

To: Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer

Via email only

23 October 2020

Dear Frank,

You may be aware of correspondence I've sent to the First Minister and the Minister for Education this week regarding the fire break measures and the impact in particular of school closures on young people. I had written earlier in the week to ask for the public health evidence behind the decision making, to enable me to understand how children's rights issues had been considered and applied.

I've since been party to some confidential discussions throughout this week around how the decisions were reached within Government, but much of this information has not been made public. I understand that the decision around school closures was influenced by advice regarding the contribution required in each and every sector in order to reduce the R rate overall and prevent further restrictive measures remaining in place for a lengthy period.

In order for children, young people and their families to fully appreciate and understand how and why this decision that affects them significantly has been made, they need to hear this directly from Government representatives, in a format and language that is accessible to them.

Given the clear role of medical and public health information in reaching these decisions, I would urge you to communicate this information directly to children as a matter of priority. I would encourage you to create information and/or video content addressed directly to children and young people, acknowledging the impact that these measures have on them and the cumulative impact of much of the disruption they have faced during the year. In addition they need to then hear the public health reasons for the decisions reached in clear and unequivocal terms.

In addition I would like to offer to co-ordinate a closed discussion with you and a group of young people to enable you to hear their views directly and the impact of particular decisions or measures. This is something that we've facilitated once already during the pandemic, as part of a four nations discussion with representatives from UK SAGE to help them understand the medical and health aspects of the differing measures in place across the UK. We obtained questions in advance and ensured representation of children of different ages, from different areas and backgrounds, and a selection of questions and themes/topics to avoid duplication. We also made it clear to



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Croesawn ohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg yn ogystal â'r Saesneg ac mewn amryw o fformatau
We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh and English as well as alternative formats

all participants that this session was about health and medical information only and that the SAGE representatives would not be able to address any political issues. We also supported the session in terms of obtaining parental consent and joining the session to support with any safeguarding considerations, and included some written questions in the way that the UK Government press conferences sometimes do, alongside live participation and questioning.

I appreciate that such a session might not be possible to convene ahead of the decisions on the 'post fire break' measures as these are already under discussion but I strongly believe that this is an important step to take when thinking about the necessity and proportionality of any future restrictions or lockdown measures that affect certain groups of children.

I hope that you will agree to these two suggestions in order to help our children and young people understand what is happening and why, and how their views feed in directly to decision makers. I have taken the opportunity to publish [a range of reports](#) on children's experiences of the first UK-wide lockdown, and hope that these have been brought to your attention to inform your ongoing thinking, but these should not be a substitute for direct engagement and discussion with young people themselves.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

PD

Professor Sally Holland
Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Children's Commissioner for Wales

