

Annual Report

2024-25

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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President's Foreword

On completion of a fourth reporting period, I am pleased to present the 2024-2025 Annual Report for the Victims' Payments Board (VPB).

Throughout this period, the VPB has continued to engage extensively with victims, their representatives and other key partners.

This Annual Report demonstrates the significant progress made by the VPB in delivering all aspects of the Troubles Permanent Disablement Payment Scheme (the Scheme).

The value of victims' payments awarded has continued to increase substantially, almost doubling, from £23 million as reported in the previous year to over £46 million this year. This takes the total awards made from the inception of the Scheme to more than £84.6 million as of this year end.

Acknowledging the harm suffered by those injured in the Troubles, while promoting reconciliation between individuals and communities affected by our troubled past, lies at the very heart of the VPB's work. During this reporting year, the VPB, alongside a wide range of interested stakeholders, advocated strongly for the extension of the backdated element of victims' payments which had been due to cease for applications received after 30th August 2024.

In a positive and welcome development, the Secretary of State published a review on 29th August 2024 which confirms provision for backdated payments has been extended to align with the closing date for applications on 30th August 2026.



This ensures the Scheme can properly acknowledge the harm suffered by victims in a fair and consistent manner across the lifetime of the Scheme.

Given the inherent challenges associated with delivering a Scheme of this complexity, the VPB has continued to pursue opportunities to enhance service delivery, and to strengthen business processes and procedures.

An operational review commissioned by the VPB and carried out by the Innovation and Consultancy Services (ICS), Department of Finance, has been completed during this reporting year. To implement the recommendations made by ICS, the VPB has established a Business Transformation Project (BTP) which commenced in November 2024.

The BTP is focussed on further streamlining operational processes, enhancing communications and seeking digital solutions to improve case management and reduce delay for the benefit of victims who are applying to the Scheme. Ongoing external engagement and consultation are integral to this important project.

A key priority for me, and all those involved in the Scheme, is to ensure fair and consistent outcomes for applicants, while remaining attentive and responsive to the views, concerns and feedback of victims and their representatives. To this end, the VPB has continued to strengthen communications planning and engagement with victims' support groups, including through collaborative in-person workshops, regular meetings and targeted outreach work.

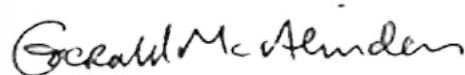
Communications, outreach and awareness raising work this year has included the launch of an improved Application Form alongside updated guidance. Changes incorporate feedback from support groups and applicants. Support groups have also assisted the VPB by providing insights in relation to the development of guidance on regulation 20 regarding past compensation. Updates have been published by the VPB through its leaflets, posters and website to advise of the extension of the backdating of payments and to encourage applications as the Scheme progresses.

With sustained awareness raising activity across Northern Ireland, Great Britain and further afield during this reporting year, the number of applications received has increased by c20% in 2024/2025, compared to 2023/2024.

I wish to pay tribute to our dedicated Secretariat and administrative teams who have continued to work diligently and tirelessly throughout another demanding and busy year. In a challenging recruitment environment and with increasing staffing pressures as the volume of throughput continues to progress at pace, we have been successful in increasing our staffing complement this year and will continue to focus upon recruitment and retention of dedicated specialist staff teams.

