

## Written evidence submitted by [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.]**

### **Context:**

I would like to begin by pointing out the position that I come from. I have been a qualified teacher for 21 years; teaching in a variety of primary school settings across England where I tackled the issues around social deprivation and affluence. My teaching was consistently graded as outstanding and without question I have loved my years as a teacher. However, I did become increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the system and how it did not enable every child to thrive and succeed. At one stage I lived in what was our nation's most deprived ward, choosing to teach and live alongside the community with an established project known as [name]. This was a real eye opener and children would knock on my door and say that if I was their teacher they'd come to school. The issues were relationship, the importance of feeling accepted and the freedom to be themselves in how they approached their learning. I was struck with how so many of our nation's children end up failing unnecessarily, if we just had the courage to take a wider and more diverse approach to our education options for our young people we'd see far more positive attainment and achievement. I am perplexed as to why we still chase after a 'one size fits all' approach, particularly in light of our rapidly changing world and one that will soon be post Brexit too. Our nation thrives on an entrepreneurial spirit and EHE feeds that so well. My own experiences within education led me to take the decision to home educate my own children.

### **The duties of local authorities with regards to home education, including safeguarding and assuring the quality of home education.**

There have been a number of consultations over home education in recent years and it still baffles one as to why there are perceived failures of the already existing systems that are in place. Authorities already hold the powers that they need in order to intervene. There hasn't been one serious case review involving a home educated child where the child wasn't already known to authorities. The perception that a home educated child is 'invisible' really is an urban myth and as a community we are tired of people assuming we're some kind of abuser who hides away from sight. Research conducted in 2015 found that home-educated children were two to three times less likely to be subject to a Child Protection Plan than children in school, despite being twice as likely to be referred to social services.

As things stand the necessary powers are already in place and strike the right balance between private family life and child protection. It is unreasonable to expect my home to be inspected at least annually because I've chosen to home educate; logic would say that the same must be asked of any family with children and that's both utterly unrealistic and also a huge over reach. Scotland's attempt at bringing in a named person scheme legally failed and that is worth noting. Wales also attempted something similar and that too has been abandoned due to it breaking the law. There are already substantial powers available to authorities to step in should it be necessary. Asking over stretched authorities to take on even more will only make them even more risk adverse in an attempt to limit having to do anything more. I can not see how this will help home educators or those children that are tragically most at risk as precious resources will be taken from those who need it most.

But most importantly why does the local authority need to concern itself with the quality of something that they are not legally responsible for? Should it come to light that things are not sufficient then that is a different story. There is no need to assure the quality of each and every child in the case of what 'might' be found. 'Innocent until proven guilty' should stand in all aspects of life.

### **Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required.**

Why do I need to register with the state to educate my own children? My children who I am legally responsible for in all aspects of life. This seems to be another step towards giving the state unwarranted powers over parents. Am not even sure why this is necessary nor how it would be effective. If where a child is educated is such a concern then a system of notification that means local authorities know if a child is either in state, private or home education would be more than suffice but even that seems unnecessary. Knowing where every child is at all times is deeply concerning and an overreach of safeguarding.

**The benefits children gain from home education, and the potential disadvantages they may face;**

The benefits are endless and I wouldn't want to use all the space to list them as there are other key points that need to be made. The most apparent ones are: a child's education can be truly personalised, that children have more time to learn about what fascinates them, that you can go as deep with a topic as interest desires, the use of first hand experiences, enriched family life, quality of relationships with peers, the developing of self motivation and self directed learning, more ground can be covered in quicker time as you're managing the needs of few children against a class of thirty, more time for free play whether indoor or outdoor which enables to child to develop far more at their own pace and we know how crucial play is to child development, navigating complex situations with the support of those who love them the most, being able to develop at their own pace rather than externally imposed expectations and the rich and diverse ways we can socialise with so many different people and in a variety of settings. The opportunity to snuggle up on the couch, read a good story, sip a hot chocolate and see where the adventures take you. Coming downstairs one morning and finding the most intriguing play set up where really you're learning about coding but it just feels like amazing play. Taking on an allotment and learning every aspect of it from crop rotation, to the quality of the soil, to choosing what to grown and learning when is best to plant it and how, managing the timing of your planting to ensure you're not overwhelmed at harvest time. Spending time with an older relative who might teach you to knit, or build a model aeroplane or hear their fascinating stories about their life's adventures. Seeing the enchantment of history as you watch a documentary together all about how food has changed since the 1950s and making recipes as you go along to taste those changes yourself... so the list goes on. EHE leaves you with enthusiastic, self directed learners where learning is a part of the every day and continues in all aspects of life and for life. Isn't that what we want all our children's learning experiences to be?

In terms of disadvantages they are largely external issues such as being able to attend exam centres to sit public exams, or the attitude of the general public and professionals who do not understand Elective Home Education (EHE) and come at you as if you must be an abuser of some sort in order to be following such a lifestyle. These are exhausting, tiring and unnecessary attitudes which reflect more the lack of public understanding around EHE. Children find themselves having to defend their position and this is not right. We recently moved house which meant a new Doctors' surgery, within weeks I had made an appointment simply to identify ourselves and ensure we were known and familiar. We have watched over our shoulder continuously through our time in a tier 2 area. It is not right that law abiding families feel that they have to take such steps in order to protect their family life.

**The quality and accessibility of support (including financial support) available for home educators and their children, including those with special educational needs, disabilities, mental health issues, or caring responsibilities, and those making the transition to further and higher education.**

Any offers of support need to be entirely voluntary, only upon request from the parents, without any strings attached otherwise the authorities are over reaching into something that parents are legally responsible for. It is also worth noting that the acceptance or rejection of offers for help are not reason for any cause for concern. It is also important that professional services do not say to a family that they can't help because their child is not in school. Professionals should be able to find

ways to assess children that doesn't involve just the classroom setting. Time and time again I hear of families that hit a brick wall because their child isn't in a classroom to be assessed. This is weak professionalism and shouldn't be a barrier.

