

Written Ministerial Statement

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The Executive Office

PUBLICATION OF HISTORICAL CLERICAL CHILDHOOD ABUSE RESEARCH REPORTS

Published at 2pm on Wednesday 22 July 2026

Ms O'Neill (The First Minister) and Mrs Little-Pengelly (The deputy First Minister): Today we are publishing the findings of three research studies that were commissioned to investigate different aspects of Historical Clerical Child Abuse (HCCA). These studies were commissioned to strengthen the evidence base, improve understanding, and inform future policy.

The reports published today are:

- **A Scoping Study of Records Held by Faith Organisations, Social Services and Criminal Justice Agencies**, undertaken by a consortium comprising Queen's University Belfast, the University of Birmingham and Outcomes IMPS Ltd as lead contractor.
- **A Review of Victims' and Survivors' Experiences and Expectations**, undertaken by Tim Chapman Consulting Ltd.
- **A Review of Current Safeguarding Practices within the Faith Sector**, undertaken by Trilateral Research.

Historical clerical child abuse has caused profound and lasting harm. For many victims and survivors, the abuse they endured in faith-based settings has had long lasting impacts that have continued throughout their lives. Too many people were not believed, supported or protected when they most needed help. We acknowledge that harm and extend our deepest sympathy to all those who suffered abuse. All abuse of children is wrong and ought not to have happened.

We acknowledge the meaningful engagement by many victims and survivors and thank every person who contributed to shaping the research and helping to bring the truth out into the open. We recognise the courage of those victims and survivors who engaged with these studies. We are sincerely grateful to everyone who participated in the research.

The findings of these reports provide important insights into the nature and extent of historical clerical child abuse. They highlight the devastating consequences of abuse and underscore the importance of ensuring that effective safeguarding measures are consistently applied across all faith organisations. The reports indicate that, while safeguarding arrangements within faith settings have improved significantly over recent decades, gaps and challenges remain. We have already started working on plans to address this and will work with Executive colleagues, statutory partners, safeguarding bodies, victims and survivors and faith organisations to identify areas where further improvements are required to strengthen child protection arrangements and safeguard children and young people.

We also remain committed to ensuring that victims and survivors are properly supported. Work is progressing on arrangements to provide access to counselling and other specialist support services

for those who need them, recognising the enduring impact that abuse can have throughout a person's life.

These are complex and deeply sensitive issues that demand careful attention. Junior Ministers met with victims and survivors on 30 April to discuss next steps to design support services and to develop a programme of work to improve safeguarding across faith organisations. Officials have subsequently held further meetings with victims and survivors to take this work forward.

We are committed to continued engagement with victims and survivors, and our priority is to ensure that their voices remain at the centre of this work and to ensure that lessons are learned from the past, and that children and young people are protected now and into the future.

The reports are being published on The Executive Office website today.