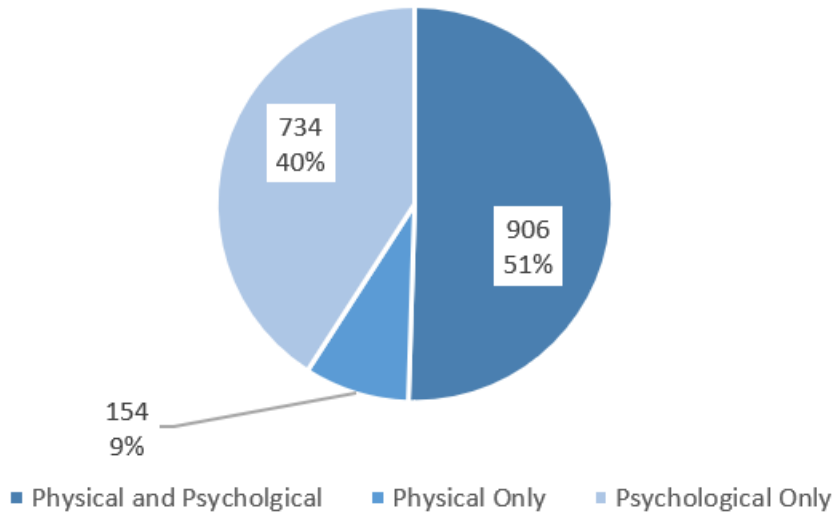
Country	Applications received
ROI	22
GB	143
France	1
Spain	3
Germany	1
Sweden	2
Canada	6
USA	6
South Africa	2
Australia	4
Thailand	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>191</b>



### Injury type breakdown

Applications have been received for psychological or physical injury or both. The chart below illustrates the proportions of such applications received during the reporting period.

## Injury Type Breakdown



### Posthumous applications

Posthumous applications	71
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### Priority applications

Terminal illness applications	46
Applicants aged 80 or older	114

### Assessment of applications

The table below shows applications referred for assessment of degree of permanent disablement.

Cases issued to Capita for disablement assessment	548
Cases returned from Capita with completed disablement assessment	64
Requests from Capita for psychological assessment	12
Consent not given for psychological diagnosis	3

### Hearings

Cases heard	25
Determinations issued – payment recommended	6
Determinations issued – not eligible for payment	15
Cases adjourned	4
Appeals submitted	2
Further cases listed but not yet heard as of 31 March 2022	75

### Successful applicant awards

As of 31 March 2022, the Scheme had paid a total of **£150,135.16** to successful applicants.

## Conclusion

71. A commitment to undertake work to progress a victims' payments scheme was made as part of the Stormont House Agreement which was signed in December 2014. Payments are backdated to that date. The foundations of this novel and complex scheme have been carefully constructed in full consultation with all interested stakeholders. The first period of intense activity upon which we are reporting has resulted in the creation and set up of the VPB and the commencement of operation of the Scheme. The overriding aim of the VPB is to keep the needs of victims at the heart of the Scheme at all times, so that those who have suffered permanent disablement as a result of the Troubles receive recognition of the harm they have suffered.
72. Significant progress has been made in the development of the Scheme during a relatively short timescale and the VPB now intends to build upon the successes of this period to bring the Scheme to full fruition for the benefit of victims of the Troubles who may have waited for many years for the recognition they deserve.
73. The first payments to victims of the Troubles have commenced. As of 31 March 2022, the VPB had paid out £150,135.16 to victims. As this is just the beginning of our operational phase it is recognised that there is much more work for us to do on behalf of victims. The VPB will continue to press for the continuing expansion of operational capacity and will ensure that all reasonable steps continue to be taken to progress applications as efficiently as possible.
74. During the incoming year, the VPB will increase efforts to raise awareness of the Scheme within Northern Ireland and further afield, through use of targeted media campaigns. It is hoped that this will help provide potential applicants who live outside Northern Ireland with information on the scheme and how to apply. Increased publicity about the Scheme will be carried out in partnership with the wider victims' sector, to ensure that potential applicants can access all available support when completing an application.
75. The VPB looks forward to the next year with optimism and determination to build upon the excellent work that has gone into establishing this novel Scheme. As we move forward, we will continue improving our efficiency, easing the journey for each applicant to the best of our ability and further enhancing the public profile of this remarkable and valuable Scheme.