

Question:

Under the Freedom of Information Act, can you provide me with the following:

- Baroness Cass's interim report into NI's gender service.
- Any communications between the Department of Health and Dr Cass and her team in the period between receipt of the interim report, and the publication of the final report.

Response:

The Minister for Health commissioned a visit by Dr Hilary Cass and her team in November 2025 to assess whether planned changes to services for children and young people with gender incongruence / gender dysphoria in Northern Ireland are compliant with recommendations of the Cass Review in England.

The report produced by Dr Cass following her visit has been published by the DOH and is available on the DOH website at the following link:

- <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/cass-assessment-report-gender-identity-services>

In considering your request for a copy of an interim report into Northern Ireland's gender service and a copy of communications between the Department of Health and Dr Cass and her team in the period between receipt of the interim report, and the publication of the final report. Dr Cass shared a draft of the report with the DOH for review prior to sharing the final version. DOH is mindful that placing a draft into the public domain, particularly where the final version is already published has the potential to mislead and cause confusion. A decision has therefore been taken to withhold the draft report and the communications between DOH and Dr Cass via application of Section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act – *'Formulation of Government policy etc.'*

The Department is relying on section 35(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which relates to information held:

"...for the purposes of the formulation or development of government policy."

The draft report was commissioned to inform the development of departmental policy. It contains developing analysis, options, and advice that were considered as part of the policy-making process but which do not represent the Department's settled position. The draft reflects intermediate thinking and material that was refined or superseded prior to publication of the final report.

Section 35 is a qualified exemption, and the Department has therefore considered the public interest test.

Public Interest Test

Factors in favour of disclosure:

- Disclosure would promote transparency around how the final report was developed.
- It would enable greater public understanding of the evidence and analysis considered by the Department.

Factors in favour of maintaining the exemption:

- The draft report forms part of the Department's policy formulation process, and disclosure would provide an incomplete and potentially misleading account of that process.
- Drafts are intended to allow officials and advisers to explore options, challenge assumptions, and refine conclusions before policy is settled.
- Disclosure could undermine the integrity of the policy-making process by deterring robust analysis and frank contribution at draft stages.
- The public interest in transparency is adequately met by publication of the final report, which represents the Department's considered and settled position.

Public interest conclusion

Having weighed the competing public interest factors, the Department has concluded that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure of the draft report.

Date response issued: 10th April 2026

Reference Number: DOH 2026-0035