

NZ Media Council Case 1260

Chris Pook, 14th May 2026

Response to the Herald's Formal Submission

The Amended Reversibility Sentence Remains Inaccurate

The Herald claims that this amendment addresses the accuracy concern:

"Puberty blockers have long been thought of as fully reversible, although this was disputed by the Cass Review, which said the claim that there were no lasting negative effects was lacking evidence."

The amendment remains inaccurate in three respects. First, framing reversibility as something that had "long been thought" presents it as a consensus the Cass Review merely challenges. Both Cass and the 2025 US DHHS Review found that reversibility was never adequately evidenced. It was an unexamined assumption embedded in clinical guidelines, not an established finding later overturned.

Secondly, the word "disputed" implies two sides of an open debate. The Cass Review was the product of the most rigorous independent systematic review conducted in this field, using internationally validated methodology. Its findings were corroborated by the equally robust US DHHS Review. Advocates for puberty blockers have lost the scientific debate.

Third, the characterisation of Cass as finding that "the claim that there were no lasting negative effects was lacking evidence" is a gross misrepresentation. The Review **found positive evidence of harm**, as summarised in my complaint.

The Principle 1 Balance Argument

The Herald cites rulings 3398 and 3594 for the proposition that Principle 1 does not require every article to present every side of a debate. That aspect is not in dispute. My complaint is not that the article failed to canvas every argument about "gender medicine". My complaint is that the article stated an unattributed scientific claim as plain fact, and that claim is directly contradicted by the Cass Review. The review which the same article cites as the basis for the Government's ban. A publication cannot cite a review as authoritative in one sentence and present as fact a claim that review finds to be undemonstrated in another. The cited rulings address the balance of voices; this complaint addresses the accuracy of a stated fact.

Professor Hofman's Suicidality Claim: The Herald's Editorial Responsibility

The Herald's submission states that Professor Hofman's quotes are attributed as such and that one unattributed line has been amended. This does not address the most serious aspect of my complaint, which is not attribution but editorial responsibility.

The amended article continues to state that gender-dysphoric young people without access to puberty blockers "become suicidal." This claim is published without challenge, without evidence, and in direct contradiction to the best available evidence. As I wrote in my original complaint, the statement also breaches established safe reporting guidelines on suicide, which are embedded in New Zealand's national suicide prevention framework, the Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2025–2029. Those guidelines require that claims about suicide are evidence-based, that suicide is not attributed to a single cause, and that reporting avoids creating the impression that suicide is the expected outcome in certain situations. Professor Hofman's statement fails all three tests.

Again, as I wrote in my original complaint, the specific risks of publishing this sort of irresponsible misinformation were addressed in the Review of Suicides and Gender Dysphoria at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, an official UK Government report. The author, Professor Louis Appleby, concluded that the data do not support claims of a causal link between restriction of puberty blockers and increased suicide, and states that it is "unfortunate that puberty-blocking drugs have come to be seen as the touchstone issue, the difference between acceptance and non-acceptance." Prof. Appleby's review warns explicitly that one risk of irresponsible public discourse in this area is that "already-distressed adolescents [will hear] the message that 'people like you, facing similar problems, are killing themselves', leading to imitative suicide or self-harm." I will paraphrase this plainly: **Publication of irresponsible statements about the causes of suicide, such as those made by Prof Hofman and published by the NZ Herald, can cause vulnerable people to become suicidal.**

Attribution of the statement to Professor Hofman does not discharge the Herald's responsibility. A publication that prints an evidentially unsupported and potentially harmful claim without challenge remains editorially responsible for the impression it creates. The fact that the source was recommended by the Science Media Centre as politically unbiased is not the relevant test. The relevant tests are accuracy, evidential support, and compliance with safe reporting standards. Again, Professor Hofman's statement fails all three of these.

Remaining Grounds

On the '*Hitting pause*' subheading: The Herald submits the subheading is clearly a reference to Professor Hofman's comments. My complaint under Principle 6 is not that it is confusing but that it presents the metaphor that puberty blockers give confused children "time to think" as the Herald's own position. The Cass Review (S83) explicitly contradicts this: "there is no evidence that puberty blockers buy time to think".

On the subsequent opinion piece: A subsequently published opinion piece cannot remedy a breach in an earlier article. Each article is assessed on its own merits at the time of publication.

I ask the Media Council to uphold my complaint under Principles 1, 4, and 6, and to require the Herald to remedy this not only as requested in my complaint, but additionally to acknowledge that the evidence does not support the claim that withholding puberty blockers causes suicidality and that claims that they do are both harmful and irresponsible.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C.J. Pook". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "P" and "k".

Dr Chris Pook