

Consultation document

Objections to statutory proposals for school organisation

Consultation Response Form

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Organisation (if applicable): ATL- The Association of
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Responses should be returned by **05 November 2010**, to:

Schools Management and Effectiveness Division 3
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

SchoolsManagementDivision3@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Question 1: Do you agree that it would be better if changes to schools were decided more quickly, once statutory notices have been published in the newspaper and at the school? If you do not agree, please say why.

ATL agrees that it would be better if changes to schools were decided more quickly, once statutory notices have been published in relevant media and at the school.

Surplus places in schools cost LAs and estimated £30 million per year according to Estyn. Historically, statutory procedures make closing schools complex and prolonged. This is most recently highlighted by the fact that 3 schools in Wales; one in Carmarthen, one in Ceredigion and one in Gwynedd, remained open despite not having any pupils in them to teach. Because of the current statutory position they had to remain open despite costing the LA money which could be better spent elsewhere. We agree with the Minister, Leighton Andrews, that this is a 'bonkers' situation, and that there is a clear need to re-evaluate how LAs deliver education in Wales. Re-organisation in its present form is a difficult and slow process which often has elements of high risk for politicians, especially concerning closure and reorganisations of schools in rural areas which is often highly political. Too many wider issues are taken into account as part of the objections to closure and reorganisation. Ironically, there is a general consensus that the status quo is not an option but the present process of rationalisation is too cumbersome to ensure progress.

There is a lack of national strategic direction, guidelines and targets for LAs to address issues to do with increasing the numbers of surplus places in schools. While the situation is 'bonkers' part of the madness lies with the WAG's repeated refusal to spell out clearly and succinctly what it believes to be the minimum viable size for schools. ATL Cymru believes that is imperative that the WAG comes up with a clear definition of what a small school is. We agree with the Audit Commission definition of 90 pupils or less for a primary school and 600 pupils or less for a secondary school.

Having said all this we would also wish to note that there will be occasions when individuals or community leaders will be working out of area or on holiday around the time notices are published and may require time after their return to the area. If a meeting is to be called to pool opinions and objections then time needs to be allowed for a suitable venue to become available. It should also be remembered that in some areas there is a below average level of adult literacy. Parents and partners affected by proposals to vary school organisations may need time to seek help to draft their objections. We are also concerned with the reduction in response time allowed for LAs. At present the authority's administrative sections can be subject to backlog and in the current climate of "efficiency savings" this situation is likely to worsen. It is not acceptable for evidence to be ignored simply because it was on a desk awaiting processing. If the time scale is cut then LAs need to be required to act on it.

Question 2: Do you think that 1 calendar month is enough time for objectors to let local authorities and others know that they oppose the change? If you do not think that this is enough time, please make an alternative suggestion, with brief reasons.

Yes, one calendar month is acceptable but it needs to be ensured that any proposals are not advertised in school holiday times which can make it difficult for some to object fully. Full publicity is necessary otherwise the whole process would be undermined. The best option is to publish any proposals at the start of the school term.

Question 3: Do you think that 2 weeks is enough time for local authorities to refer the objections on to the Welsh Ministers, together with their comments on the objections? If you do not think that this is enough time, please make an alternative suggestion, with brief reasons.

Yes. It needs to become imperative and LAs should be penalised if they do not progress the matter with due haste.

Question 4: Do you agree that if the objection period is reduced to 1 calendar month, proposals should not be published during school holidays? If you do not agree, please let us know why.

Yes. Please refer to question 2.

Question 5: If a proposal were to be published in term time, do you agree that the objection period should include at least 15 school days? (this would be approximately 75% of the objection period). If you do not agree, please let us know why.

Yes

Question 6: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Schools reorganisation is imperative in the current climate to help reduce costs. The WAG to give clear guidance on the minimal viable size of a school and a clear definition of what constitutes a small school.

Responses to consultations may be made public - on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to be kept confidential, please tick here: