

05 September 2022

Dear

ATISN 16557 Consultation with EHE people re legislation changes

Information requested

Thank you for your clarification letter which I received on 9 August 2022. You asked for:

- 1. How many home educated young people under the age of 18 responded (either in writing or verbally) to the Welsh Government consultation WG35754 Home Education – Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and a Handbook for Home Educators?**

The consultation was open to all age groups and stakeholders. However, the consultation did not require respondents to provide their date of birth or age. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

- 2. What views and opinions were expressed by the home educated young people age 18 and under, that Welsh Government consulted with in relation to the above consultation in question 1?**

See response to question 1 above.

- 3. Please provide a copy of all responses from Home educated young people age 18 and under in relation to the above consultation in question 1.**

See response to question 1 above.

- 4. How many home educated young people under the age of 18 attended the following meetings in relation to the above consultation in question 1?**

**South Wales Cardiff City Stadium Friday 11th October 2019 10.00 - 13.00pm
North Wales Venue Cymru, Llandudno Friday 18th October 2019 10.00 - 13.00pm
Mid and West Wales Liberty Stadium, Swansea Monday 21st October 2019 10.00 - 13.00pm**

A total of 8 young people attended across these events. We are unable to provide a breakdown per event as this could lead to identification.

- 5. What questions were asked to home educated young people under the age of 18 at these meetings listed in question 4?**

The events were split in to two parts.

During the first session, participants were invited to consider the Home Education Handbook (easy read version) for parents and decide what information they felt would be important to tell another child who was thinking about becoming home educated. This was presented as either a straight challenge to make the Home Education Handbook more child-friendly or a request for the younger participants to produce some form of information (for example a poster, an audio recording, a Word document etc.) for other children to guide them through what to expect as a home educated child. During the second session participants were invited to suggest a variety of ways that the ‘someone’ could recognise the type and complexity of education they were receiving. They were able to do this as an ‘interview’ with another young person or the facilitator, posters, documents or notes. The youngest participants, who struggled with the concept of a home visit, were asked to design a poster to show an alien visiting them what and how they learned if they were not going to school.

Participants were also asked for their opinions on such things as:

- What sort of person should do the visits?
- How often?
- Where should they take place?
- What should happen if the ‘someone’ doesn’t think the education is good enough?
- Should the child or young person always be seen?
- Should the child or young person ever be seen on their own?

Time permitting, the participants were also asked, as a home educated child, what additional support they may like from their local authority such as access to Welsh language lessons, exam support, sporting/educational trips, learning resources and IT sessions. The eldest young people were also asked if they felt there would ever be a need for additional support around ‘health and relationships’.

6. What were the home educated young people’s replies to those questions (either in writing or verbally)?

The participants felt the text used was too negative in places. For example – ‘*will my child miss the social part of school*’ was felt to potentially create concerns for parents when in reality their personal experience of home education was one of a full social life with many friends. They also felt that some of the language was too biased, in that it gave the impression that home education was more difficult or less valid than education at school. For example, under the section on ‘full-time education’ they objected to the negative tone of the phrase ‘it can be difficult to run home educating to set times.’; they maintained that the text should be more neutral and be replaced with the simple statement ‘*Home education does not have to be at set times*’.

Similarly they felt that the section on ‘If I’m feeling pressurised to home educate by a school ...’ was too negative and the handbook suggested that a child who is not coping should always be made to feel that they had to fight to stay in school, as though school was always the ‘best option’ for the child. They stated that ‘*making a child work too*

hard [at school] MAY make them reject learning. If they have less pressure on them [by being home educated] they will feel more comfortable learning.'

Specifically, they did not like the definitions of 'suitable' and 'efficient'. They said that the explanations were too basic and pointed out that '*Children like to learn any way. If you give them opportunities they will find something to spark their interest and will [usually] want to learn that [topic] and will guide their own learning. If you try to force children to learn then it may make them hate learning. So if they choose what they want it will help them want to learn for the rest of their lives'*'.

