

**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 70**

**Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas y Plant**

**Response from: The Children's Society**

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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**

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

**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)**

**Measuring children and young people's wellbeing**

'Well-being' is used to refer to a range of things in everyday life, such as being happy, not being ill, feeling fulfilled and being financially secure. Successive Welsh Governments have emphasised the importance of improving well-being, having introduced major pieces of legislation which provide a framework for improving well-being in Wales and making well-being a key element of the new curriculum.

Two key pieces of legislation that place duties on public bodies in Wales to promote well-being are the Social Services and Well-being Act and the Well-being of Future Generations Act. While it is welcome that these major pieces of legislation exist, the well-being goals that the Acts aim to achieve focus on 'objective well-being' – that is, access to education, educational attainment, housing, access to rights, and access to work and training. These are important goals, however they do not take into account



the importance of subjective elements of well-being, meaning how children feel about their lives – for example, whether they feel safe where they live or whether they enjoy school.

In this year’s Good Childhood Report, we provide the following estimates of how children in Wales feel about difference aspects of their lives:

<b>Measures where mean scores for children aged 10 to 15 were found to be sig lower in 2018-19 than 2009-10:</b>	<b>Estimated number of children in Wales</b>
Low happiness with life as a whole in UK: 6.7%	14,000
Low happiness with friends in UK: 3.4%	7,000
Low happiness with appearance in UK: 14.4%	30,000
Low happiness with school in UK: 11.9%	24,000

We are able to learn a great deal more about children and young people’s lives by asking them about these aspects and how they impact their lives. Good policy requires good evidence and an absence of data on children’s subjective well-being remains a barrier to improving children’s lives. Whilst children are required to learn about how to look after their well-being, policymakers in Wales do not know how children feel about their lives and what they need to help them to live a fulfilling life and achieve their ambitions in the difficult times ahead.

Welsh Government needs to prioritise improving data on children’s subjective well-being. This could have positive implications for the development and implementation of policy relating to education, public health, social care, planning and housing at national and local levels. Importantly it could help provide a consistent objective of policy and spending decisions and a narrative on children and young people for Welsh Government – to improve children’s well-being.

We urge the Committee to scrutinise Welsh Government’s current thinking on measuring young people’s wellbeing; whether they are seeking to develop and expand current activity on gathering data on young people’s wellbeing; and if so, whether it will be expanded to all children and young people in Wales.



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

### **Support for care-experienced young people**

It is crucial that young people who have left care are provided with support and guidance as they transition to living with greater independence, which is a time and process that can be exciting for the young person, but that also can induce anxiety. There are several factors involved with this process that need to be considered, such as managing money and accessing benefits; accessing or continuing with education or training; finding housing; and the ability to engage in activities to help with wellbeing. In recent years, support that should be in place for young people who are care experienced has garnered a lot of attention both at national and local levels.

In 2016, the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act came into force, which requires local authorities to prepare a pathway plan for a child who is 16 and who are looked after, to “set out the actions which are necessary to support the young person make a successful transition to adulthood and greater independence,” ([Code of Practice, Part 6, p.8](#)), and which require review once the young person has left care. As of April 2019, young people in Wales up to the age of 25 and who have left care are exempt from paying council tax. This policy is crucial for removing from young people who are care experienced a financial cost that can be significant, and giving them the space to transition to living with greater independence.

Additionally, in 2017 the Welsh Government launched the St David’s Day Fund, which provided to local authorities £1 million to support young people who have left care to access opportunities to help them transition to life with greater independence. This funding was doubled in 2019/20, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government updated its guidance to prioritise support for care leavers “[who may be experiencing financial hardship due to income loss, difficulty with tenancy agreements, food and other basic living necessities.](#)”

We also welcome other forms of support available to young people who are care experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the Protection from eviction (Wales) Regulations as part of the Coronavirus Act 2020, and the Tenancy Hardship Grant. It also is welcoming to see the First Minister’s intention to trail a Basic Income pilot with a cohort of care leavers.

