

Dear staff of Equity in Education,

On 19th May 2024, Home Ed Cymru requested copies of the PowerPoint slides and handouts that were used in the hosted meetings of early May for home educated children and young people in relation to the proposed databases. However, we still do not seem to have received these. We would be most grateful if these could be shared at your very earliest convenience.

In relation to the aforementioned meetings, we trust it will be helpful to share with you the results of surveys held by Home Ed Cymru on the reasons many home educating families declined to attend, despite such significant concerns about these proposals. We trust this will be received in the manner in which it is intended, namely as constructive feedback that can benefit future engagement.

An online survey of opinions and views of home educators around Wales was carried out via a number of national and regional home educators' groups in the week following the two meetings. The aim was to explore and establish the various reasons why people were not able to attend these meetings, or why they chose not to do so. Home educators were able to select any number of potential responses and to add other reasons or responses to the survey.

Please allow us to share the results of this survey here:

We regret to have to share that the responses (from 156 Welsh home educators) reflected a marked degree of disillusionment and mistrust in the Welsh Government, in the process, or in the seemingly last-minute decision to hold such meetings. These reasons including (in ranked order with most frequently indicated first):

- Felt these meetings were tick-box exercise/were an after the fact addition/were not a true attempt to take on board & act upon opinions.
- Did not think the Welsh Government would listen or wanted to hear any other viewpoints.
- Did not trust the information the Welsh Government would seek to "*disseminate*".
- Objected to the tone and/or content of the "child-friendly" document that Welsh Government had produced (the one with the "ghost children" imagery), disputed its accuracy or appropriateness, and felt it misled children and young people.
- Felt the Welsh Government would not be interested in hearing the voices and opinions of adults and/or children and young people.

- Did not want their children completing the survey form on the Welsh Government's "child-friendly" document as believed the questions are leading.
- Felt the format was not age appropriate
- Crucially, each home educator was given, alongside the choice of other potential reasons, the option to indicate if they declined to attend because they "*have no worries or concerns about the database proposals*". However, **no home educator** gave this as a reason for non-attendance.
- The survey clearly indicated that **offering only an in-person format for home educated children and young people to respond to the "children's" version of the consultation**, one where any child or young person wishing to respond could only do so if they were "seen" by government and local authority staff was a very considerable barriers to home educated children and young people attending and being able to have their voices heard. In addition, the very last-minute decision to hold such meetings provided logistical challenges as well as a discouraging impression to home educators.
 - For example, 57% of respondents stated that the dates and times were inconvenient "*because of other commitments including educational opportunities or exams*" and/or "*lack of suitable advance notice*" meaning they were unable to change existing plans to attend.
 - Inappropriate/inconvenient location and lack of transport including lack of accessibility by public transport were also cited by 20% of respondents.
 - 22% of respondents stated that the format of "*in person only*" was inappropriate and not accessible for their families because of neurodiversity or disabilities.
 - Allowing an in-person only format for children and young people to respond in a "child-friendly" way was also indicated to be a barrier to those who are not known to their local authority, preventing them from being able to express their concerns and opinions. Moreover, even for those families who are known to their local authority, respondents indicated that they did not want to have to express their opinions in person, with such a format being too intimidating and/or lacking in privacy.
- Another key issue identified was that **over half of respondents had not been sent an invitation to, or any information about, these meetings by their local authority.** This, of course, highlights the **lack of true voice or involvement of the home ed community.**

- A short separate survey was thus conducted via Home Ed Cymru to investigate if there were any pattern that may help explain why only some home educators had been informed about these meetings. The results of survey demonstrated a very patchy and inconsistent distribution of families who had or had not been sent an invitation to these meetings. Some LAs seemed to have not sent any invitations or information to “known” home educators. However, other LAs only sent invitations to a few but not all of the home educators that are known to them, rather ironically demonstrating the lack of evidence for usefulness of keeping lists/registers/databases of home educated young children.

In addition, a number of home educators who attended these meetings fed back their experiences to Home Ed Cymru.

Concerns and experiences expressed included:

- The **dissemination of false or misleading information to children**, alongside the **lack of permission or opportunity to correct or address this**, for example, repeating a misquoting of the Education Act that had been stated in the CYP documentation.
- That **responses** to the consultation from home educators who were not able to attend in person were **refused by Welsh Government staff**. Some home educating families had brought responses from CYP who were unable to attend due to circumstances, neurodiversity or because they were not known to local authorities. They were told by Welsh government representatives that these would not be accepted unless the responding families delivered them in person to such meetings.
- It was noted that, when home educators attempted to challenge or discuss misrepresentative paraphrasing of the law or of legal duties, it was stated that this was only the “**interpretation**” of those who were representing the Welsh government. However, this does not correlate with the claims of the documentation, which state “the law says”, rather than “our own personal preference of interpretation would be”.

We hope that you will find the above feedback enlightening and constructive, including in influencing the planning and engagement for future consultations, as well as to help inform the evaluation and interpretation of responses to this most recent “database” consultation.

We trust that making available the PowerPoint slides and handouts that were used in the meetings will help address any concerns that have been raised and look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

Home Ed Cymru