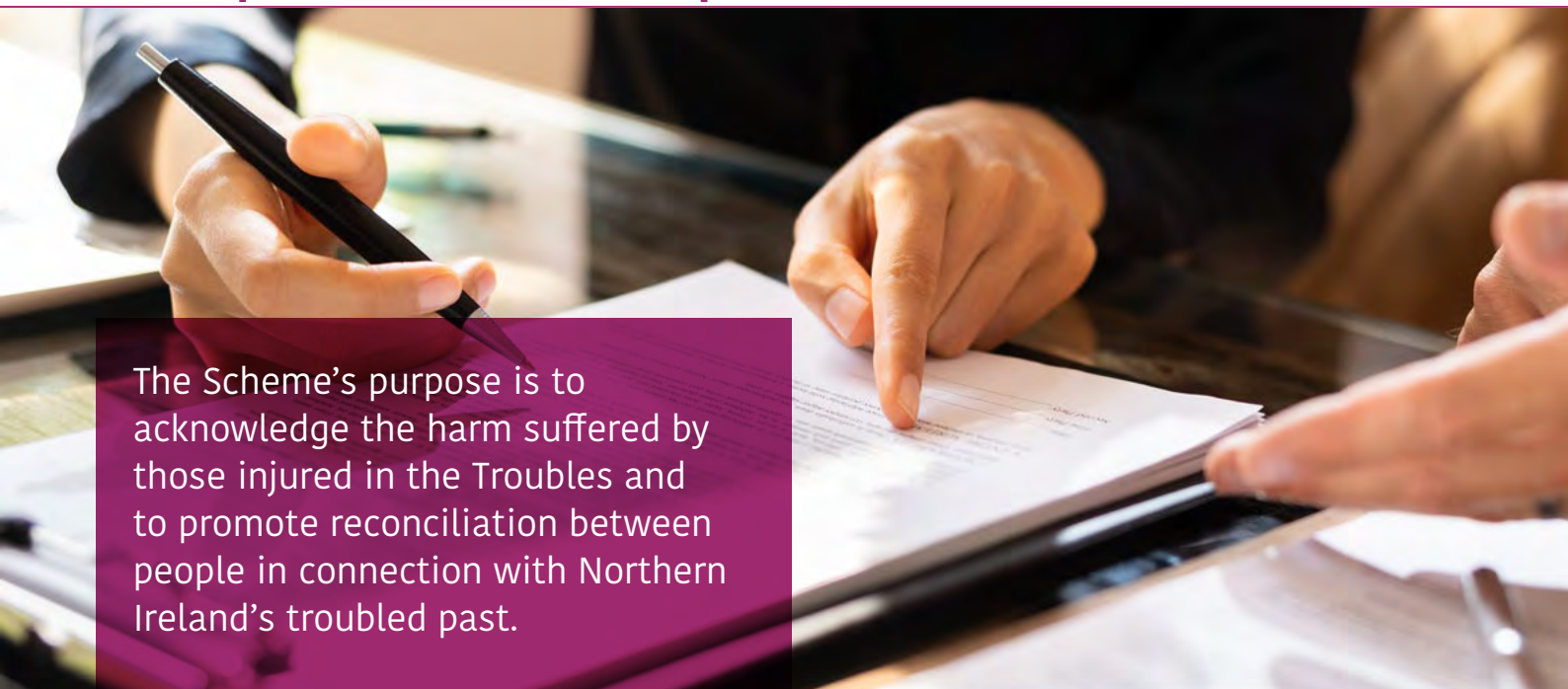
I recognise that sound governance arrangements are essential to serving victims with honesty, transparency and integrity. VPB members continue to provide strategic leadership across key areas, including governance, risk management, policy development, service improvement and Scheme enhancement. The Board's Committees work assiduously on a wide range of strategic priorities to strengthen the Scheme's responsiveness and effectiveness, and I am grateful for their continued dedication, support and expertise.

On behalf of the VPB, I reaffirm our commitment to work collaboratively with victims, their representatives and our key partners to prioritise, and respond effectively to, the needs of victims, to communicate clearly with applicants and to acknowledge the harm suffered by those injured in our troubled past.



The Honourable Mr Justice McAlinden,
Victims' Payments Board President

Purpose and Principles



The Scheme's purpose is 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.

The Scheme also recognises the implications of living with disablement caused by a Troubles-related incident(s) including the associated impact of such disablement on carers who are often family members. Further, it acknowledges that, in many cases, coping with disablement arising from serious injury has had an adverse financial impact on victims and their families.

The VPB is required to apply the eligibility criteria rigorously as set out in the Regulations, and it is important to emphasise this Scheme cannot meet the needs of all the victims of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

With the support of our dedicated staff, and through continued improvements to operational systems and governance structures, we have worked hard to deliver high-quality services and to administer applications fairly and efficiently.

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.

Board Membership and Responsibilities

As President of the VPB, the Honourable Mr Justice McAlinden, is responsible for the leadership and strategic direction of the Board, and for the efficient and effective implementation and delivery of the Scheme. At the end of this reporting year, the Board comprises 25 legal, 23 medical and 26 ordinary members.

Members are appointed as judicial office holders by the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission to determine applications under the Scheme. Board members also have responsibility for supporting the President in the discharge of corporate governance functions, including policy development, quality assurance, financial and risk management.

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.

The panels who determine applications comprise one legal member who acts as Chair, one ordinary member and one medical member with each having an equal role in the final decision. Appeals against first instance panel decisions are determined by panel members who were not involved in the original determination.

Operation of the Board

The VPB is a body corporate and operates independently of, and at arm's length from, the Executive Office (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 the Department of Justice (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.

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. 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 our challenging performance measures. Staff numbers continued to increase throughout this reporting year enabling the improved progression of cases.

