

1. Name/Name of Organisation/other body (optional)

MN

**2. Please select the category that best describes you as a respondent:
(Please tick one box only)**

Parent/Guardian	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pupil	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of School Staff (Teaching)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of School Staff (Non-Teaching)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governor (individual)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Board of Governors (Please insert name of school) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education/Sectoral Support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Government Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>
General Public	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. Having read the Draft Policy for Elective Home Education, I consider that the draft policy:

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Not applicable
3.1 Provides relevant information about the Board's responsibility for Elective Home Education, clearly and concisely			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.2 Outlines the procedure to be followed should parents decide to home educate their children			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.3 Provides parents with a greater understanding of their role/responsibilities when deciding to home educate their children			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.4 Provides parents with a greater understanding of the Board's statutory role/responsibilities for Elective Home Education			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.5 Clarifies the role of the Education Welfare Service/Officer in relation to children who are home educated			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.6 Clarifies the role of the School/School Principal in relation to children who are home educated			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.7 Clarifies the role of other agencies in relation to children who are home educated			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.8 Highlights the importance of establishing arrangements for safeguarding children/young people who are home educated			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3.9 Provides information and clarifies the role of the 'Named			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Officer' as appointed by the Board				
3.10 Provides appropriate information about the arrangements for and frequency of monitoring			x	
3.11 Highlights the minimum standards that will be used for monitoring purposes			x	
3.12 Signposts resources/information that may be useful for parents who are home educating			x	
3.13 Provides information about the process to be followed to facilitate children with identified Special Educational Needs			x	
3.14 Provides parents with sufficient information to contact the named Board Officer			x	
3.15 Overall, I consider that this draft policy provides me with a clear understanding of provision for Elective Home Education for children within the Board's area			x	

Please use the space below to comment further:

As a university-educated parent and qualified music teacher, I am currently home-educating two children, one who is of school age. I strongly oppose the proposals contained in this draft policy, the reasons for which I will state below.

First, I find this policy's proposals to be far beyond the legal powers of the NEELB. The law states that it the parent's duty to educate their child, "either by regular attendance at a school or otherwise". (Article 45 of the 1986 Education (Northern Ireland) Order).The Board simply has a *reactive* duty to step in if it appears that parents are failing to do their duty. In UK law, the parent is always considered to be the best advocate for the rights of their child.

Second, I find it insulting in the extreme that the policy seems to presume that a home-educated child is 'in need' or 'at risk'. Safeguarding is not the role of the Education and Library Boards but of the relevant authorities, either a Health and Social Services Board, or a Health and Social Care Trust. The Boards need to do us the courtesy of recognising that home education is a legally protected option, not a valid concern, and desist from casting such aspersions upon home-education parents. Simple logic dictates how highly unlikely it is for a home-educating parent who spends all their time with their children, and invests a lot of money on materials, to be mistreating those children.

Third, I find the overall tone of the policy to be prejudicial towards home-educators and threatening in tone and structure. I take to task the intrusive suggestions made in the policy under Section 3: Procedures. It is

illegal to delay de-registration once it has been requested by the parent, and likewise there is no legal requirement for the parent to submit a 'programme of education' as part of the deregistration process. The Article 3 Children (NI) Order is referred to in regard to questioning the child about their wishes and feelings, but this Article applies only to court and is thus irrelevant. Furthermore, such proposed questioning of the child is most intrusive. Children in state schools are not routinely cross-examined about their feelings on their education, so why should home-educated children be treated any differently? What I find most galling about Section 3 is the proposed power given to the Board officer to assess the learning environment and suitability of the programme to meet the educational needs of the child. The NEELB needs to realise that that every home-educating family has a particular teaching style, that religion may influence the choice of curriculum, and that the home may not necessarily be set up as a model classroom. Effective learning can take place in many different environments.

Fourth, I find it incongruous that while the boards claim to value the child's opinion under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the fact remains that no age appropriate materials have been made available for children. Young people have not been given sufficient opportunity to engage despite the stated intent in the consultation proforma:

"Boards are mindful of the accessibility issues faced by some who may wish to provide feedback about this draft Elective Home Education Policy, and will upon request; make all associated documentation available, in different languages and formats as appropriate."

I would like to suggest that education board staff be properly educated regarding the philosophies and practices of home education in order to build up good relationships with home-educators and their families. In the past few years since I began to home-educate my daughter, I have been distressed to see the narrow-minded views towards home education in this country and the resulting lack of support for it. In comparison, in Canada and the USA alone, it is estimated that over two million children are home-educated. Not only is home-education well accepted, but it is also supported by local school districts, and many extra-curricular activities are made available to home-educated students. I know this, because I grew up in the United States, experienced an excellent home education along with my siblings, and progressed to university to complete an honours degree. From personal experience, I know that home education works, and not only works, but shines. And because I have such confidence in home education, I have chosen to take this route with my children.

In conclusion, the Education and Library Boards need to recognise the absolute validity of home education under the law. They must refrain from assuming that home-educated children are 'at risk'. They must desist from seeking powers of control over programmes of study, de-registration, and home visits, to which they are not entitled under law. Most importantly, they must realise that their best practice would be to develop a

procedure of working constructively with home educating families in Northern Ireland and of providing additional support to home educators if it is requested (such as exam centres, group meeting facilities, and access to local schools' choir/orchestra or sporting events).

4. Equality Consideration

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 all public bodies are obliged to consider the implications of any decisions on nine different groupings before decisions are implemented.

The two duties within this Equality legislation include promoting equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between all communities.

The equality of opportunity duty requires that the Boards shall, in carrying out all their functions, powers and duties, have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- Between persons of different religious belief.
- Between persons of different political opinion.
- Between persons of different racial groups.
- Between persons of different age.
- Between persons of different marital status.
- Between persons of different sexual orientation.
- Between men and women generally.
- Between persons with a disability and persons without.
- Between persons with dependants and persons without.

The Good Relations Duty requires that the Boards shall, without prejudice to their equality obligations, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations:

- Between persons of different religious belief.
- Between persons of different political opinions.
- Between persons of different racial groups.

In light of these obligations do you consider that review of primary provision in the area will impact positively or negatively on either Equality of Opportunity or the Promotion of Good Relations in any way?

Section 75 Category	Positive	Negative	Don't Know
Religious Belief		x	
Political Opinion		x	
Racial Group		x	
Age		x	
Marital Status		x	
Sexual Orientation		x	
Gender		x	

Disability		x	
Dependants		x	

If you ticked any of the above boxes please clarify your reason:

Since the policy is already discriminatory toward home educators and their children, there is a great deal of potential for subjective judgments to be made on the family's lifestyle and beliefs by uninformed board officials.

Thank you for completing this survey. Your privacy is very important to us and we have taken every step to ensure your confidentiality and the security of your data. We will not at any time, release your personal data to third parties.