

Guide to complaining to MPs about the Oct 23 - Jan 24 Consultation on draft EHE Guidance for LAs and parents

Links to all relevant documents and other reference resources are available on our [English Consultations page](#).

Purpose

To complain about the conduct of the consultation, not its content!

The objective of this exercise is **primarily** to bring to your MP's attention the **flawed process** by which this consultation was conducted. This should *not* be seen as a second opportunity to highlight detailed *problems* about the *content* of the draft guidance documents.

Confidentiality

For those who are concerned about sharing their details with their MP or meeting with them, we have in our [Library](#) a page addressing the matter of [MPs and Confidentiality](#). Please take time to read this if you have any concerns.

If you don't know who your MP is, enter your postcode on this [UK Parliament page](#) to find out who they are, and how to contact them.

Hints for writing to your MP

The one thing we should all remember when writing to our MPs is that *the longer our letter, the less likely it is that your MP will read and engage with it*. The Patients Association has a very useful guide on "[How to write to your MP](#)" on its website - the next section borrows heavily from that.

- As already mentioned, keep any letter short - **no more than two sides of writing paper** (i.e. A4 typed in a suitable font size);
- Use the correct title - 'MP' and don't forget any extra bits like "The Rt Hon" etc.
- When you write to them always include your name, address and postcode - they are not required to correspond with members of the public who are *not* their constituents;
- Explain in your own words why you are writing to them and why you care about the matter in hand;
- Be polite;
- Include relevant facts, figures or information on how the issue is affecting you and your family;
- If you can, include a personal story relating to the issue - such things very often help;
- Tell your MP what you want them to do in both the short and long term - they may not be able to resolve the matter completely, but they can listen to your concerns and hopefully come alongside to support you;
- Ask your MP to keep in touch with you to tell you what they've done in response to you contacting them;
- Please don't forget to thank them in advance for reading your letter, and say that you hope they will respond positively.

You can write to your MP by post or email (PDF attachments are much easier for their staff to print off than 'in body' messages), but always include your name and contact details for the reasons stated above. Remember, you can find their contact details [here](#).

Meeting with your MP

It is usually helpful to try and meet your MP in person so you can explain your concerns to them and, importantly, so they can at least put a face to your name - for a while at least. In the case of home educators, this can be enhanced by taking your children along with you to meet them. (Some MPs may even rise to the 'educational opportunity' this presents, by explaining a little about how the parliamentary system works.) Offering to arrange for your MP to meet a group of families at the same time also has several benefits. For a start, you will feel supported by your HE friends; you will probably get the MP to spend more time with you than during a standard 'surgery' appointment; and hopefully they will meet parents and children who belie the all too common media and political narratives about home educators. So do seriously consider asking for a meeting.

Communicating with Ministers

In many circumstances it is helpful to ask your MP to "raise your concerns" directly with the relevant Minister. If you write directly to a Minister who is not your local MP, **then they will not personally read your letter. Your reply will be written by a civil servant.** However, if your MP forwards your letter to a Minister, e.g. *the Secretary of State for Education*, then they or the departmental Minister responsible for the matter in question, are

required to respond to your MP. Very often your MP will then forward you a copy of that letter, to which you can reply to through your MP, and so on. **This is one of the best way members of the public can make Ministers aware that there are widespread concerns about what is being proposed.** We return to this topic at the end of this guide.

The above points are relevant to contacting your MP about any matter. What follows are points specific to complaining about this particular consultation.

Consultation Principles

The [Cabinet Office](#) publishes these, and they are available from [this page](#). The [latest edition](#) is dated March 2018.

There are 11 areas covered by the current edition. They do not all relate directly to the area of complaint on this occasion. There is a short paragraph expanding each point. The most relevant sections are underlined below, and it is suggested that you read these to help you express your concerns most usefully.

- A. Consultations should be clear and concise
- B. Consultations should have a purpose
- C. Consultations should be informative
- D. Consultations are only part of a process of engagement
- E. Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- F. Consultations should be targeted
- G. Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- H. Consultations should be agreed before publication
- I. Consultation should facilitate scrutiny
- J. Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion
- K. Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.

The following points relate to one or more of the sections underlined above. We suggest it would be helpful to refer to the **Consultation Principles**, explaining that you feel the *conduct* of the EHE Guidance Consultation failed to follow several of them. (You don't have to identify which ones, either for general or specific points you raise.)

Points to consider raising about the consultation on the draft guidance

The following points are to be used as a guide. As in all instances of communication with politicians and Government departments, near-identical correspondence from a significant number of people is usually classed as part of a 'campaign' and given less weight. We are therefore not providing a 'template' response, but seeking to help you write in your own name and in your own style.

We do *not* suggest that everyone covers every point below, but recommend that you select the ones you feel are most important to you, and tell your MP why you think they are important. Remember too that other members of your family can also write to them in their own way and with their own words.