To build upon the Scheme's progress to date, the Business Transformation Project (BTP), commencing in November 2024, will be focused upon streamlining operational processes; communications planning; seeking digital solutions to improve case management efficiency; and scoping and securing the staffing structures required to take forward this critical work.

Capita is contracted by DoJ to assess the degree of permanent disablement suffered by victims. The Board monitors closely 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 assessment processes.

Board Committees

The work of the VPB is supported by the Business Assurance Committee, the Operational Committee and the Rework Committee.

These Committees operate within agreed terms of reference and deal with governance matters, policy development and risk management, supporting the effective delivery of the VPB's operations and consideration of requests for the reworking of applicant medical assessments.

The Committees comprise members of the VPB and are supported administratively by the Senior Management Team and Secretariat. They meet regularly to progress agreed strategic priorities and projects, establishing sub-committees and multi-disciplinary working groups to deliver objectives. The work of each Committee is detailed in the respective Chair's quarterly report to the VPB to assure members as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Scheme. In this reporting period, the 3 Committees worked to assist the President and the VPB to fulfil their statutory functions.



Business Assurance Committee (BAC)

The Business Assurance Committee (BAC) plays a central role in the governance of the Board, providing essential support to the President and the Secretary as Senior Accounting Officer (SAO) in monitoring risk, controls, governance and associated assurance. The responsibilities of the BAC include:

- the development and oversight of strategic policies, formal guidance and governance documents;
- VPB's Risk Register, Business Plan and Annual Report;
- the strategic process for risk management, internal controls and governance;
- assurances relating to the management of risk and corporate governance requirements for VPB;
- anti-fraud policies and arrangements for special investigations;
- consideration of annual reports in respect of GDPR and Raising a Concern Guidance and procedures;
- the effectiveness of the internal and external audit function; and the adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity.

During this reporting period, the BAC welcomed 1 new member, bringing its membership to 14 at the year end.

The BAC met on 5 occasions throughout the year. Standing agenda items include the Risk Register, Business Plan, Statistical Report, Stage 3 complaints, data breaches/incidents and engagement with victims' groups.

The BAC continued to exercise delegated authority for:

- oversight of the Complaints Policy and Procedure, and for handling Stage 3 complaints;
- the approval of Direct Award Contracts;
- oversight of the Write-off of Overpayments Register and reporting all write-offs to the Board.



Business Assurance Committee continued

In the course of this reporting period, the BAC completed specific targeted work in the following areas of strategic importance to the Board:

- Significant revision, and regular reviews, of the Risk Register for 2024/25.
- Development of GDPR Guidance for panel members to reflect one of the Scheme's underpinning principles to handle personal data carefully and sensitively.
- Development of the Business Plan, Annual Report and Risk Register.
- Development of the Conflict of Interest Policy and Raising a Concern in the Public Interest Guidance.
- Revision of the Complaints Policy and Members' Code of Conduct.
- Extensive revision of the Application Form and the accompanying Guidance document, to reflect feedback from support groups and applicants.
- Production of a Regulation 20 Procedural Guidance Note regarding adjustments to victims' payments in light of past compensation, together with revised guidance for applicants.
- Implementation of lessons learned from Stage 3 complaints and data incidents.

Additionally, the BAC made a significant contribution in this period to:

- Promoting continuous improvement through the independent review of business processes.
- Working with Capita to reduce delays.
- Drafting a Date Parameters Guidance Note.
- Reviewing the 'Defining a Troubles-related Incident' Guidance Note and Annex A 'Indicative List of Incidents'.

During this reporting period, a BAC led cross-committee concluded its work on improving the time taken to determine priority cases.

The BAC's strategic work priorities are informed by the need to be agile and responsive to the emerging needs of victims, the political and business environment and the requirement to develop and update policies. Looking forward, the Committee will continue to progress work on: Regulation 19 guidance regarding adjustments to victims' payments; revision of guidance on the Principles of Natural Justice; development of Safeguarding policies; improving efficiencies in the progression of applications; the quality and consistency of expert reports; draft determination templates and letters.



Operational Committee

The purpose of the Operational Committee is to provide oversight on behalf of the VPB of the day-to-day activities of panel work conducted by members.

In this reporting period, 2 members of the Committee who resigned from VPB were replaced by 2 new members, maintaining a total membership of 12.

The Committee met 5 times during the reporting period, with much of the work progressed by sub-groups in between committee meetings.

