



**Number: WG46923**

Welsh Government  
**Consultation Document**

# Belonging, engaging and participating

Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance

Date of issue: 5 June 2023

Action required: Responses by 20 July 2023

## Overview

This consultation seeks views on the new Belonging, engaging and participating Guidance on improving learner engagement and attendance.

This consultation is for anyone with a role or interest in school attendance, including local authorities, schools, governing bodies, parents/carers and other interested parties.

## How to respond

Responses to this consultation should be emailed/posted to the address below to arrive by **20 July 2023** at the latest.

Responses to the consultation can be made by using the questionnaire at the back of the document.

## Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

A separate piece of work is underway to update the exclusions guidance. A separate consultation on this guidance will be undertaken in due course.

The consultation documents can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at [gov.wales/consultations](https://gov.wales/consultations)

## Contact details

For more information:  
Supporting Achievement and Safeguarding  
Equity in Education Division  
The Education Directorate  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

email: [ccd.sas@gov.wales](mailto:ccd.sas@gov.wales)

This document is also available in Welsh: <https://www.llyw.cymru/perthyn-ymsgysylltu-chyfranogi>



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## **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)**

The Welsh Government will be data controller for Welsh Government consultations and for any personal data you provide as part of your response to the consultation. Welsh Ministers have statutory powers they will rely on to process this personal data which will enable them to make informed decisions about how they exercise their public functions. The lawful basis for processing information in this data collection exercise is our public task; that is, exercising our official authority to undertake the core role and functions of the Welsh Government. (Art 6(1)(e)).

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about or planning future consultations. In the case of joint consultations this may also include other public authorities. Where the Welsh Government undertakes further analysis of consultation responses then this work may be commissioned to be carried out by an accredited third party (e.g. a research organisation or a consultancy company). Any such work will only be undertaken under contract. Welsh Government's standard terms and conditions for such contracts set out strict requirements for the processing and safekeeping of personal data.

In order to show that the consultation was carried out properly, the Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then redact them before publishing.

You should also be aware of our responsibilities under Freedom of Information legislation and that the Welsh Government may be under a legal obligation to disclose some information.

If your details are published as part of the consultation response then these published reports will be retained indefinitely. Any of your data held otherwise by Welsh Government will be kept for no more than three years.

## Your rights

Under the data protection legislation, you have the right:

- to be informed of the personal data held about you and to access it
- to require us to rectify inaccuracies in that data
- to (in certain circumstances) object to or restrict processing
- for (in certain circumstances) your data to be 'erased'
- to (in certain circumstances) data portability
- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection.

For further details about the information the Welsh Government holds and its use, or if you want to exercise your rights under the UK GDPR, please see contact details below:

Data Protection Officer:  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
CARDIFF  
CF10 3NQ  
e-mail:  
[dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales](mailto:dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales)

The contact details for the Information Commissioner's Office are:  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire SK9 5AF  
Tel: 0303 123 1113  
Website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

## **Summary**

### **Why are we proposing this guidance?**

The review of attendance trends undertaken in 2022 and the subsequent report from the Children Young People education committee has reinforced how important it is that we consider attendance alongside other influences and factors such as socio-economic status, wellbeing, and wider systemic issues. Understanding the underlying factors behind learner absence and supporting greater consistency of approach to school level attendance and other related policies are the key drivers behind this guidance.

Attendance cannot be considered in isolation. The many interrelated and overlapping causes of absence and the varied nature of the learner experience in school and at home mean that whole school strategies and strong multi-agency working arrangements are needed, designed to support all learners, regardless of their socio-economic status, wellbeing and mental health needs, social or behavioural issues or additional learning needs (ALN). There is a growing understanding that schools also need to support learners in developing a sense of belonging, connectivity and engagement with school, and to build their resilience and ability to cope with the challenges they face.

### **What is the consultation about?**

The guidance has been developed to support maintained schools, pupil referral units, parents/carers and local authorities with improving learner engagement and attendance. It sets out approaches that can be used by schools, PRUs and EOTAS settings to help improve learner engagement and attendance, and by local authority services and other partners when attendance issues escalate. The approaches should be adopted, developed and built upon so that they are aligned to the needs of children and parents/carers.

### **Where are we now?**

We are all familiar with the challenges the pandemic has presented to our education community, one of which has been the increase in learner absence, across all year groups and across all characteristics of learners. We know there are a range of reasons or underlying causes for learner absence, and that this has been further exacerbated over the last two years.

The link between attendance and educational attainment is clear - missing sustained periods of school presents a real risk to a child's attainment and can also lead to them feeling more disengaged from their education.

One of the key findings to emerge is the impact the cost of living is having on attendance. Tackling the impact of poverty on attainment is a major priority and we know that attendance at school is key to good educational outcomes, especially for children and young people from lower income families. This means that we must have the right offer in place within our schools, that we reach out to children and young people and their families and that we support and foster aspiration.

We know that greater engagement with families has been shown to have a positive impact on tackling the impact of poverty on attainment and improving attendance. That is why our Community Focused Schools approach is vital in responding to this challenge. Family Engagement Officers in particular have a key role to play in ensuring that positive partnerships are created and that bespoke support is offered. Schools that know their families well can ensure measures are put in place which will help children maintain good attendance and engagement.

Every young person should be given the opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of their background. Tackling learner absence is key to this.

## **The guidance consultation**

This consultation seeks to gather views on the clarity and usefulness of the guidance to be a useful, practical document for leaders, teachers and other practitioners in maintained schools, PRUs and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) settings. It also outlines the important role of family and community engagement in securing improved engagement and attendance amongst learners.

The guidance is divided into:

1. Foreword
2. Principles and approaches
3. Whole-school attendance strategies, policies and practices for all
4. Recording and analysing attendance data
5. Early identification and learner support
6. Family engagement and multi-agency support
7. Formal absence management

Appendix 1: PSP Form, review and cessation record

## Consultation questions

**Question 1** – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance provide suitable useful, practical information for leaders, teachers and other practitioners in schools, pupil referral units and education otherwise than at school settings to enable schools and governing bodies to improve learner engagement and attendance?

**Question 2** – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance clearly set out the legal responsibility of the school and governors?

**Question 3** – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance clearly set out the responsibilities of the local authority?

**Question 4** – Are the contributing factors and the many possible reasons for absence adequately covered?

**Question 5** – Are learners with protected characteristics included?

**Question 6** – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance provide sufficient information for parents and carers to understand their statutory responsibility for ensuring that their compulsory school-age children receive full-time education?

**Question 7** – Is the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance explained clearly? If not, which areas could be improved and why? Are there aspects that you particularly like, and if so, why?

**Question 8** – Is the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance user-friendly? If not, which areas could be improved and why? Are there aspects that you particularly like and if so, why?

**Question 9** – On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being ‘not at all’ and 5 being ‘very’) how helpful do you find the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance? Are there improvements you would like to see?

**Question 10** – Does the draft ‘Belonging, engaging and participating’ guidance provide adequate information in relation to:

- i. explaining the principles and approaches that should be adopted in improving learner engagement and attendance?
- ii. identifying the contributing factors that may impact on attendance?
- iii. signposting to further guidance and good practice?
- iv. recording and analysis of attendance data?
- v. family engagement and multi-agency support?
- vi. formal absence management?

**Question 11** – For statistical purposes, persistent absence has been defined in Wales as being absent for over 20% of half-day school sessions. The Welsh Government proposes that the statistical definition of persistent absence be

amended to over 10% of sessions, which is the definition currently in use in England.  
Do you agree or not with this proposal and why?

Please use the consultation response form to respond to the above questions.



