



Ethnic Minorities
& Youth Support
Team Wales

Tîm Cymorth
Lleiafrifoedd Ethnig
& Ieuenctid Cymru

All Wales BAME Engagement Programme Response to Children, Young People & Education Committee Inquiry Impact of COVID 19 Crisis

1: About EYST Wales

EYST Wales is an award-winning Wales wide charity established since 2005 which aims to support ethnic minority young people, families and individuals living in Wales and help them to contribute, participate and feel a valued part of Wales. It does this through a range of services targeted variously at ethnic minority young people, ethnic minority families, refugees and asylum seekers and also the wider public.

EYST Wales coordinates the All Wales BAME (Black Asian Minority Ethnic) Engagement Programme, a project funded by Welsh Government to gather views and experiences of BAME people living in Wales and improve the evidence base from which to positively influence public policies and services to better reflect the needs of BAME communities. This project is one of seven Welsh Government Equalities and Inclusion Grants.

During April 2020, the All Wales BAME Engagement Programme hosted weekly online topical fora on the impact of COVID 19 on BAME people and communities in Wales, a series attended by a collective 230 participants. One of these fora specifically focused on the impact on Children, Young People and Pupils. Each additional forum also touched upon the impact on CYPE in discussion of the following topics: general impact, hate crime/racism, food security, loss of household income, and Muslim communities. Following are key points from these fora as well as additional intelligence from EYST project work.

EYST request to give oral evidence for the CYPE committee in relation to this enquiry.

1: FOOD & Income

Food Access – Free School Meals, Poverty

- Free School Meals – Initially, there was much confusion over free school meal provision. The updated guidance from the education minister was welcome though many would like the Minister to provide stronger messages for local authorities to opt for offering a mixed cash or voucher offer. Currently 17/22 local authorities are offering cash provision or a cash/voucher option for FSM, but there are still a few local

authorities operating on parcel provision. The consensus from representatives in the EYST forums is that a mixed offer of cash or voucher options is the optimum.

- Food security for asylum seekers, new refugees and low-income families – These families will not have money to do bulk shopping if needed for self-isolation or to compete with other consumers who are panic buying. Likewise, low income people who were working in informal economy, particularly hospitality sector will not have had the opportunity to be furloughed and will have been made jobless and incomeless very quickly.
- Any provision of food parcels must consider, cultural, religious, and medical food needs. The best efforts to provide culturally and medically appropriate food seem to be accomplished by organising at the local level by community groups. Likewise, via food some banks. This seems to work best for people when there are solid networks and good communication between food initiatives at a local level. For instance, Cardiff, Newport and Swansea all have networks of foodbanks and initiatives with leadership from organisations such as Food Cardiff and/or local councils. It has been repeatedly brought up that WG food parcels for people who are shielding. WG are aware of this problem, but as yet there seems to be no work-around.
- Universal credit claims have increased and the queues for processing are unprecedented. It is welcome that DAF rules have been relaxed, but there were questions in our forum if people could readily access DAF if they didn't have support to do so or had done so before, particularly for people with English as an additional language. Likewise, the best case will be if the 5 week waiting period for universal credit is put on hold not just during the COVID crisis but in the economic downturn afterward.
- There are big concerns that BAME people will be disproportionately affected by unemployment in and that BAME businesses, particularly new ones will have a hard time accessing COVID 19 related relief. Such loss of income will have an impact on children living in the household. WE recommend that Welsh Government ensure robust ethnicity monitoring for all COVID related relief or benefits as part of its Public Sector Equality Duty.
- The relaxation on restrictions to provide housing to people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) is welcome. However, Welsh Government should give. Local authorities are all trying to work out separately what exactly is legal and this is taking precious time whereby people need additional support for livelihood. Likewise Welsh Government should provide definitive advice (not just a suggestion) for local authorities to provide NRPF families with FSM.
- There are serious concerns about what happens to NRPF families post-COVID. We were presented with some evidence that people subject to NRPF were not seeking assistance with local authorities because they are afraid of being unhoused at short notice. On another note, there have been many women able to escape from domestic violence and/or trafficking in this period as they now can receive refuge. What will

happen to them and their children if they no longer qualify for that refuge? We were presented with some evidence that people subject to NRPF were not seeking assistance with local authorities because they are afraid of being unhoused at short notice. Welsh Government should use this opportunity to collect evidence relating to this relaxation on restriction for people subject to NRPF and influence Westminster to end NRPF for good.