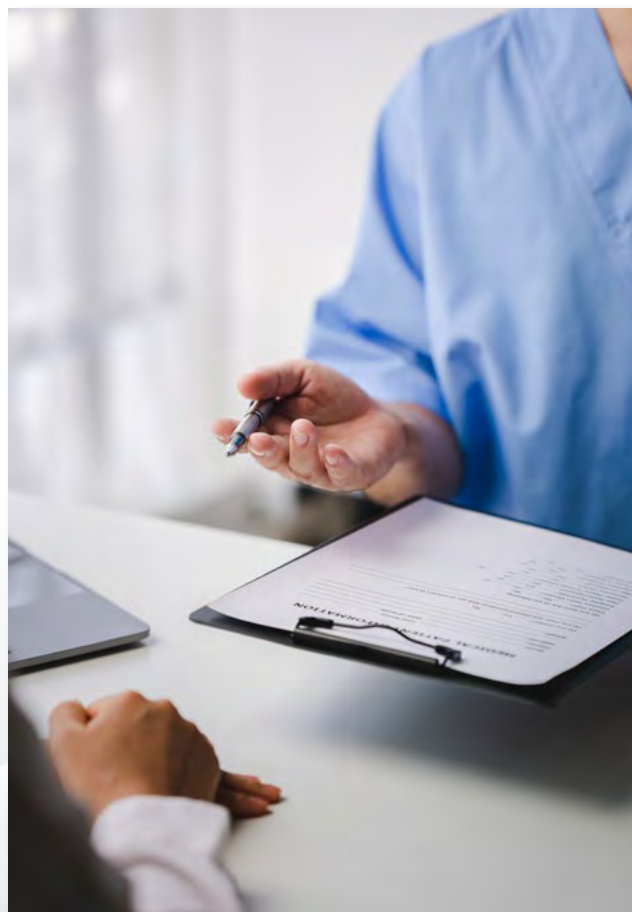
In the course of this reporting period, the Operational Committee completed specific targeted work in the following areas of strategic importance to the Board:

- Review of feedback forms, a retained log of operational matters and risks identified by members, senior management and administrative staff.
- Creation and launch of a bespoke VPB Database to promote consistency in determinations and efficiency in accessing Board documents.
- Twice yearly analysis of adjournments to identify key trends and make recommendations.
- Monthly analysis of determinations to identify trends and learning points.
- Revision of template letters sent to applicants in response to feedback from support groups.
- Establishing and leading a cross-committee sub-group to review Guidance Note 04/21 'Defining a Troubles-related Incident'.

Additionally, the Operational Committee made a significant contribution in this period to:

- Reducing the timeframes for determination of priority applications.
- Considering processes regarding the change of nominee by an applicant.
- Exploring ways to progress 'on hold' cases (where further information is awaited from applicants).
- Reviewing the processes in applications where capacity queries have been raised.
- Reviewing determination documentation following feedback from user groups.

Looking forward, the Committee will continue to progress work on revised determination templates; on hold applications; capacity concerns; nominees and applications involving sexual violence.



Rework Committee

The Rework Committee filters requests from VPB Panels when it is considered the assessment of permanent disablement in an application contains errors so significant they either:

- jeopardise the accuracy of the degree of disablement; or
- risk significant harm to the applicant (such as inclusion of harmful information).

The Rework Committee maintained its membership during the reporting period with 13 members.

The Rework Committee met bi-monthly and held clinical governance meetings with Capita every 8 weeks. The clinical governance meetings provide an opportunity for regular feedback on issues relating to rework requests and assessments. The meetings also involve standardisation exercises which utilise sample cases and improve shared understanding of the healthcare guidance.

During the reporting period, 34 rework requests were received from panels, with 19 forwarded to Capita, 10 of which were accepted for rework.

An additional 8 requests were considered by the Rework Committee in cases where the applicant was found to be ineligible for payments, of which 6 were referred back to Capita for quality control.

Panels provide regular feedback regarding Capita assessments, with trends and issues identified and tracked. As appropriate, the Committee and Capita work together to maintain and improve quality.

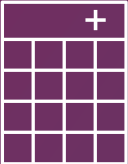
In the course of this reporting period, the Rework Committee completed specific targeted work in the following areas of strategic importance to the Board:

- Work with Capita to update Guidance to Healthcare Professionals.
- Refinement of processes regarding scarring assessment, hearing loss assessment and assessment in cases with multiple incidents.
- Designing an improved prioritisation process for applications made by terminally ill applicants, resulting in reduced handling time.
- Consideration of the approach taken in interim assessment cases.
- Monitoring a pilot scheme in respect of the assessor approval process.
- Reformatting healthcare reports to reduce time taken in compiling reports.
- Working with Capita to produce technical training for VPB members.

