

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

CYPE SP 100

Ymateb gan: Rocio Cifuentes, Prif Swyddog Gweithredol, EYST Cymru

Response from: Rocio Cifuentes, Chief Executive Officer, EYST Wales

Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

Thema 1: Addysg oedran ysgol | Theme 1: School-age education

Impact of Poverty on ability to learn

- **Food Poverty**
- **Digital Poverty**

From our significant engagement with ethnic minority young people and their families since our establishment in 2005 and throughout the pandemic period, we have established that Poverty, and specifically food poverty and digital poverty are having significant detrimental impacts on children and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds in particular. Children in Wales already have high levels of poverty compared to the rest of the UK, and for children from ethnic minority backgrounds this rate is even higher. During the pandemic, those already living on the margins were squeezed even more so, with parents losing income and employment. Resulting, and very sadly, we saw far higher rates of food poverty and families seeking food parcels or food vouchers than ever before. We support the campaign led by the Child Poverty Action Group for universal free school meals and believe this move would greatly mitigate the devastating impact of poverty and its impact on learning.



Digital poverty became a huge and more obvious factor in educational inequality with the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We found there was huge inconsistency in the response of schools and their ability to provide learning equipment for online classes. Many many children we support did not have a laptop, and a high number were sharing perhaps their mum's phone amongst many siblings to try to access online lessons. We found that WG's response and support to schools was fairly slow and late, meaning that in practice many children had no access to devices for a 12 months.

We would like to see an inquiry into Poverty and its impact on Children and Young People, including Digital and Food Poverty in particular, looking for practical ways to mitigate its impact.

Racism

- **Racism from pupils and teachers**
- **Poor school responses to Racism**

Unfortunately we have continued to receive reports of racism towards children and young people from other pupils, and sometimes from teachers, and a pattern of unsatisfactory school responses to dealing with racist incidences. Further evidence can be seen here for example <https://racealliance.wales/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Show-Us-You-Care-Executive-Summary-2.pdf> .

Despite excellent progress from Welsh Government in commissioning the report into Diversity in the School Curriculum, <https://gov.wales/final-report-black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-communities-contributions-and-cynefin-new-curriculum> , there is a lack of progress in supporting schools to strengthen their response to racism.

Currently there is lack of regulation over schools as to how they respond to racism, and it is not a clear part of the regulatory framework.

We would welcome an inquiry into how schools respond to racism in Wales and how this can be improved.

Thema 2: Addysg bellach ac addysg uwch | Theme 2: Further and higher education

We would propose that the Committee focuses on access to Further and Higher Education for pupils from poorer backgrounds, ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers. Including a specific focus on



- **Access to FE and HE for Asylum Seekers**

Welsh Government has stated its ambition to become a Nation of Sanctuary, nevertheless is currently tied to UK Government restrictions for asylum seekers to some public funds including Education Maintenance Allowance. The current asylum process is very slow, and sadly, many people who come to Wales seeking sanctuary are stuck in the system for what can be many years while their claims are assessed. As a result, many children who come to Wales and are thriving in their education, find themselves suddenly unable to access FE and HE in the same way as their peers. Asylum-seekers are not currently eligible for Education Maintenance Allowance which means that families may see themselves financially unable to support their child to access FE education as they would like to. Even worse is the barrier to HE which asylum seekers face as they are treated like international students for funding purposes and therefore are subject to astronomical fees which are completely unaffordable for those living on the current Asylum Seeker allowance of £5 per day.

We would recommend a review is carried out into barriers to accessing HE and FE for those from poorer backgrounds including asylum seekers.

Thema 3: Iechyd a lles, gan gynnwys gofal cymdeithasol (i'r graddau y maent yn ymwneud â phlant a phobl ifanc) | Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)

We are aware of significant issues affecting the health and wellbeing of ethnic minority children in particular including the need for better:

- **Mental health support**
- **Access to sports and leisure**
- **Improved access to transport**

During the pandemic, the mental health of children and young people from minority ethnic background worsened significantly, with the dual hit of the Pandemic alongside the trauma of George Floyd's death and the focus on Black Lives Matter. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of mental health support for children and young people in general, and a specific lack of culturally specific and targeted mental health support for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

We would like to see an inquiry into the provision of mental health support for children and young people across Wales, with focus on the needs of specific minority groups.

In terms of access to sports and leisure, this also worsened during the pandemic, but had already been worsening over many years. Since the economic downturn started ten years ago, the creeping closure of public services such as libraries, swimming



pools and youth centres has disproportionately affected children and young people, and lessened their ability to keep physically and emotionally healthy and well.

We would like to see an inquiry into the impact of closing public services on the physical and emotional health of children and young people.

Associated to this, is poor access to public transport due to prohibitive cost, lack of availability of services, and sometimes physical barriers, along with concerns about not feeling safe on public transport. During the summer of 2021 some local authorities made buses free for children on certain days. We would like to see an inquiry into the potential of making public transport free for children always, as a means of improving physical and mental health, reducing pollution, and creating safer more cohesive communities.

Thema 4: Plant a phobl Ifanc | Theme 4: Children and young people

We would suggest that the CYPE committee focus on the key issues outlined above.