3: EDUCATION

Digital Access – Laptops, Broadband

- Access to Digital Equipment and Broadband – We were pleased to see the financial commitment and clear direction from Education Minister Kirsty Williams that local authorities provide.
- It was noted in our forums that the Government **must** provide laptops/tablets and Wifi access to students who are without them; otherwise it is in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that all children must have access to education. As such, there is a legal obligation for authorities to provide laptops and WiFi to execute their duty under law.
- Now it is imperative that schools locate and provide this equipment for all families who need it with deliberate speed. Many families have lost weeks of home schooling due to the time lapse in response to this issue. Third sector organisations and grassroots organisations may be of assistance in assuring that all families who need it are reached.
- There was consensus at EYST forums and in a number of other networks that current Covid 19 disruption offers opportunity to demand Government to consider Wifi an essential household utility and ask for it to be provided not only to asylum seekers but also to other low-income and digitally households as a matter of a human right.

Barriers to accessing educational resources – Facilitating parents’ ability to home-school Discrepancies in support from schools and quality of home learning materials/lessons

- Language can be a huge barrier. Accessing school hubs and other online set ups is extremely difficult for parents who don’t speak English fluently. Likewise, there are concerns for EAL pupils where no one at home speaks English. There is much concern, and rightly so, about Welsh medium pupils living in homes with no Welsh speakers. The same concern should be there for EAL pupils.

- Suggested solution: Employ or re-deploy teachers and teaching assistants who speak relevant modern foreign languages to support parents who are not fluent in English as well as EAL pupils. This support can be over phone, what's app or online meeting site such as Skype or Zoom. It may also be useful in engaging/keeping employed teaching assistants who were on temporary contracts and possibly not furloughed when schools closed.
- There is likely an under-reporting of parents' concerns over lack of access to online learning as parents with language barriers or who are not confident in engaging schools may not know how to approach them or have confidence to do so. Some schools report that they have had requests for laptops from families but not from BAME pupils/families. Are BAME parents not going back to the schools to make these queries?
- BAME community groups can facilitate communication between parents and schools. BAME groups need to get the word to parents that they should be communicating with schools about any barriers to accessing educational materials. Likewise, BAME groups can facilitate that communication where parents are not able to themselves. EYST are currently encouraging Third sector and grassroots groups to get messages to their networks that parents who have barriers to online learning, particularly digital exclusion should contact schools immediately.
- There were some concerns about differences in the quality of online learning provided by different schools, including concerns that this period of learning at home may exacerbate existing attainment gaps between certain groups of pupils – with pupils from already high performing schools in wealthy areas where parents and potentially schools have access to more resources compared to those of pupils from relatively low performing schools in deprived areas. Additional considerations such as EAL add extra dimensions to this problem. To note, recent Sutton Trust research shows that since schools closed, 30% of middle class pupils in England have had access to daily online live or recorded classes compared to 16% of working class students and that less than 50% of parents without an HE qualification felt confident supporting their child's learning¹.
- We understand that these are unprecedented times and we appreciate the heartfelt and concerted efforts by educators and the team in the Welsh Government education department to provide continuity of learning for children in Wales in these circumstances. We appreciate that the WG Education "Policy Statement on Continuity of Learning" pledges to "seek to ensure as far as possible that no learner is disadvantaged because of access to technology, where they live, their age, their special educational needs, the language of their school or home, or their demographic profile" and to centralise principles of inclusion are central to the delivery of the programme and the return to school. We eagerly await specific plans to develop staff, content and strategies to deliver those goals. As such, we

¹ <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>

would recommend that WG adopt some of the strategies recommended by Sutton Trust to flatten the curve between advantaged and disadvantaged learners, including ethnic minority learners, in this period (in addition to solutions already referenced above): train teachers to be enabled to deliver online content, stamp out the digital divide, give disadvantaged pupils access to online 1-1 or small group tuition, consider running 'catch up' classes for children who need it over the summer or when schools return.