Looking forward, the Committee will continue to work in partnership with Capita to embed, monitor and review a new process of direct referral of reworks; provide and disseminate training as required to Board members; assist with initiatives to increase throughput of cases and ensure continuous improvement in the quality of reports.



Overview and Impact of the Board’s Work in 2024/25

		78 Physical 1,754 Psychological 1,845 Both 68 Not specified Breakdown of applications by disablement
£46,182,354.74	3,745	
Total amount paid to applicants	Total number of applications	

			
1,959	98	14,717	7,201
Number of applications determined	Number of appeals concluded	Number of e-mails handled	Number of phone calls handled

We increased the level of engagement with our community and professional partners, with a view to identifying and connecting with under-represented groups.

Applications from GB and the Republic of Ireland showed a modest increase this year.

During this reporting period, we continued to engage with sectoral groups quarterly, focusing on explaining developments in the Board's work and receiving valuable feedback on the Scheme. The President and Secretary have also attended regular meetings with external stakeholders, including TEO, DoJ and the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS).

A Business Transformation Project was commenced to streamline internal structures and improve operational efficiency.

We introduced an improved Application Form alongside refreshed Guidance with help from applicants and support groups.

The process for priority applications for those who are over 80 years of age or terminally ill was streamlined.

We developed guidance to make it easier to understand adjustments for past compensation under regulation 20, with questionnaire input and advice from support groups.

We revised and simplified our complaints process, making it more responsive and efficient.

Our Communications Plan ensured the availability of the Scheme is widely communicated, with applications showing a 20% increase this year.

We have, in a challenging recruitment and retention environment, maintained a staffing complement of 124.3 full time equivalent (FTE), increased from 91 last year. It is anticipated this staffing increase will enable an increase in the number of hearings listed for the coming year and will contribute to greater efficiency in handling incoming correspondence in respect of ongoing applications.

Crucially, we maintain the VPB's autonomy and independence whilst maintaining open, honest and collaborative working relationships with TEO and DoJ.

Board members and staff received training on GDPR, Inquisitorial Hearings, Presence/Immediate Aftermath cases and Hearing Loss assessments.

We continued to work with our information partners to improve the quality and timeliness of evidence available to panels.

Communications and Engagement

Effective engagement remains a priority for the VPB to ensure victims and survivors can readily access the Scheme and receive the acknowledgement and recognition they deserve.

Regular formal meetings continue between VPB, TEO and VSS.

The VPB also meets regularly with a wide range of partners and interest groups working with and for victims including:

- Ashton Centre
- Commission for Victims and Survivors
- Ely Centre
- PSNI Benevolent Fund
- Relatives for Justice (RFJ)
- South East Fermanagh Foundation (SEFF)
- Victims and Survivors Service
- WAVE Trauma

These meetings provide a vital platform for capturing and reflecting on victims' views, sharing valuable feedback, and highlighting issues regarding the administration of the Scheme.

The VPB adopts a "lessons learned" approach informed by feedback received and is committed to making continual improvements to the Scheme for the benefit of victims and their families.

The updated Application Form was launched during the reporting period in cooperation with external partners, taking into account feedback from VPB members, victims' support organisations and applicants. The revised Form is designed to support the gathering of relevant information and evidence for the benefit of victims.

The VPB's Communication and Engagement Plan is regularly reviewed with our media partners. The plan supports direct engagement with victims and their representatives. It also aims to increase awareness of, and accessibility to, the Scheme. It encourages applicants to engage as well as keeping all interested stakeholders informed of updated information about the Scheme.

During this reporting year, the VPB Information Leaflet, posters and website information were updated to reflect the decision of the Secretary of State to extend provision for backdating victims' payments so that these important payments can be applied to successful cases in all applications received before the closing date for the Scheme on 30th August 2026.

As part of the Communications and Engagement Plan, the VPB also developed an effective programme of outreach to include the hard to reach and under-represented victims, including those residing outside of Northern Ireland, and has made a number of improvements to published advice, guidance and information for applicants.

In this period, engagement has been extended to include a meeting between the President of the VPB and the First and deputy First Ministers, meetings with the Veterans' Commissioner and the Police Benevolent Fund.

