

Written evidence submitted by [a member of the public]

[Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. Text in square brackets has been inserted where text has been redacted.]

Evidence on home-educating children

1. I do believe that some regulation is required. Some home-educating parents don't agree but those with nothing to hide have nothing to fear.

It is really important to check what parents are up to. When we started home-educating in Scotland the education authority asked us for evidence of educational material and we submitted this. It was no hardship as our son was taking 9 IGCSEs and we had plenty of material.

Checks should be made on children to make sure parents are actually teaching them.

2. A huge number of home-educated children are taken out of school because school has become untenable either due to illness or, most commonly, bullying. Bullying is rife at some schools and for anyone who is in any way different, can be brutal. I met one boy at an examination centre and when I asked his mum why she had chosen to home-educate her son, she said that [personal information]. In our case, our eldest son was highly gifted so school wasn't meeting his needs (he now has a place at [college]). Our second son was unhappy at school due to disruptive behaviour of other pupils and chose to take his IGCSEs at home.

So the gains of home-education are:

- a) protection from bullying and violence at school
- b) a more relaxed environment at home - it takes considerably fewer hours of work to achieve better results since teaching is one to one.
- c) less stress as parents don't need to meet 'targets' nor unnecessarily examine their child as schools might have to. In our case, this approach has achieved very high grades.

Downsides are none to the child but some to the parents – all financial and with Covid, logistical. There are plenty of home-education activities in cities (I imagine there are disadvantages to home-educated in the countryside with fewer home-ed children around) and a home-educated child could meet other children every day for several hours if they wanted to.

Financially there is NO SUPPORT for parents. We meet all the considerable costs for text books and outside examination (up to £200 per exam) plus any outside tutoring one has to access for more technical subjects such as chemistry or maths.

3. As stated in 1) some form of regulation should occur. Checks on written work would be an easy one to conduct. In [city] we had these checks done because our son had been in the state system. When we moved to [city] there were no checks as our son had been in the independent school system. I worry about some children who are not being allowed to take qualifications by some parents and I would worry about the difficulty of assessing child abuse with children being at home. There must be SOME checks on home-educated parents – though understandably many parents are worried about this.

An important note on checks: some parents home-educate their child due to illness. It is vital that sensitivity is applied here because there is a lot of ignorance – even amongst the medical profession - about some invisible illness like ME/CFS and also mental illness like depression/BPD etc in children. These conditions can be managed at home and home - education is fantastically suited to

these difficult scenarios. It is important to educate around chronic illness and the role of home-education in managing these conditions.

4. The most pressing issue is what effect the cancellation of exams is having on home-educated children who are taking exams. Our eldest took his IGCSEs in [year] and went to sixth form college. His A-levels were cancelled this year and he was given his predicted grades. However, our youngest is due to take his IGCEs summer [year]. If these are cancelled, all his work over the last two years will have gone to waste.

Home-educated children **MUST** be given an opportunity – even if it is at a later date – to take their exams. They have no continual assessment by teachers, colleges won't take (understandably) the evidence from parents on the performance of their children, and if they are unable to take exams, they will have to take the two years again since many syllabuses will have changed. This means they will be starting their A-levels at 18! No educational establishment will allow entry at 18.

Even as it stands, my son, for example, has done all the work for IGCSES which have been chopped (English Literature, History, French, Geography). This has meant he has studied a lot of material which he no longer needs. This is dispiriting for him. But worse, this anxiety of not knowing if exams in [year] are going ahead is extremely stressful for pupils and parents. It is hard to motivate a student if they feel that exams are going to be cancelled.

It is catastrophic for home-educated children if they are not allowed to take exams as this is the **ONLY PROOF** they have of their educational ability.

There is also the issue that many sixth form colleges who were allowing external candidates have now closed their doors to them. We are having to look at other cities than our home town (necessitating more expense – having to rent a holiday property for the duration of exams) to find exams centres that are taking external candidates.

The govt must help home-educators. Key points:

1. Ensure exams can still be taken – preferably before Autumn 2021 term starts. If exams are delayed to November like this year, students will have to take a year off and start Sixth form at age 17 not 16. But the **MUST BE ALLOWED** to take their exams at some point.
2. Start funding home-educators – perhaps provide vouchers for educational text books and examination fees and tutors. (Education authorities save the four to six thousand pound per annum cost of educating these children in state school). I would not recommend cash grants as non-exam home-educators don't need it and could spend it elsewhere.
3. Check that home-educators are actually educating their children. This is not popular amongst many but we think it is wrong that some children don't get a chance to take exams because their parents don't want to do the work/don't believe in exams.
4. Understand that the reasons for many children being home-educated is that some pupils at schools are so badly bullied and anxious that their parents feel they have no alternative but to home-educate – often at considerable sacrifice. In other cases, as in ours, it is that particular educational needs are not being met at school.

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