Under the section on 'How do I educate?' they felt it could be summed up with the phrase '*so long as you're learning you can do it however you like*'. They also argued that the information on flexi-schooling was too brief and failed to point out the advantages. '*Flexi-schooling lets you have opportunities from both worlds and experience life in and out of school*'. They also wanted clarification on how many children can be taught together before the group needs to be registered as a school '*What if it's a family of six kids, will that make it a school?*'

They felt that with a little adaptation, the Home Education Handbook (easy read version) could be made suitable for older children as well as parents. They also suggested having a '*place on-line or possibly an 'App' (for home educated children and young people) to access educational opportunities and to know when and where they are happening*'.

Feedback on possible content for a children's version of the Home Education Handbook (or similar resource)

The participants were asked to suggest ideas for a resource for children and young people entitled 'My Journey to Home Education – What to Expect'.

Most attendees who had been home educated for several years were initially slightly confused over the need for such a resource since, to them, the information was obvious. Most reported however that they are frequently asked by non-home educated children what being home educated is like so were able to rationalise the aims and purpose of the resource. Two participants had only become home educated in the last six months and were pleased that such a resource may be available in future. In one case, the young person explained that her parent had carefully researched home education with her online before she became de-registered so she had a fair understanding of what it meant. Further discussion however showed the parent had not fully understood the freedom it gave them as the young person understood that she had to continue with studies as close to the school curriculum as possible and needed to follow school hours. In the second case, the young person was clearly confused over what home education meant. It was only as he discussed all of the activities that his family had arranged for him that he realised that, whilst he was not being taught lessons like at school, he was definitely learning a wide range of things and making progress. This young person was very supportive of the idea of a bespoke

children and young people's information leaflet/poster as he felt it would really have helped him understand what and why his parents had decided this approach for him.

When asked 'What should the information look like?', most of the young people who expressed an opinion on the format said that it would be acceptable as a poster, leaflet or simple booklet as long as they could read it and it wasn't too wordy or boring. However, two of the younger teenagers were keen to suggest that it needed to not be too simple because they (home educated children) '*aren't stupid*'. One attendee recommended that a much simpler version for children and young people with ALN (particularly ASD) would also be useful as they felt their sibling would not be able to access the more complex, colourful posters/leaflets they were designing. The older attendees felt that a leaflet or poster aimed at younger children was a good idea but that, as long as the Handbook for Home Education (easy Read version) was adjusted as recommended above, most older teenagers would be '*okay with that*'.

When asked 'What is Home Education?' those who expressed a view, felt that it was a positive thing; for them, it was the norm. For those four individuals who had left school due to personal issues (two of whom had left early in primary education and two within the last 6 months), home education was different from school but they recognised that they were still learning. Most of the young people were happy to be home educated and wanted to promote it as a good alternative to school. The other two, newly home educated people who had recently de-registered had not yet decided on its value but were keen to state that, for them it was a much better alternative to school. The young people's comments about home education included:

- *Your parents or grandparents teaching you instead of school.*
- *It can adapt to you and your needs.*
- *We get to see other people's lifestyles – how people are vegan/vegetarian.*
- *Small groups or individual attention is better.*
- *No distractions at home – so information sticks better* – this was a point that the young person was very keen to emphasise.
- *[It's about] problem solving, at home you learn to think outside the box.*

When asked 'How is home education different from school?' many of the comments tended to focus on their negative experiences of school rather than the positives of home education:

- *I don't get picked on by the teachers*
- *I don't get bullied*
- *I get a proper English and maths tutor that my mum pays for so I can learn properly not just be put in the bottom set 'cause the teachers don't know how to handle my ADHD and think I'm thick 'cause I can't write right.* (this young person clearly had significant dyslexia or a similar additional learning need)
- *I can learn with my brother who has autism*
- *I can study what interests me*
- *I can learn about black history*

- *I can do more sport and start to learn my hairdressing early*
- *Learning at my own pace*
- *Learning cooking with my Nan*

The only really negative comment regarding home education that one of the young people new to home education commented on, was his regret at '*not seeing my friends in school.*'

When asked 'Who will teach me?' the young people gave the following responses:

- *My Mum and Dad*
- *My Nan*
- *My neighbours and community*
- *From the internet and telly – Curiosity Stream is good!*
- *From home education groups where we meet up and do art and stuff together*
- *I teach myself*
- *I go on bush craft courses*
- *I see a tutor a couple of times a week to help with my English and maths*
- *My mum's friend who's a teacher gives us stuff to learn and I do some stuff online.*

When asked 'Where will I learn?' responses included:

- *At my house or at my grandparents*
- *At my mum's hairdressers shop*
- *At the library*
- *At my tutor's house*
- *I learn pretty much everywhere because my parents are really good at turning pretty much anywhere we go into something to learn.*
- *In the woods/countryside*
- *We go on trips to places like Chester to see the architecture and history, and we looked at what the buildings were made of too*

When asked to consider 'What will I do? and 'What will I learn all day?' the young people identified a very wide range of activities as learning opportunities. Most were able to distil these into the main groups of reading, writing, communication, maths, numeracy, history, basic science (geology and biological topics were popular), music, languages (Latin and some basic Welsh), sports, different cultures and religions, IT, cookery, budgeting, enterprise activities and wider skills such as self-reliance, problem solving and team work. Specific activities identified included:

- Formal English and maths lessons, frequently by paid tutors
- Reading books and writing reviews on them – often word-processed
- Budgeting for shopping or to create business ideas

- Working on online tools such as Minecraft and Lego Build which focus on design and problem solving as well as basic programming
- Creating spreadsheets, Word documents, basic programming, designing promotional leaflets for their enterprise business etc.
- Visits to museums, historical or cultural sites
- Visits to food festivals to discover about cuisines across the world
- Learning basic woodwork and plumbing skills from members of the community
- Practising circus skills in which they develop sufficient competency to teach such skills to other children at festivals
- Cookery skills by learning from grandparents
- Playing a musical instrument
- Hairdressing
- Watching documentaries on TV or online research
- Researching online on topics such as tattooing, graffiti and body piercing to support their interest in body and street art and awareness of health and safety
- Environmental studies by visiting the Centre for Alternative Technology and Technquest
- Bush craft including fire starting, den building and identifying edible and non-edible foods
- Animal care for chickens, horses, reptiles etc. in the home

Only one young person followed a formal curriculum which was broadly based on a school timetable and used resources based on school text books and similar. This young person was new to home education. All others had relatively less structured days, but all clearly had specific learning times throughout the week, most learnt via topics rather than subjects.

All but the two newest home educated young people were keen to point out that they had many friends and some had maintained friendships from their time at school. They met them in a variety of situations including:

- Cubs and scouts
- Youth clubs
- Home education groups
- Within their community
- Music groups
- Festivals and events
- Frequent use of social media for those who recently left school to remain in contact with friends from school but, interestingly, the older young people reported that the use of social media is not that common among the home education community, most contact is face to face.

Only three of the young people wanted to sit GCSEs as they saw the costs as prohibitive for their parents. They also reported that, although they were aware that should they wish to go on to Further Education (one expressed the desire to become

a solicitor and another wanted to opportunity to go to university) GSCEs may be useful, they were frustrated with the difficulty in finding examination centres that would support their choices and the need to complete controlled assessments (course work).

Three felt that GCSEs were of no use to them as they saw their future life in vocational professions (hairdressing, building etc.) and were aware that they could access college courses for these without GCSEs. They were aware however that to get into college without GCSEs they '*may need to work a bit harder to prove you have the skills they [the college] want*'.

All of the older young people were aware that they could study GCSEs but that they did not have to do them. Many of them were unfamiliar with at what age you may be entered for GCSEs, what it might involve, and had never experienced a formal 'test' or were even aware of what school year equivalent they were currently. One young person, who was actually the equivalent of Year 11, wanted to sit her maths and Latin this year and was planning on doing a 'few more' next year but had no idea if this was the normal age – she just knew that she could start college when she was 16 if she wanted to.