During this reporting year, the VPB website has been improved for the benefit of all those who have an interest in taking forward an application. This has included updated FAQs, and alongside Capita, the VPB has developed a series of instructional videos which cover all aspects of the Scheme's processes, from application to determination by a panel. These videos are now available to view on the [VPB website](#).

As part of the Business Transformation Project, work is ongoing with the Scheme's digital service providers to ensure the necessary tools are available to ensure streamlined, efficient and victim-centric processing of applications.

Media activity during the reporting year has included the issuing of press releases and media briefings across the UK and ROI, as well as social media engagement delivered through partner organisations such as TEO, DOJ and all sectoral partner groups. The President and Secretary of the VPB participated in media interviews as part of the VPB's awareness raising campaign.

There will continue to be a strong focus on the development of the VPB's external communications, with a view to ensuring the website, guidance and all forms of engagement are accessible, informed by victims and their support groups and are readily understood.

victimspaymentsboard.org.uk



Applications to the Scheme

Applications to the Scheme are made using the VPB application form, either online or by post. In this reporting period 3,745 applications were received, of which 78 were applicants suffering physical injury, 1754 with psychological injury and 1845 with both physical and psychological injuries.

It is important that applicants and/or their representatives provide as much detail and supporting evidence as possible. Updated guidance on how to prepare and submit an application is available on the **Victims' Payments Board website** (victimspaymentsboard.org.uk) and VPB staff are available to assist with any queries an applicant or their representative may have.

Applications from those applicants aged over 80 or with a terminal illness are prioritised. Given the complexities of applications received by the Scheme, which often involve historic and multi-faceted circumstances, it is not possible to have a standard timescale for applications to reach the determination stage, but the VPB has taken steps this year to significantly improve the progression of priority cases.

Each application is unique and is considered on its own specific facts and merits. While the burden of proof rests with applicants, the VPB adopts a victim-centric approach and, where appropriate, endeavours to obtain evidential and medical information on behalf of applicants, reflecting the Scheme's purpose and guiding principles.

Given the nature of the Scheme, a significant proportion of applications relate to incidents that occurred many years ago. In addition, many applications are complex and involve more than one incident. As a result, a comprehensive evidence-gathering process is undertaken to ensure that all available relevant information is included in an

application bundle prior to referral to a panel for determination.

Throughout the application process, the VPB continues to communicate with applicants to provide updates on the progress of their application, to advise on the stage reached and to identify whether any further information is required from the applicant. There may be lengthy periods of time between these stages while essential evidence is being sought from external information providers. All VPB staff are trained to support applicants appropriately and handle their personal information sensitively and securely.

Applications are considered by a panel usually comprising one legal member, one medical member and one ordinary member. The panel considers all available information, including the assessment of the degree of permanent disablement, and makes a determination on the applicant's eligibility for victims' payments in accordance with the Regulations. A panel may decide to adjourn its decision for a variety of reasons, including to obtain further information or clarification. Panels make determinations solely on the basis of the information provided to them.

Where an applicant is not satisfied with the decision of a panel, they may appeal the determination within 12 months of being notified of the outcome.

Appeals

Appeals may be brought on a number of grounds, as set out in the Regulations, and the reason for a successful appeal is varied. In support of an appeal, applicants may provide further evidence or clarity in respect of their application and/or provide submissions which were not included as part of their original application. There were 98 appeal hearings throughout this reporting year, of which 54 were successful.

Illustrative Scenarios

While each application is fact-specific, we have developed some illustrative scenarios to assist and inform applicants.

These scenarios are provided for illustrative purposes only and are not based on any individual or specific applications.



SCENARIO 1**Loved one**

The applicant had arranged to meet a work colleague, whom they considered to be a close friend, in a bar, when gunmen entered and opened fire. The applicant arrived shortly afterwards and was able to comfort their injured friend. The panel determined this was a Troubles-related incident and that the applicant was present in its immediate aftermath. The applicant was not eligible for victims' payments however, as the injured friend did not meet the definition of a "loved one" under the Regulations, which require a close relationship of love and affection. Such a relationship will be presumed to exist between spouses, civil partners, cohabiting partners and parents and children. In other cases, it is a question of fact in each individual situation. The panel acknowledged the harm suffered by the applicant but set out its reasons that "a close relationship of love and affection" was not evidenced in this particular case.

