



END CHILD POVERTY NETWORK CYMRU RHWYDWAITH DILEU TLODI PLANT CYMRU

Consultation on Welsh Assembly Government School Uniform Financial Assistance Scheme

Consultation Response

This response is submitted by Lucy Akhtar, Coordinator, End Child Poverty Network Cymru on behalf of, and in consultation with, the End Child Poverty Network Cymru, C/o Children in Wales, 25 Windsor Place, Cardiff CF10 3BZ.

The End Child Poverty Network Cymru is a coalition of concern focused on child poverty whose Steering Group Members include Barnardo's Cymru, Children in Wales, Save the Children Cymru, NCH Cymru, NSPCC Cymru, Communities that Care, Fairbridge Cymru, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Frank Buttle Trust, Shelter Cymru, and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. We also have a growing number of Supporter Members who support our vision that no child in Wales should be living in poverty by 2020. These members come from a broad cross-section of voluntary and statutory organisations.

The Network was set up in November 2001 and works to achieve:

- Increased public and professional understanding of child poverty in Wales
 - Public and professional support for measures to end child poverty
- Policies in place at all levels of government (local, Welsh Assembly and Westminster), which contribute to ending child poverty in Wales

Address: C/o Children in Wales
25 Windsor Place
Cardiff CF10 9BZ

Would you prefer that your response is kept confidential? No

➤ ***Dates for application and eligibility of grant***

Q1. Do you agree eligibility should be based on eligibility for free school meals at the time the uniform grant application is made?

Yes with consideration for parents who just move out of the threshold of eligibility but who have not yet got established in higher paid employment.

Q2. Do you agree that the application period should be 1 July to 31 October? Should authorities have discretion to accept later applications

(up to 31 January) from eligible families moving into Wales or families becoming eligible for free school meals?

Yes and authorities have discretion to accept later applications (up to 31 January) from eligible families moving into Wales or families becoming eligible for free school meals. Consideration should be given to parents of disabled children who may need to replace uniform more frequently than yearly due to increased wear and tear. Also we have heard of a school in Cardiff that asks for parents to pay for uniform by the end of June so local authorities and schools may need to work some flexibility into the system.

➤ ***Form of Payment of Grant to Eligible Families***

Q6. Do you agree that local authorities should be able to choose whether to pay grant as a cash payment or by way of vouchers? If not, why not?

Local authorities would need to give an assurance that the vouchers could be used in a variety of shops locally so that parents are able to shop around for the most cost-effective choices and so that there would not be transport costs associated with the purchase of the uniform. The Welsh Assembly would need a robust mechanism for monitoring this. Consideration would also need to be given to the potential stigmatising effect of issuing vouchers.

Q7. Does this timing present any difficulties?

Local authorities would need to ensure that applications were processed in a timely manner to ensure that parents received the grant in plenty of time to buy the uniform before the child started school.

➤ ***Payment of Grant to Local Education Authorities***

Q8. Are the proposed arrangements for grant payment acceptable?

Not qualified to answer

➤ ***Audit Arrangements***

Q9. Are the proposals for internal audit review adequate?

Not qualified to answer

➤ ***Publicity***

Q10. What do you think would be the best way to distribute these?

- a) Direct from the Assembly Government to all primary and special schools to pass on to parents of Year 6 pupils;**

- b) Assembly Government to send to Local Education Authorities to distribute to primary and special schools to pass on to families of Year 6 pupils; or**
- c) Welsh Assembly Government to send the leaflet electronically to authorities so that they can send them electronically to primary and special schools or incorporate them in their own publicity for school uniform financial assistance?**

Direct from the Assembly Government to all primary and special schools to pass on to parents of Year 6 pupils with additional publicity through Job centres, and the media

Other comments

Some parents face real hardship when purchasing school uniform for their children. The Welsh Assembly Government needs to make certain that their guidance on School Uniform is adequately monitored. They need to ensure that individual school policies meet the Assembly's guidance on considering the financial impact of choosing a particular uniform. Some schools are choosing uniforms, which are so expensive as to leave pupils or their families feeling socially excluded. According to National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau school uniforms can cost from £92 for a basic boy's primary school uniform to £274 for a secondary school uniform, which clearly exceeds the level of this grant. Local Authorities' which currently give a larger grant should be encouraged to continue to do so.