EHE is surrounded by unwarranted suspicion by local authorities. Support is the last thing you anticipate receiving if ever having to deal with them. It's worth nothing one local authority was reprimanded by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for visiting a family based on unsubstantiated claims and not even explaining the reasons. As an EHE family if we dedicate too much thought to it we can end up feeling like we live under a constant cloud of suspicion. Something needs to change here and for the positive.

**Whether the current regulatory framework is sufficient to ensure that the wellbeing and academic achievement of home educated children is safeguarded, including where they may attend unregistered schools, have been formally excluded from school, or have been subject to 'off-rolling'.**

The clear distinction between EHE and unregistered schools, exclusions and 'off-rolling' has again be blurred here. It is imperative that this is separated out and dealt with as the separate issues that they are.

An 'off-rolled' family will be known to the local authority and can be dealt with there, as will a child who was excluded.

Illegal schools need to be tackled separately by separate legislation. An electively home educating family will not be using an illegal school. It is the illegal school that needs closing not every family inspected in suspicion that they might be linked to one.

It is also worth noting that families end up choosing EHE to protect their children from relentless bullying or even, shockingly, sexual harassment that has been documented in schools (as per the DfE's own report May 2018 'Sexual violence and Sexual harassment between child in schools and colleges).

The powers already in place are sufficient.

**The role that inspection should play in the future regulation of home education.**

Where is the mandate for this? Are local authorities already without sufficient powers to be able to intervene? They are not. I can not think of one piece of evidence that would suggest this is either needed or a good idea. New South Wales, Australia, took this step and research was then carried out into the effect it had had on the quality of home education. The research entitled, 'Child-led and interest-inspired learning, home education, learning differences and the impact of regulation' concluded the following, "child-led, interest-inspired learning mitigated learning difficulties. Less flexible regulatory policies and processes impacted negatively on student learning by restricting the opportunity...resulted in less effective learning and compromised well-being,"

Having worked for three years within the home education community I am now painfully aware of just how different every home education setting looks. EHE is inherently diverse and does not fit any type of 'box checking' which inspection inevitably boils down too. I also know how EHE can create huge anxiety for people not accustomed to its nuances and ways that make it work and work well. From the personality of the family, to the temperament of the child, to learning difficulties, to family ethos and so the list goes on. EHE is far more diverse than a school setting will ever be. It just isn't a practical nor manageable approach to take. Nor is there any evidence indicating that not inspecting means children are at risk. It seems an unnecessary and unneeded use of resources that is tantamount to intrusion into the home and yet another worrying sign of increased state interference into family life. Again it is worth noting here both Scotland and Wales' failed to be so intrusive into family life and this amounts to the same.

**What improvements have been made to support home educators since the 2010-2015 Education committee published their report on 'Support for Home Education' in 2012**

I would say none, if anything things have become worse with many local authorities now deeply suspicious of home educators and over reaching in their remit in an attempt to be seen as 'pro-active'. It also doesn't help that now many LAs have removed their home education department and those responsible for it are now within the 'children missing from education' teams. This hardly sets for a helpful and positive attitude when these children are not missing from their education at all; in fact it is being provided by the very people legally responsible for it. Add to this the distinct lack of understanding of home education and how varied it can be. It is alarming that those who were involved in establishing 'The Association of Elective Home Education Professionals', as per recommendation 4. from the report, now no longer has a traceable office and that a freedom of information request revealed that its members were actively advising Lord Soley over what to include with his private member's bill. It leaves one rather questioning their motives to support home education families.

**The impact COVID-19 has had on home educated children, and what additional measures might need to be taken in order to mitigate any negative impacts.**

The first lockdown we suffered the same as everyone else with effectively losing everything. The impact on those who were due to sit exams was disgraceful but not something I can comment on directly as we're not there yet. Increasingly the guidance from government is remembering to include EHE families and this is appreciated as it gives us the confidence to continue providing a suitable education for our children rather than looking over our shoulder to the extent we have been out of fear of being misunderstood during the pandemic.

My bigger concern is the number of families who have been pushed into EHE due to COVID-19. It may be that because a family member is extremely vulnerable the family have decided to opt out of school for the time being. I am hearing time and time again of schools saying that that will be put down as EHE as they are unable to either release the families from the fining process or don't want the negative impact on their attendance numbers. This is tantamount to off-rolling. These families, who are temporarily EHE-ing may well be shocked by the lack of support and start asking for more. They haven't had the opportunity to explore and fully grasp how EHE works effectively. I was pleased to see the DfE issue a clear definition of home schooling and home education recently as what so many experienced earlier this year was most definitely not EHE.

I am also gravely concerned that we're being asked such key questions in the middle of a pandemic. At a time when families are stretched to the limit asking whether it is a good idea to intrude further into their lives seems some what in bad taste and at times of high stress people's comments can be skewed by the stress being experienced rather than by the real long term needs. This doesn't help build one's confidence over how EHE families are regarded.

We have an effective approach to EHE that works extremely well. We're uniquely placed, at a key time in our nation's history, to enable EHE families to thrive further and do their bit towards ensure that their children receive an effective and useful education. The existing laws around EHE work and work well. We'd be foolish to try and curb anything through unwarranted registration and inspection. I say this not only as a parent but as a professional too. Our education system needs a shake up and a loosening to take place to ensure that our youngest generation can thrive not just survive.

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