SCENARIO 2**Nominee**

A panel determined that an applicant who had been injured in a bomb explosion was entitled to victims' payments. A person so entitled can appoint a nominee to receive victims' payments for ten years following their death. To qualify as a nominee, a person must be the spouse, civil partner or co-habiting partner of the beneficiary or otherwise, must establish that they are or used to be regularly engaged in providing substantial care for the beneficiary. The evidence showed that the applicant's son provided regular and substantial care to them, including daily household chores, cooking, shopping and support for personal hygiene. The panel determined the applicant's son qualified as a nominee so that, in the event of the applicant's death, the victims' payments would transfer to him for 10 years beginning with the date of death.

SCENARIO 3**Burden of Proof**

The applicant stated their car was hijacked at gunpoint and used in an attempt to blow up an army base. The device failed to explode, and the incident was not widely reported. The incident occurred decades ago, and the applicant was unable to recall specific dates. The VPB sought information from the PSNI who were unable to locate information relating to the incident in the absence of a date. The application was unsuccessful as the applicant had failed to discharge the burden of proof (the balance of probabilities) and satisfy the panel that the incident had occurred.

An appeal was filed which included new evidence. The applicant's nephew had searched local newspaper archives and found a photograph of the car outside the army base. The applicant had old holiday photos to prove they owned the car at the time. Using the newspaper date, a new PSNI information request was submitted, and details of the incident were found to support the applicant's case. The appeal was successful.

SCENARIO 4**Immediate Aftermath**

The applicant's father, who was the victim of a gun attack, was taken to hospital by ambulance but sadly died shortly afterwards. Police and newspaper reports from the time confirmed the incident took place as described by the applicant. She had been diagnosed with depression as a result of the incident. The applicant was not present at the incident. Although she attended hospital after the incident, she did not see her father at any point after the shooting. The case was listed before a panel who determined the applicant was not eligible for payments as she was not present at the incident or in the immediate aftermath of the incident. The case was determined without asking the applicant to undergo a medical assessment. The applicant was sent the panel's decision and summary of reasons as to why she was not entitled to victims' payments.

Statistics 2024/2025

The VPB collates statistics and other data to monitor the quality of service delivery, identify themes arising from applications received and to assist in reviewing the effectiveness of the Scheme and the work completed during reporting periods. Whilst an assessment of statistics does not give a complete picture of the work of the VPB, the Secretariat and administrative teams, it can assist the Board to focus on areas of service improvement.

Key statistics for the reporting period of 2024/25 are:

Table 1: Global picture statistics

	2024/2025	Total from commencement of scheme: 2021/22 to 2024/25
Amount awarded to applicants	£46,182,354.74	£84,626,446.75

Table 2: Personnel and workload

	2023/2024	2024/2025
FTE (full-time equivalent) capacity	144	150
Number of FTE in place	91.4	124.3
Number of Board members (average in reporting year)	69	71
Number of phone calls handled annually	6,808	7,201
Number of emails handled annually	12,894	14,717
Number of applications received annually	3,117	3,745
Number of hearing panels held monthly	41	42
Number of cases heard monthly	100	101

Table 3: Application statistics

	2023/2024	2024/2025
Total applications received	3117	3745
Applications for physical injury only	74	78
Applications for psychological injury only	1300	1754
Applications for both physical and psychological injury	1671	1845
Applications with incomplete injury data	72	68
Total classified as priority	189	255
Total posthumous applications	139	166

Table 4: Geographical location of applicants

	2023/2024	2024/2025
Northern Ireland	2,921	3,494
Republic of Ireland	40	52
UK (excl Northern Ireland)	124	163
Continental Europe	5	9
Australia and New Zealand	8	13
USA & Canada	16	10
Central and South America	0	0
Africa	1	0
Asia	1	1
Applications with geographical data missing	1	3

Table 5: Age distribution of applicants

	2023/2024	2024/2025
0-19	1	0
20-29	18	25
30-39	156	181
40-49	434	444
50-59	888	966
60-69	1,050	1,282
70-79	437	625
80-89	126	189
90+	7	28



Table 6: Determination statistics at first instance

	2023/2024	2024/2025
Total cases listed for first instance determination	1127	1959
Total adjourned	181	272
Total first instance determinations made	946	1687
Total of these successful	624	1092
Total unsuccessful	322	595

Table 7: Appeal statistics

	2023/2024	2024/2025
Total number appeals filed (in reporting year)	130	232
Total appeals considered (in reporting year)	94	98
Total of these successful	51	54
Total unsuccessful	43	44

12,349,000
238,681,000
85,678,000
8,369,000
189,301,000
102,698,000
24,697,000
76,002,000
57,610,000

Complaints and Compliments

The VPB operates a 3-stage process for the effective handling of complaints.

