

## Stakeholders Not Invited To Consultation Events

In September 2012 the Welsh Assembly Government announced proposals for substantial changes to local authority procedures for dealing with home educated children and a public consultation was held from September 3rd to November 23rd<sup>1</sup>. Regrettably, the conduct of the consultation was flawed.

### Government Home Education Guidelines Say Send Information By Post

Freedom of Information responses reveal that neither the Welsh Assembly Government nor the company running the events thought to ask local councils to circulate details of the three consultation events to home educating families living in the area. This should have been done as a matter of course since Government Guidelines tell local authorities to keep a list of children known to be home educated and to send relevant information by post.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that this didn't occur to anyone running a consultation designed to elicit the views of stakeholders speaks volumes.

Home educators were effectively denied a voice and the opportunity for facilitated round-table discussions between local authorities, the Welsh Assembly Government, and home educating families was largely wasted. Participation and feedback would have been more equitable if home educating families had been given sufficient notice and if they had known that adults were allowed to participate and if it had been made clear that children wouldn't have to go into the events on their own.

### Purpose And Remit of Events Unclear Throughout

The events were billed throughout the entire consultation process as "facilitated workshops for children and young people" and parents were subsequently taken aback to find so many local authority representatives at events which they understood were designed for children.

When I met home educating families in Wrexham on September 14th, 10 days after the launch of the Welsh Assembly consultation on registration and monitoring in elective home education, there was no information in the public domain about the consultation events, except for a mention on the consultation web page of "a small number of facilitated workshops for children and young people".

Parents in Wrexham told me that they found this description very off-putting and they were understandably apprehensive about signing their children up to such an unknown quantity. There was no mention of adults being invited to give their views and it wasn't even clear whether parents would be allowed to accompany their children to the workshops.

Where children had been taken out of school following bullying or other traumatic events, parents did not want to open up conversations where they would have to explain that the law on home education might be changed and that the children might have to go back to school.

### Insufficient Notice

Dates and times were not announced at the outset. We didn't even know that the events were going to take place during October, let alone which area of the country. In the third week of September it was announced that the workshops would take place on 18th, 26th and 30th October.

Perhaps it needs stating that home educating parents would be unlikely to put their children forward for an unknown quantity? The events had the potential to function effectively on a number of levels but the opportunity was frittered away by a lack of planning and absence of joined-up thinking.

It is still not clear whether councils were routinely invited or whether council officers had to express an interest before receiving additional information and a formal invitation. Councils did not seem to get much advance warning of the events; Bridgend and Wrexham both told me that there wasn't enough time to tell families.

Councils do not seem to have registered – and perhaps were not even told - that these "events" were specifically for children and young people.

I sent out Freedom of Information requests at the end of October 2012, asking local councils in Wales whether they had been asked to pass on information to stakeholders. According to FOI responses received in November/December 2012, the Government did not routinely ask local authorities to circulate information to stakeholders.

### What Did Councils Actually Do?

1. Given that councils weren't specifically asked to pass on information to stakeholders in their area, it is interesting to see what they actually did. Anglesey passed the information on to individual families, as did Pembrokeshire, Bridgend and Flintshire. Ceredigion discussed it with some families. Denbighshire passed it to the co-ordinator of the local home

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1 <http://edyourself.org/articles/walesbriefing.php>

2 [http://wales.gov.uk/dcells/publications/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/schools/inclusionandpupilsupport/guidance/section6/section6inclusionpupilsup1.pdf?lang=en](http://wales.gov.uk/dcells/publications/policy_strategy_and_planning/schools/inclusionandpupilsupport/guidance/section6/section6inclusionpupilsup1.pdf?lang=en) page 5, paragraph 3.6

education network and the Vale of Glamorgan circulated information via SNAP<sup>3</sup> Powys mentioned the consultation and the workshops whenever it had contact with families and is setting up an email system to keep parents up to date with news in future.

Some councils appear to believe it was not necessary – or desirable – or even legitimate - to share the information. Conwy was asked during a telephone call to share information about the local consultation event, but the council took no further action as it had already written to parents giving a link to the consultation web page.

Carmarthenshire said that “home-educating families have their own campaign organisations, such as Education Otherwise, who will contribute their views to this consultation” . Rhondda said that “as these events were originated by another body and we were an invitee, it would not be appropriate for us to invite others without being asked to. Our representative reported that the event was well attended by Electively Home Educated parents.”

In contrast to most councils, Caerphilly was asked to circulate information about the consultation and associated events to home educating families, but did not do so. Torfaen was asked to circulate information about the consultation (though not the consultation events) but the email went to a senior officer on leave and so the request was not received in time.

### 3 Categories Of Response

1. Not asked to pass on information but doing so anyway to the best of their abilities
2. Taking no initiative in passing on information
3. Adopting the view that it's none of their business to share information with stakeholders

Once the consultation responses are made public, it will be interesting to see if there is any correlation between the councils asking for more powers and the councils adopting the view that it's none of their business to share information with stakeholders.

### Freedom of Information Responses

<http://edyourself.org/angleseyconsultfoi.pdf>  
<http://edyourself.org/bridgedconsultfoi.pdf>  
<http://edyourself.org/caerphillyconsultfoi.pdf>  
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