Whilst it is important to recognise the commitment and action over recent years to support young people who are care experienced, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects for some time to come, we believe it is appropriate to evaluate the effectiveness of this support; to find gaps in current provision; and to consider how support could be improved.



One way in which greater support could be offered to young people who are care experienced who are in need of emergency assistance is easier access to the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Welsh Government invested an additional £11 million to the Fund, as well as make more flexible its criteria for accessing Emergency Assistance Payments (EAPs), one of the two grant types offered by the DAF, such as being able to be awarded up to five grants per year. However, this increased flexibility is due to end by 30 September 2021, and in June 2021 people would [no longer qualify for a grant if they face hardship as a result of extra costs brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

The impacts of the pandemic will be felt for some time, and those who are particularly vulnerable to financial hardship, such as care-experienced young people, will not be able to use the greater flexibility for accessing the DAF to respond to an emergency. In response to this, as well as making the case for these DAF flexibilities to be extended, we also would urge the Committee to examine how accessible the DAF has been to care-experienced young people during the pandemic, and to examine what changes could be made to the Fund to ensure that it can be accessed with ease by care-experienced young people. This should be for both EAPs and Independence Assistance Payments (IAPs), the latter of which is a DAF grant used to help a service user to live independently in a property he is moving into, and can be used to purchase, for example, white goods or furniture. IAPs could serve as an important form of support for a care-experienced young person who is moving into living with greater independence, and we urge the Committee to examine how accessible is this grant for these young people.

As well as the DAF, we encourage the Committee to examine the efficacy of the support and advice offered by Regional Advice Networks to care-experienced young people. These Networks were established at the beginning of 2020, which involves six networks across Wales working with services users to offer information, advice, and guidance on issues such as accessing benefits, money and debt, housing, employment, and immigration. Although we welcome the establishment of these networks, it is unclear how accessible they are to groups such as care-experienced young people, and whether social services have established links with these networks so as to streamline the process of a care-experienced young person accessing a Network's services, and to involve the Networks in the process of preparing the young person towards living with greater independence. We would argue that these Networks play a vital role in providing care-experienced young people with the financial advice and support they need, and we would urge the Committee to examine what support these Networks offer, and the efficacy of such support.

We will be doing more work in the coming months on support for care-experienced young people, and we will share with the Committee our findings and recommendations.



## Return Interviews

When a child goes missing, we must see that as an indication that something is going wrong in his or her life. When they go missing repeatedly, we must see that as a signal that the problem has still not been addressed. Missing episodes can place a child or young person at significant risk of danger, such as child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, serious violence, or modern slavery. These forms of exploitation, as well as others, may be the cause of the child or young person going missing in the first place.

We can identify these as some of several 'push and pull' factors which lead to missing episodes, as well as repeat missing episodes. A return interview can help to identify potential 'push and pull' factors by providing a child or young person who has been found or has returned from a missing episode an opportunity to share their experience of the missing episode, so as to identify where they were, with whom, and to understand the reasons why they went missing.

Currently, there is too much variability in the provision of return interviews in Wales, with some areas enacting practice and providing support this is better than in other areas. This variability means that children and young people who go missing face inequality in the form and quality of support offered to them after a missing episode. This inequality means that two different children or young people who goes missing will receive a different response and offer of support depending on where they live in Wales.

In recognition of the risks that children and young people face when they go missing, Welsh Government guidance mentions the moment when they return home as potentially being crucial to identifying risk or harm. However, without clear guidance on Return Interviews, this crucial moment can be a lost opportunity.

Although we welcome guidance to address examples of 'push and pull' factors, return interviews play a crucial part in identifying these factors, and to prevent and disrupt them. The opportunity to do so is lost if a systematic approach to return interviews across Wales is not adopted, meaning that children and young people who go missing may experience repeat missing episodes and face the various risks associated with them.

We urge the Committee to scrutinise Welsh Government's current policy on return interviews and the impact the current variation in provision is having on the efficacy in safeguarding young people who go missing.

You can find more information on this in a 2020 joint report published by NYAS and The Children's Society in Welsh [here](#) and in English [here](#).