The VPB Complaints Policy and Procedure provides for complaints to be raised either formally or informally. The Board's approach is focused on achieving a timely resolution which appropriately addresses all aspects of a complaint. The VPB views complaints as important opportunities to identify learning and drive improvements in service delivery.

The Business Assurance Committee (BAC) monitors the volume and nature of complaints, identifies emerging patterns or themes and provides assurance that high professional standards of service delivery are maintained. The BAC is responsible for managing and investigating all complaints which have progressed to Stage 3. A sub-committee with the required expertise is appointed by the BAC Chair to review, investigate and determine all aspects of the complaint. The outcome of each Stage 3 complaint investigation is reported to the BAC with any recurring themes and key recommendations shared with all Board members. Lessons learned are used to inform service improvements.

In this reporting year, the Board received a total of 32 complaints, with 28 of these resolved satisfactorily at Stage 1 or Stage 2 of the process, and 4 progressing to consideration at Stage 3. Of the 4 complaints dealt with by a Stage 3 sub-committee, 1 was upheld, 1 partially upheld and 2 were not upheld. 6 complaints were made to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Of these, 3 were not upheld, with the remaining 3 yet to be decided.

The nature of the complaints received in this period were, in almost equal proportions:

- delay in determinations / adjournments;
- issues with health care assessments;
- administration processes regarding timely communication;
- administration processes regarding panel hearings.

Five recommendations to improve service delivery were made by the Stage 3 complaints sub-committees including recommendations to:

- review processes to ensure the on-going accuracy of contact details for applicants and data handling procedures;
- take action to improve the accuracy of VPB responses to complainants;
- review and amend the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section available on the VPB website to include advice on how applicants can assist the VPB to obtain medical evidence from a GP practice where this has not been forthcoming;
- review the way adjourned hearings are reconvened to prevent needless delay; and
- review organisational targets for convening determination panels, again to avoid needless delay.

All these service recommendations were accepted by the Board Secretary and senior management, and improvements have been implemented.

A record is also kept of compliments and expressions of appreciation sent by victims, community partners and service users. These primarily related to:

- the high quality of service provided;
- the dedication of the staff, especially their attentiveness in answering applicant queries;
- gratitude for the help offered.

The Board's ongoing commitment to learn from all feedback both positive and negative, will inform improvements to the Scheme, supporting the promotion of best practice.



Future Plans



This fourth Annual Report demonstrates the breadth and depth of the VPB's strategic and operational work. Our work is complex and has significant impact on the lives and wellbeing of a wide range of people in Northern Ireland and beyond.

The VPB and staff are acutely aware of widespread interest in their work and remain committed to making continuous improvements to the operation of the Scheme and, in particular, to enhancing the applicant experience.

Over the next 12 months, the VPB will focus on consolidating the progress made to date, while delivering further improvements to service delivery, efficiency and accessibility.

This will include progressing key elements of the Business Transformation Project, strengthening internal processes and continuing to support timely, fair and consistent decision-making for applicants. Building upon increased staffing, operational improvements and efficiencies, along with enhanced support and guidance for members, the VPB anticipates that greater operational capacity will be delivered to enable a significant increase in the number of panel hearings and determinations during the coming year.

In order to further raise awareness of the Scheme, we will continue to expand our programme of communications and engagement activity. This will include sustained outreach to victims and survivors, engagement with support organisations and representative bodies, as well as a targeted campaign of outreach to under-represented groups, including those living outside Northern Ireland.

The VPB will also continue to improve the clarity, accessibility and usefulness of information provided through its website, guidance and other materials.

We intend to introduce further improvements to VPB's governance systems and structures. These measures will include the continued review of risk management and assurance arrangements, ongoing development of guidance and strengthened oversight through the VPB's committee structures.

VPB committees will progress work on agreed strategic and corporate priorities, providing advice and assurance to the President and Board Secretary on performance against the key objectives and targets set out in the Business Plan. In doing so, they will support effective corporate governance, robust risk management and the sound discharge of the VPB's statutory duties and functions.

The VPB will continue to fulfil its roles and responsibilities, placing victims at the centre of all our strategic planning and operational activity, including through the delivery of critical elements of the Business Transformation Project in the period 2025 – 2026.



Paul Bullick,
Secretary to the Victims' Payments Board

VPB | VICTIMS'
PAYMENTS
BOARD

**Troubles Permanent
Disablement Scheme**

Further information on all aspects of the Scheme and the support available can be found on our website at:

www.victimspaymentsboard.org.uk

If you need this report in a different format or a different language, please contact us.

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