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Meeting with John Swinney reassures anxious abuse victims Inquiry is on Track

Scotland's biggest ever public inquiry, into the abuse of children in care is genuinely independent and a new chair will be appointed as soon as possible, John Swinney has told victim and survivor groups.

At a meeting with survivors of childhood abuse held in the wake of the resignation of two of the three key figures at the head of the investigation, the Deputy First Minister attempted to reassure them that the troubled investigation is still on track.

He was pressed to explain why he had taken steps to remove the former Chair Susan O'Brien QC – which eventually led to her resignation - and why another member of the three person panel leading the official probe had also resigned. Both quit citing government interference as the causes and warning that the independence of their work was being compromised.

However Mr Swinney told survivors that he had moved to remove Ms O'Brien because of comments she had made which he feared would upset them and cause great offence if they had been made public.

Mr Swinney agreed to consider appointing a judge or a candidate from outside Scotland to replace Ms O'Brien and said he would look again at whether the remit of the inquiry could be extended to encompass groups currently excluded.

After yesterday's gruelling two and a half hour meeting, survivors appeared to have been placated by reassurances, but said the resignations from the inquiry had rocked confidence in the Government.

Alan Draper, spokesman for In Care Abuse Survivors Scotland (INCAS) said: "It being suggested that survivors have lost confidence in the Child Abuse Inquiry. We have not lost confidence in the Inquiry Team, but the government.

"Mr Swinney has committed himself that the inquiry will be totally independent and he is prepared to reconsider the remit to cover organisations with a duty of care [where abuse occurred].

"We have been reasonably reassured but a lot of questions remain to be answered. We also want a commitment from the inquiry team themselves that they remain fully independent of government."

Mr Draper said survivors representatives had asked Mr Swinney if he regretted acting hastily in pressing Ms O'Brien to resign. "We feel he took precipitous action, as a result of pretty flimsy evidence," he said.

David Whelan, another prominent campaigner for survivors of abuse suffered within the charity Quarriers, said victims were fed up and distressed by years of waiting for answers: "This has gone on long enough - it is time for Scotland to face up to its responsibilities", he added.

"The deputy first minister has given us these assurances and we will wait on the outcomes. We have been assured the inquiry will be independent and impartial but we have been let down in the past.

"We have to wait now for the appointments process to happen."

Earlier in the day Mr Swinney had said that he recognised that the events of the last week had caused survivors great anxiety and upset. He added: "The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to this inquiry and its work uncovering the truth of what survivors have experienced; how the people they should have been able to rely on could have been able to fail them so badly and how we make children today safer as a result of what we establish."