

NHS Wales Specialist Gender Incongruence Services for Children and Young People - Final Report of the Cass Review

The purpose of this document is to brief stakeholders on the outcome of the final report of the Cass Review and confirm the position in Wales.

1.0 Background

An independent review was commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement in 2020 to make recommendations on the services provided to children and young people who are exploring their gender identity or experiencing gender incongruence.

The independent review was led by Dr Hilary Cass OBE, a consultant paediatrician and former President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

The Cass Review was commissioned to ensure that children and young people are able to access the best possible support from the NHS, and a high standard of care that meets their individual needs. It gathered evidence to determine how the NHS can provide sustainable models and pathways of care into the future.

The aim of the Cass Review was to ensure that children and young people who are questioning their gender identity or experiencing gender dysphoria, and who need support from the NHS, receive a high standard of care that meets their needs and is safe, holistic and effective.

The Interim Report from the Cass Review emphasised the need to move away from the model of a sole provider and to establish regional services that work to a new clinical model that can better meet the holistic needs of a vulnerable group of children and young people. In July 2022, Dr Cass sent further advice on the core components of the clinical model including key recommendations that the future regional centres should be led by experienced providers of tertiary paediatric care (Children's Hospitals) to ensure a focus on child health and development, with strong links to mental health services, established academic and education functions, a multi professional workforce and the ability to maintain a broad clinical perspective to embed the care of children and young people with gender uncertainty within a broader child and adolescent health context.

The new services based in the North West (a partnership between Alder Hey Children's and Royal Manchester Children's Hospital) and London (a

partnership between Great Ormond Street Hospital, Evelina London and South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust) opened on 1st April 2024. Both services have started to see patients and are prioritising the open cases transferred from the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust including 21 children and young people from Wales.

More regional services are planned in the coming years. The NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee and colleagues from Cardiff University Health Board attend the NHS Children and Young Peoples Gender Service Programme Board (South West England) with Bristol Royal Hospital for Children as a phase 2 regional provider, with the aim of bringing services closer to home for Welsh patients.

All of the providers will deliver services in the same way, working to a single NHS service specification and clinical model in alignment with the recommendations of the Cass Review.

There is a single, national waiting list for the service, managed by NHS Arden & Greater East Midlands Commissioning Support Service. As of the 31st March 2024, there were 259 Welsh patients on the waiting list for the Children and Young People's service. They hold the details of all children and young people who had previously been referred to the service at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and are receiving new referrals directly from referrers. Children and Young people will be seen in order of referral date. In Wales, referrals are made from CAMHS and are prior approved through the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee.

2.0 The Final Report

The [final report](#) from the independent review of gender identity services for children and young people was published on 10 April 2024.

The Joint Commissioning Committee is committed to securing safe, sustainable, robust and evidence based gender identity services for the children and young people of Wales and as such welcomes the final report.

The report describes what is known about the young people who are seeking NHS support around their gender identity and sets out the recommended clinical approach to care and support they should expect, the interventions that should be available, and how services should be organised across the country.

It also makes recommendations on the quality improvement and research infrastructure required to ensure that the evidence base underpinning care is strengthened. NHS England's response to the final report can be found [here](#).

There are a number of recommendations that extend to the adult gender identity service. NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee will consider the recommendations of the final report in the review of the service specification for the adult gender identity service in Wales which is planned for 2024.

NHS England has committed to setting out a full implementation plan, following full consideration of the final report, in due course, including the detail and structure of their approach. They have also set out a 7 immediate priorities as they continue to build a new service configuration with increased capacity and that works to an evidence-based model of care as set out below:

1. NHS England will continue to fully support the newly opened children and young people's gender services based in London and the Northwest as they operationalise and expand their new services. Helping them to overcome challenges around staff recruitment will be a top priority as this will determine the pace at which they will be able to see new patients from the waiting list in addition to supporting the care of all those patients who have been transferred as a result of the closure of the Tavistock GIDS.
2. NHS England will do everything possible to accelerate its programme of work to bring on board additional regional service providers in line with your interim advice to mobilise regional centres led by experienced children's hospitals. We are supporting Bristol Royal Hospital for Children (part of University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust) to develop a mobilisation plan that describes how a new service will open in the autumn this year. In addition, paediatric specialist hospital Trusts across the country are working with us to explore the possibility of hosting additional Children and Young People's Gender Services.

The NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee and colleagues from Cardiff & Vale University Health Board attend the NHS CYP Gender Service Programme Board (South West) with Bristol Royal Hospital for Children as a phase 2 regional provider. The Board are considering how services can be brought closer to home for Welsh patients with the potential of a satellite clinic being set up on Health Board premises as an initial starting point for collaborative working.

3. The clinical approach set out in our published interim service specification remains consistent with the findings and recommendations of your review and we will continue to apply this as we look to bring on board additional regional centres. As we look to develop a final version of this service specification, we will particularly strengthen the description of the infrastructure that will be needed for the new services to operate within regional networks to ensure the specialist regional centres are connected with a matrix of local secondary care paediatric services, children and young people's mental health services, primary care, and school nursing. We would expect to launch a public consultation on any revisions to the service specification during the course of 24/25 and to provide Integrated Care Boards with the guidance and support they will need to build the local services.
4. NHS England will publish a separate, but related service specification by June 2024 that defines access into the new children and young people's gender services. We are currently considering the responses during our public consultation that closed in March. As part of this, we will consider relevant findings and recommendations in your final report, including the importance you attach to ensuring all parents have access to support in understanding the importance on keeping options open and the risks of enabling a premature social transition. We also note your support for our consultation proposal to only allow referrals into the specialist services from secondary care providers which would bring an end to direct referrals from primary care.
5. NHS England will commission the required professional training curriculum and competencies framework, not just for staff working in the new gender services but also for clinicians working in secondary care, primary and community care.

The NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee have written to Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW) to set up a working group to consider current training available for gender care. This work will include linking with the work being undertaken by NHS England to ensure consistency of approach and access to training materials.

6. NHS England will review the use of gender affirming hormones through a process of updated evidence review and public consultation, similar to the rigorous process that was followed to review the use of puberty suppressing hormones. In the meantime, you have made clear that the new providers should be 'extremely cautious' when considering whether to refer young people under 18 years for consideration of hormone

intervention. In order to support the providers in following your advice we have established a national multi-disciplinary team (MDT) that will review and need to agree all recommendations for hormone intervention, and we are pleased to confirm that Professor Judith Ellis has agreed to chair this MDT on an interim basis while a permanent chair is appointed. The first meeting of this new national MDT will take place later this month.

The access criteria for the Welsh Gender Service provided by Cardiff & Vale University Health Board is already age 18 plus, therefore no young people under 18 are seen or offered gender affirming hormones before their 18th birthday under the current service specification. The NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee will also review the use of gender affirming hormones as part of the planned review of the adult service specification for non-surgical interventions commencing in 2024.

7. NHS England has already announced that it is bringing forward its review of the adult service specifications, and we have written to the Chief Executives of the organisations that host the GDCs to inform them that this will be undertaken in the context of a broader, systemic review of the operation and delivery of the GDCs. NHS England will provide more detail very soon, but we envisage it will be informed by the deployment of external quality improvement experts into the services. In view of your advice about the need for caution in the initiation of medical interventions for young people under 18 years of age, our letter instructs the adult gender clinics to implement a pause on offering first appointments to young people below their 18th birthday. This letter also makes clear that NHS England expects full cooperation from the GDCs in the delivery of the data linkage study, on which we have corresponded separately.

The NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee will consider this as part of the planned review of the adult service specification for non-surgical interventions in commencing in 2024.