Most of the young people knew that they could go back to school and felt that it should be included in the information/handbook as '*you can go back at any time if you want – it's [your] choice*'. However, some responded with the statement '*Only if you or your parents want to*' which then led to concerns about if the question meant would they ever have to go back to school. Some were very alarmed at the idea that 'someone' could force them to go to school as this had not occurred to most of them. This took some careful reassurance that it could only happen if they were not getting a good enough education at home and prepared the way for the second session on evidencing 'suitable education'.

Home Visits

This session generated the most diverse feedback from the young people with three of the six attendees having recent experience of home visits. It is not clear if the others had not had visits or if they just were not aware of them. However, this was the issue that those who had already spoken with their families about the 'new law' (as referred to by participants) were most concerned about. Three of the older young people were concerned that it would be a 'snooper's charter' and more about checking if their mums were 'good parents' than about their education. Two of the young people were quite happy with the idea that a welfare check should be an integral part of the home visit as they were sufficiently aware of the existence of child abuse to recognise a need to establish all is well with the home educated child. All of those who were able to understand the ramifications of welfare checks and the possible benefit of safeguarding children, agreed that they could be part of the visit provided they were not the main focus.

When asked 'Who should come?' the young people gave a wide range of responses. They felt the person should:

- Probably be a teacher or social worker who is open to new ways of learning, can communicate with children, is friendly and can understand education is a very broad term and can happen in very different ways. They should not arrive with a checklist.
- Be open-minded to alternative forms of education, understanding the differences between groups of people i.e. home educators, travelling families/gypsies etc.
- Encouraging and enthusiastic about achievements and non-judgemental towards families
- Someone who knows about home education and has been trained.

One young person talked about how the visitor shouldn't be a '*normal teacher who doesn't know about how we learn.*' Their concern was that a teacher would expect them to be taught as though in school and would judge them poorly if they did not recognise their learning processes and didn't see lots of written work in exercise books. The two eldest young people suggested that the visitor need not be either a teacher or a social worker but that it may be preferable to have a specifically trained person, possibly from the home education community or background, who would recognise '*good learning*'. Alternatively, the visiting person should be trained by someone like that.

Most young people felt that fairly short annual visits were acceptable as long as there were no problems. One young person suggested visits every three months or so lasting a few hours but stressed these visits should all be about support and '*helping Mum with the teaching bits*' meaning offering resources and helping with what to actually do and teach if needed. Most were happy with the idea of visits to the home provided the visit was pre-arranged. Feelings regarding un-announced visits were very negative. Many were happy with visits taking place at other mutually agreed locations such as libraries, leisure centres, cafes or even one suggested Council Offices. None were supportive of them being held at schools.

Assessing Suitable Education

All of the young people (with the exception of the circumstance mentioned above) were happy with the idea of meeting the visitor themselves and some reported that they would be keen to show their work. One young person was very keen to suggest the importance of the visitor seeing the child on their own for a short while to check if everything was okay.

Some were a little concerned at first that they may need to complete specific work to demonstrate their skills, (e.g. write an essay or do a maths test) but once it was explained that they could show something they already have, they were more reassured. The young people were very inventive with the evidence they felt they could show any visitor to demonstrate their learning. Suggestions included:

- Written work such as book reviews
- Worksheets they have completed
- Talking about their favourite topic that they have been learning about
- Showing reports from tutors
- Photos and video clips
- Things they have made
- Playing musical instruments
- Showing leaflets and resources they have used from zoo visits etc.
- Rocks and articles they have collected on visits
- Showing websites they use
- Awards, certificates in Scouts or other similar forms of recognition that they have achieved

Other considerations

When asked to suggest specific support needs the young people gave a range of ideas including:

- Funding for equipment: computer, pencils, pens etc.
- Access to science equipment and/or support with studying science
- Funding for examination fees, for transport to exam centres and for tests to prepare for exams. '*Don't have enough money to pay for course work and exams so may need funding.*'
- Support workers for children with additional needs
- Easy ways for parents to learn Welsh so they can help and encourage their children with Welsh

Most young people requested support for learning IT but some wanted it on a one-to-one while others suggested lessons for their parents. There was no overall support for wellbeing and health sessions (Relationships and Sexuality Education) but they did not feel it would be inappropriate to offer it. Their wish list for support as home educated learners focused mainly on funding and included funding for:

- one-to-one tutors for children at home including for health and wellbeing
- parents to quit work and home-school full time
- gym and swimming passes
- educational visits (Techniquest, zoos etc.)
- transport for home education groups
- help and training in how home education works

Other suggestions included:

- Access to virtual learning platforms including online tutors

- More awareness in schools about racism and the effect of bullying on Black Ethnic Minority children). ‘*There’s lots of stuff on other bullying and mental health, but no-one takes racial bullying seriously.*’

A couple of the young people expressed the wish that they could just go into a school to do science ‘properly’ but neither wanted to join in with the main classes. Others suggested having a home education website that would signpost the support available and where the Welsh Government can put up a range of free teaching resources for home educators/parents to use. Young people also suggested that the Welsh Government pay for their parents to be trained in things like IT, and how to teach GCSEs.

7. What other views and opinions were expressed by the home educated people at those meetings in question 4, in relation to proposed changes to Home Education legislation?

See response to question 6.

8. How many home educated young people under the age of 18 responded (either in writing or verbally) to the Welsh Government consultation WG39220 - The Children Act 2004 Education Database (Wales) Regulations 2020; & The Education (Information about Children in Independent Schools) (Wales) Regulations 2020?

The consultation was open to all age groups and stakeholders. However, respondents were not required to provide their date of birth or age when responding to the consultation. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

9. What views and opinions were expressed by the home educated people aged 18 and under, that Welsh Government consulted with in relation to the above consultation in question 8?

See response to question 8 above.

10. Please provide a copy of all responses from home educated young people aged 18 and under in relation to the above consultation in question 8.

See response to question 8 above.

11. How many home educated young people under the age of 18 attended the following meetings in relation to the consultation referenced in question 8?

North Wales Venue - Venue Cymru, Llandudno 06.03.2020

South Wales - Orbit Business Centre, Merthyr Tydfil 26.03.2020

Mid and West Wales Liberty Stadium, Swansea Monday 13.03.2020

These meetings were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

12. What questions were asked to Home educated young people under the age of 18 at the meetings listed in question 11?

These meetings were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

13. What were the Home educated young people's replies to those questions (either in writing or verbally)?

These meetings were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

14. What other views and opinions were expressed by the Home educated young people at those meetings listed in question 11, in relation to proposed changes to Home Education legislation?

These meetings were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

15. Have there been any other consultations (either written, verbally, virtually or in person) seeking the views and opinions of home educated young people under 18 years of age and either

- the Education Minister of the time (Jeremy Miles now, Kirsty Williams previously)
- the Childrens Commissioner of the time (Rocio Cifuentes now, Sally Holland previously)
- meetings with any relevant civil service staff in the Education Directorate

between 01/01/2018 and 03/08/2022 regarding legislation changes to Elective Home Education (including on the 2019 EHE Draft Guidance and the 2020 EHE Database proposals)?

Please provide the dates times and locations of any of these meetings, who they were with and how many home educated young people under the age of 18 were in attendance. Please provide copies of what was discussed at any of these meetings, questions that were asked and the views and opinions of the home educated young people in attendance.

No Welsh Government meetings were held therefore we do not hold this information. The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent human rights institution and as such you should forward any request for information direct to the Commissioner's Office at post@childcomwales.org.uk

16. How many home educated young people under the age of 18 attended the meeting in Builth Wells on 06/12/2018 in relation to the changes to the EHE proposals?

Participants were not required to provide their date of birth or age. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information

17. What questions were asked at the Builth Wells meeting to Home educated young people under the age of 18?

Participants were not required to provide their date of birth or age. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

18. What were the Home educated young people's replies to those questions (either in writing or verbally)?

Participants were not required to provide their date of birth or age. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

19. What other views and opinions were expressed by the Home educated young people at the Builth Wells meeting in relation to the proposed changes to Home Education legislation?

Participants were not required to provide their date of birth or age. Therefore, the Welsh Government does not hold this information.

Our response

The information you requested is enclosed above.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely