

'Keep Oral History of Troubles free from political meddling'

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A COLLECTION of Troubles narratives must remain free from political interference, it has been urged.

Questions have been raised about a proposed Oral History Archive (OHA) included in the Stormont House Agreement bill. The Northern Ireland Office last week published the 'summary of measures' to be included in the bill, such as the Historical Investigations Unit and OHA.



In parallel to this, a group from Queen's and Ulster universities has been working with the Committee on the Administration of Justice to develop 'model legislation' for past-related elements.

Dr Anna Bryson, pictured, a research fellow at Queen's school of law, said that while public response to the NIO focused on the Historical Investigations Unit, less attention had been paid to the OHA.

The NIO said the archive "will be independent and free from political interference" and will be established as a new part of the Public Record Office under the direction of a deputy keeper of the records, who is a senior civil servant.

Dr Bryson said "political interference must be avoided at all costs".

The inclusion of the OHA in the bill presented an opportunity to enshrine the independence of the archive in statute, she said.

She added that unfortunately the summary of measures proposed failed adequately to address the foundational principle of ensuring independence.

"What has been officially proposed is that the OHA be established as part of the Public Records Office," she said.

While the NIO said ministers would not have access to oral history records until they had been published by the deputy keeper, Dr Bryson warned "it will be clear to anyone familiar with the culture and practice of the public service that this amounts to a fig leaf".