Discrepancies in definitions of 'Key Workers' Concerns about Access to Childcare/Schooling Coming Out of Lockdown

- There were also concerns about how local authorities are defining key workers and whether families who qualify for key worker childcare are taking up that option. Are BAME families having their eligibility communicated to them and being made confident to consider the offer?
- What will happen to parents who are in sectors that come out of lockdown first if the schools are still closed when their workplaces open back up? Many jobs in sectors such as manufacturing and retail are low paid jobs and these parents may not be able to pay for childcare. Will the definition of eligibility to send children to school/childcare hubs change?

Cancellation of exams and potential bias in predicted grades and previous assessments

- Summer 2020 GCSE and A level exams have been cancelled and there is guidance that schools will assess individual learner grades and rank according to previous work and teacher estimates of their likely performance if Summer 2020 exams were taking place.
- Many young ethnic minority people, particularly young people of African descent, are extremely concerned about teachers' predicted grades. Numerous research studies show that teachers are more likely to underestimate the performance of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and from certain ethnic groups (especially Black and Gypsy, Roma, Traveller pupils) in comparison to pupil's actual exam performance. Some scholars connect this dynamic with lower representation of certain groups at more competitive universities and degree programmes.
- Several attendees at EYST's recent forums knew close family members or friends who had the experience of outperforming teachers' predicted grades on high stakes exams. One parent at our Children/Young People/Pupil forum shared her child's previous experience of passing with As, Bs and Cs, despite being predicted to fail at GCSEs. This same child is having the same experience of low predicted A level grades and the current situation is "very distressing."

- Pupils are concerned that they won't get the necessary grades to attend university or progress to the next steps in their education or employment pathways in the fall. For young people who have put everything into preparing for high stakes exams to gain university entrance – there is a huge mental health impact as, all of a sudden, they now feel gaining that entrance is beyond their control.
- There are concerns that some young people in Wales who do not get sufficient grades to enter university in fall may drop out of university pathways altogether rather than repeat a year. This phenomenon may impact an entire cohort of BAME young people, with a risk of rise in NEET young people from BAME backgrounds in coming years.
- EYST is responding the Qualifications Wales (QW) consultation on assessment proposals for Summer 2020 with the following suggestions for revision of their proposals:
 - QW must work with the Minister for Education to provide teachers with guidance and support on how to ensure more accurate assessments and ranking of students in order to reduce inconsistencies across groups of pupils in schools and across schools;
 - QW must work with the Minister for Education to provide schools with guidance and support to undertake equality impact assessments before and after final exam grade assessments as part of their Public Sector Equality Duty;
 - Remind schools of their Public Sector Equality Duty;
 - WJEC must use anonymised and disaggregated data on protected characteristics, including SES and SEN from schools to undertake equality impact assessments and investigate discrepancies in outcomes both relating to assessments/ranks provided by schools and to final grades after WJEC's statistical standardisation modelling;
 - There must be an avenue of appeal for any individual student who feels they have been underestimated or feels they have experienced bias or discrimination in their assessment, no matter what the reason for that bias.
- In a multi-agency letter to the Education Minister, EYST did request that she provide guidance to schools do equality impact assessments on predicted grades. Her return letter, though very positive about responding to needs of digitally excluded students, was less specific about commitment to address potential teacher and institutional bias in the Summer 2020 assessment system.

What can Universities Do?

- Likewise, there is potential to challenge universities to adapt the way in which they make decisions to fill student places – to ensure that they meet established

diversity targets within departments and to assess in alternative mechanisms for recruitment decisions including contextualised admissions criteria. To our knowledge HEFCW is due to give guidance to universities on recruitment for this year but is yet to do so. HEFCW can ensure that its guidance on recruitment to universities (particularly more elite and competitive institutions) considers under-represented students.

