

## Key members yet to be appointed amid claims abuse inquiry is a shambles

David Whelan of Former Boys and Girls Abused

Stephen Naysmith / 4 hours ago / News

Members of an independent inquiry into historical abuse of children in care in Scotland will not be appointed for several weeks, it has emerged, prompting some victims to describe the initiative as a shambles.

The inquiry was due to start work on October 1 and ministers and the inquiry team itself insist it is 'up and running' and has begun its task of exploring allegations of abuse in children's homes, boarding schools, foster care and other care setting such as hospitals.

However the panel which will work with inquiry chair Susan O'Brien QC has yet to be selected, the number of people on it has yet to be determined and a government spokesman said that although interviews had taken place and a panel would be appointed in the 'very near future', it could still be several weeks away.

Alan Draper, parliamentary liaison officer for In Care Abuse Survivors (Incas) said: "Our concern is they have known they needed to appoint panel members since they announced the inquiry in December. It is the Government's responsibility. What is the problem? Without a panel, it can't be up and running, it is a bit of a shambles."

He said survivors of abuse were concerned about any further delay and added: "The vast majority of survivors have a mistrust of authority."

This was echoed by David Whelan, spokesman for Former Boys and Girls Abused in Quarriers Homes (FBGA), who said victims needed to be treated with understanding during the inquiry process. "It is important that the inquiry team acknowledge they are dealing with very vulnerable adults and need to engage with survivors in a way which is sensitive and empathetic," he said. However he did not agree that process had been subject to delay. "This has come after years of campaigning and the Government is saying we want to listen to you, want to look at this and stop it happening in the future.

"It is important that the panel is impartial and able to be fair to everyone, what is important is that the people appointed are the right people so that everyone can have confidence in this inquiry."

Ministers are understood to be pleased that the inquiry has been set up promptly in just nine months after being confirmed by Education Secretary Angela Constance in December. However the frustration among some abuse survivors is recognised, given that many members have been

campaigning for an inquiry for more than 15 years, while some prominent figures have died before having their claims heard.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "We understand that many survivors have been campaigning for a very long time to see the Inquiry officially begin. It is disappointing that INCAS do not feel that this progress has been fast enough.

"Since the decision to hold a statutory public Inquiry was taken nine months ago we have worked hard to include survivors in each stage of development and continue to work with them to provide support for those who have suffered childhood abuse."

Questions have also been asked about the impartiality of chair Susan O'Brien after it was revealed that she had a 'professional connection' to two men under investigation for alleged abuse offences, when she was a junior lawyer in the 1980s.

The government spokeswoman added: "This professional acquaintance was disclosed by the Chair and discussed with her before her appointment. It was also contained in her Declaration of Impartiality that we published when she was appointed on May 28th and also covered in a press article in August.

"As the Cabinet Secretary said in May, Ms O'Brien is an experienced advocate in civil litigation, including issues pertinent to the Inquiry, and with a knowledge and expertise in human rights that makes her well-suited to ensure we get to the truth of what happened to children in care and how the victims were so badly failed by those who were meant to protect them."