We have tried to group connected points together in the list below; they are *not* listed in order of importance. Please use the ones you feel most passionately about. **Remember, the aim is to keep your letter to one or two pages at the most, and to try to establish a meaningful connection with your MP.**

- The draft guidance documents were long and complicated, not cross-referenced, and not "clear and concise;" they were therefore very difficult for *anyone* to engage with at the level required for a meaningful response - this applies not only to EHE families, but also to other respondents such as LA staff, children's professionals and third sector organisations
- The length and complexity of the two sets of draft guidance excluded children and young people from responding, when it is all about *their* futures
- There was no option for *the key stakeholders* - elective HE parents, children, and young people - and organisations which directly support and/or work with EHE communities to identify themselves as such
- No means of enabling those with learning difficulties to respond - e.g. dyslexia
- Accessibility guidelines not followed - e.g. documents in PDF which are not always suitable for those with screen-reading software

- There were no impact assessments included in the consultation documents; while these are not mandatory, they are considered best practice if changes to guidance may affect some groups more than others
- The two draft guidance documents were inaccurate in many places, and lacked consistency between themselves
- No need to have two parallel versions of guidance - the parents' one will not be read by most people
- The draft guidance documents contained many examples of poor English, and were therefore impossible to understand
- The consultation questions were not written in such a way as to elicit meaningful responses to the substance of the guidance
- Questions were focused on whether the two documents were 'understandable,' rather than if they were accurate, balanced and well written (one in particular [23] was so badly worded that it asked about personal understanding, rather the accuracy and clarity of the guidance)
- Neither the Department nor the majority of local authorities made any effort to notify known home educators that the consultation was taking place (there were some LAs who did notify, but late in the consultation period - please mention this if that was your experience)
- There was no adjustment in the length of the consultation period to 'take into account' that it spanned the Christmas and New Year holiday period when many families would be busy with other things. This would also apply to "other stakeholders" such as LA staff and children's professionals. As a minimum, the period for a consultation should be calculated in "working days" rather than weeks
- Many of the footnotes citing legislation and other documents were misleading - at least one contained a circular reference to the Department's own documentation
- The draft guidance lacked the checks and balances which should pertain to the relationship between the family and the state

Asking your MP to pass on your comments

Besides asking your MP to convey your comments to the relevant Minister, it is important in this instance to increase awareness *outside the DfE* of the widespread concern about how this consultation was conducted. We have noted above the role of the Cabinet Office in overseeing the conduct of consultations. They do have a [complaints procedure](#) which appears to be set up for individuals to use, so first and foremost we suggest that you ask your MP **to raise your concerns with the appropriate person in the Cabinet Office**, as well as passing on your letter to the Secretary of State for Education.

Commenting on the content of the consultation

This is not the main point of your letter, but if you think it would be helpful to mention something of your concerns, we suggest you do so briefly rather than at length; ideally no more than two or three sentences. If your consultation response included some brief free text comments, it could be appropriate to append those to your letter (two additional pages maximum). If you **responded at length** you will need to summarise your key points, and offer to share a copy with them if they had the time and interest to discuss your concerns with you.

Tailoring your letter to your MP's political party

The recent House of Commons Opposition debate on Children Not in School registers provided helpful comments from both main parties. These can be used when writing to MPs between now and the general election. We have written about it here, "[Labour Plays Politics with Your Children](#)." Please take the time to read this and see if there is something from the debate which would enable you to raise some relevant and specific concerns with your MP about the prevailing political narrative.

What to do with the replies you receive

If your MP does pass on your letter to the Cabinet Office and to the Minister for Education, they will write to let you know they have done so. It is very likely that the initial reply you receive from the Minister will be a standard one, consequently the majority of complainants will receive something very similar. However, if you would like to send a copy to the HE Byte team, please get in touch via our [contact form](#) and we will supply a suitable forwarding email address.



This page is available to [download from our website](#)

Links embedded in above text

English Consultations – The HE Byte

<https://he-byte.uk/eng-cons>

Library – The HE Byte

<https://he-byte.uk/library>

MPs and Confidentiality – The HE Byte

<https://he-byte.uk/library/mps-and-confidentiality>

how to write to your MP

<https://www.patients-association.org.uk/how-to-write-to-your-mp>

Find MPs - MPs and Lords - UK Parliament

<https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

Cabinet Office

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office>

Consultation principles: guidance - GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance#full-publication-update-history>

Consultation principles 2018

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aafa4f2e5274a7fbe4fbacb/Consultation_Principles_1_.pdf

Complaints procedure - Cabinet Office - GOV.UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office/about/complaints-procedure>

Labour Plays Politics with Your Children - The HE Byte

<https://he-byte.uk/england/labour-plays-politics-with-your-children>

Contact – The HE Byte

<https://he-byte.uk/contact>

Download this document from

Guide to complaining to MPs about the Oct 23 - Jan 24 Consultation on draft EHE Guidance for LAs and parents

https://he-byte.uk/resources/2024/EHE_Consultation_Complain.pdf

Read online

Guide to complaining to MPs about the Oct 23 – Jan 24 Consultation on draft EHE Guidance for LAs and parents

<https://he-byte.uk/eng-cons/complaining-to-mps-about-the-consultation>