- Professors and officials from some Swansea University departments have attended EYST's forums with a view to understanding how changing assessments may affect A level grades and how they may ensure progressive recruitment practices this year. This is a positive note that many university staff want to mitigate potential impact of COVID 19 on recruitment and retention of under-represented students. HEFCW can support this agenda (and the university staff pushing it) by ensuring that its guidance on recruitment to universities (particularly more elite and competitive institutions) gives robust considerations to widening access agendas and ensuring recruitment and further support for under-represented groups.
- There is concern that in the current context, universities may easily get distracted with their financial situations, particularly if travel bans and continued "lockdown" or perception of UK's safety cause loss of revenue from international students. These financial concerns may take priority over consideration for equality duties. Again, clear guidance from HEFCW can encourage progressive vision and leadership in universities.

4: HOUSING

Poverty – Poor Housing Overcrowded/ Multi-generational Lack of Outside Space

- Social class plays a huge part in whether people have the privilege to socially distance or stay at home.
- BAME individuals may be in more cramped spaces with no gardens and young people in these situations are under more pressure to go outside the home.
- Disproportionate impact on Roma families living in crowded houses where in normal circumstances, adults would expect young people to be outside of the house in daytimes, but they are now required to stay indoors.
- Likewise, there will be a disproportionate impact on intergenerational households.

- Overcrowding will impact young people as they are unable to sit down and do homework in a quiet space.

5: HEALTH

Mental Health Impact

Physical Health impact

Online Exposure

- Anxiety is a key issue; many young people do not recognise the signs and need to be signposted. Some young people may not be very open about these issues and there must be a culturally sensitive way to deal with these issues as well as resources in multiple languages. For instance, Cardiff Wellbeing Service on Whitchurch Road has a Facebook page that is producing regular guidance anxiety, but the information isn't available in different languages, so many parents of ethnic minority young people aren't aware of it. As stated above, there is a great deal of anxiety over changing assessment patterns and cancellation of high stakes exams as well as continuity of education.
- There are concerns about key health messages and information about services being shared, particularly to vulnerable child patients with existing health conditions. Following is an example from volunteers with 'Friends of Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia': Members are already marginalised are not getting information from consultants regarding their vulnerability. They haven't received any guidance/letters and are more disadvantaged if they have more regular hospital appointments and aren't aware of processes involved. She is frightened for her community at this time. "We are looking for ways to get them the information, but it shouldn't be on us. It really highlights how marginalised our communities are."
- There emerging but clear evidence of the disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME people, including in infection rates, higher critical care rates and death rates. There are likely many overlapping factors to this extremely concerning phenomenon including decades of institutional racism, socio-economic factors (which also relate to underlying health conditions), housing conditions, environmental justice (living in areas of high air pollution, etc.) and the over-representation of BAME people in key frontline sectors including health and social care. The majority of NHS COVID related deaths have been BAME people, many with high profile media coverage. Likewise, there has been much media coverage of families including one in Gwent where multiple members in the same family have died within days of each other.
- Though COVID 19 as yet is considered to have mild or no effect on children (with a few exceptions), children's parents and relatives are at risk. It was also pointed out in our forum, many children and young people are aware of media coverage about the impact on BAME communities and health workers, causing them worry. Likewise, especially for older children and adults, the sense that your community is being ignored or can result in a sense of rejection, which is a form of racism.

- Children and Young People are spending more time than ever online. One EYST youth worker is concerned about the sheer amount of time young people report playing video games. On a more nefarious note, in a recent online forum, young people in Wrexham brought attention to the troubling spread of online racism. “Anti-black racism spreads fast online.” Some of this material is hateful such as depictions of violence against people of African descent in Wuhan, China. Some are clips that stereotype and purport to make light of stereotypes. Many of the young people in the forum expressed discomfort and hurt from stereo-typing clips. Tiktok was mentioned as a forum where this plays out and noted that Tiktok seems to provide little oversight of content and felt that reporting process was worthless.
- Proposed solutions:
 - Ensure a speedy, robust and fair enquiry into disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME people/communities in general and also on BAME key workers. Even though Wales will participate in an enquiry with England, disaggregated data for Wales must be accessible. Likewise, Welsh Government should argue for the replacement of Trevor Phillips, recently
 - Ensure that keyworkers in all frontline sectors have sufficient access to both PPE and non-symptomatic testing for themselves and household members.
 - Campaign for fair work commission principles, higher wages and better working conditions in those low paying frontline sectors where BAME parents are over-represented.
 - Encourage Welsh Government to highlight contributions of migrants and BAME people on COVID 19 frontline in its regular communications or as a specific campaign.
 - Young people need support to protect themselves from online bullying and racist incidents and to report and stand up to online racism and hate.

6: POLICE

Disproportionate use of Police Powers?

- Community members are concerned that the expansion of police powers in relation to lockdown may be used disproportionately on ethnic minority young people. They correctly note that young ethnic minority men are far over-represented in stop and search incidents. Likewise, a number of experts at prominent racial equality organisations such as Runnymede Trust have written articles for mainstream news outlets noting this very real risk.
- There are concerns that young people who live in overcrowded housing will feel compelled to go outside. This includes young people seeking asylum who live in shared accommodation.

- Gwent Police a fortnightly community dial-in have a campaign to stop young people going out with their friends. There is a local hashtag #StayinforGwent but there is potential to make this campaign Wales wide. Ceredigion and Powys, where they also aim to monitor tensions and de-escalate issues before they become problematic in communities. Suggested ways of working together.

7: Recommendations & Solutions

Food Security & Poverty

- Give stronger advice to local authorities to provide cash or voucher choice to families
- Support locally organised food and culturally responsive food initiatives
- Argue for abolition of NRPF
- Keep gains in benefits related to COVID 19
- Raise income floor level for key worker sectors which are currently low paid
- Universal basic income???

Education – Support for Learners

- Ensure that all children who need who need it have laptops and wifi with deliberate speed
- Employ or re-deploy teachers and teaching assistants who speak relevant modern foreign languages to support parents who are not fluent in English as well as EAL pupils.
- BAME community groups can facilitate connections and communication between parents and schools
- Train teachers to be enabled to deliver online class sessions
- Consider 1-1 or small group online sessions for disadvantaged pupils
- Consider “catch-up” classes for disadvantaged pupils over the summer or when schools return

Education – 2020 Grades and University Entrance

- QW must work with the Minister for Education to provide teachers with guidance and support on how to ensure more accurate assessments and ranking of students in order to reduce inconsistencies across groups of pupils in schools and across schools;
- QW must work with the Minister for Education to provide schools with guidance and support to undertake equality impact assessments before and after final exam grade assessments as part of their Public Sector Equality Duty;
- Remind schools of their Public Sector Equality Duty;
- WJEC must use anonymised and disaggregated data on protected characteristics, including SES and SEN from schools to undertake equality impact assessments and investigate discrepancies in outcomes both relating to assessments/ranks

provided by schools and to final grades after WJEC's statistical standardisation modelling;

- There must be an avenue of appeal for any individual student who feels they have been underestimated or feels they have experienced bias or discrimination in their assessment, no matter what the reason for that bias.
- HEFCW guidance on recruitment to universities (particularly more elite and competitive institutions) should give robust considerations to widening access agendas and ensuring recruitment and further support for under-represented groups.

Health:

- Ensure a speedy, robust and fair enquiry into disproportionate impact of COVID 19 on BAME people/communities in general and also on BAME key workers. Even though Wales will participate in an enquiry with England, disaggregated data for Wales must be accessible. Likewise, Welsh Government should argue for the replacement of Trevor Phillips, recently suspended from Labour party for Islamophobia
- Ensure that keyworkers in all frontline sectors have sufficient access to both PPE and non-symptomatic testing for themselves and household members.
- Campaign for fair work commission principles, higher wages and better working conditions in those low paying frontline sectors where BAME parents are over-represented.
- Encourage Welsh Government to highlight contributions of migrants and BAME people on COVID 19 frontline in its regular communications or as a specific campaign.
- Young people need support to protect themselves from online bullying and racist incidents and to report and stand up to online racism and hate.