

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.]

**Call for Evidence
Home Education**

I am the mum of two home-educated children. We have home-educated for [time period] and our educational experience thus far has been both positive and enlightening. I consider it of especial importance to share our journey – to highlight the many positives, and the few negatives that we have encountered along our way. Please find below the statements from the Call for Evidence – Home Education (highlighted in bold), followed by my personal responses. Thank you for taking the time to collect and consider this evidence.

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

I feel passionately that my children – and the children of home-educating families with whom we interact – thrive on the receipt of a personalised, individualised education. I can see how this style of education is enabling my children to develop the life-skills that are considered critical to future job success – decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, communication skills, interpersonal skills, self-awareness, empathy, and strategies to cope with (and self-regulate in response to) a wide array of emotions – from excitement to stress: all of these combine to enable my home-educated children to positively contribute to society throughout their educational journey and beyond. The academic provision that we tailor to our children is empowering them: they are flourishing.

It must be understood that whilst the national curriculum provides the current standard in state schools (and independent schools are tasked with providing a full and broad curriculum), this should not be considered applicable to a home education environment. In law, it is the parent's responsibility to decide what is a suitable education for their child – this is no mean feat: when we opted to electively home educate, we were very aware of our responsibilities. We take such responsibilities very seriously and seek to tailor the educational provision to each of our children's individual needs. In such an inclusive and nurturing environment, many families such as ourselves will have purposely opted to adopt an alternative approach – we predominantly embrace cross-curricular, child-led, open-ended learning: our children thrive by deeply exploring their own interests. For many within the home education community – including us – school may have been tried, tested and deemed unsuitable for their child/ren – and therefore under no circumstances should home educators ever be expected to replicate "school at home".

I speak for my family when I say that having to tick boxes in order to meet a national curriculum checklist would not be in my High Learning Potential children's best interests: I have a child who reads well above his expected reading level, and for him this transfers into wonderful pieces of creative writing – we have been able to develop this passion, helping it evolve through activities at home and also with multiple trips to meet authors, poets and illustrators.

I also have a child who adores space, physics and chemistry: he has been able to grow this passion from a very young age and is now working well above his expected level in these areas with true ingenuity. He has had inspirational meetings with astronauts and astrophysicists, and he enjoys academically challenging tutoring in order to further develop his skills within these areas. He is currently working on a piece of code that will be run on the International Space Station – for the second time!

I have no doubt my children would be frustrated within the confines of the national curriculum (in fact, my eldest asked to be withdrawn from school on this basis). For children with High Learning Potential, a novel and unique approach to the delivery of education will always favour their incredible minds. Add a twice exceptional learning difference to the mix, and home education offers the opportunity for my children to excel in a supportive and encouraging environment, with the adaptations and assistive technology that can best aid their learning readily to hand.

Home education has been proven, anecdotally, to foster a life-long love of learning, as learning is provided within an environment that is specifically designed to meet each individual child's needs. Social skills are developed with children regularly interacting not only with other similarly-aged children, but across a broad range of ages – from babies in arms through to OAPs. Academic milestones are reached in a manner that the child finds most motivating, and with scope to adapt the approaches as needs be as time is not the limited resource that it must be within a school environment.

Ultimately, educational provision continues to be the parents' responsibility in law, and it is one that home educators take very seriously.

Sadly, the main disadvantage we have experienced as a home-educating family comes from the general stigma associated from taking a path less trodden: for as long as home-education is regularly misrepresented in the media and by Government officials, it will be perceived as odd and weird, and as a damaging educational choice – something I wholly dispute.

As discussed at a later stage in this document, home-educating young people are currently penalised with regards to accessing accredited qualifications: the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted this as a major flaw within the current policy-making system. Home-educated young people were not considered/no alternative provision was made available when examinations were cancelled for the summer of 2020.

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':

Under no circumstances should the conflation of elective home education and the attendance of unregistered (illegal) schools be allowed to continue – illegal schools are a separate issue: the proprietors should be subject to prosecution and it is paramount that this issue is addressed as such. Elective home education is lawful: illegal schools are not. Further, off-rolling of pupils should never be tolerated, but the very term "off-rolling" indicates that a family have not electively chosen to home-educate and therefore, again, it is imperative that the conflation of elective home education and the off-rolling of pupils is stopped with immediate effect. Fusion into a singular group of these two subsets, along with children who have been formally excluded but whose parents may not

otherwise choose to home educate, continues to negatively penetrate the views of people regarding home education. It is unfair and unjust.

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

Safeguarding is not an issue that purports solely to home education. It is of concern to all children, regardless of their educational provision. When it is presented as such, it has the potential to demonise families who opt to electively home educate by implying children who are home-educated are immediately and/or more likely to be “at risk”.

When assuring the quality of home education, monitoring by local authorities is not required by law – this abides by the fact that is legally the parent’s responsibility to decide what is suitable for their children. I understand there is a current issue with the existence of a postcode lottery, with some local authorities taking a (very welcome) light touch approach, and others taking a far more forceful and threatening style. For a child’s educational journey to be impacted by the fortune/misfortune of where they live is not acceptable.

Consistent training across all local authorities is necessary for a universal understanding of home education to be developed: this would foster a relationship of mutual respect between local authorities and home educating families. Additionally, a separate area of expertise would be welcome: receiving a letter about your home educated child/ren from the Children Missing Education team has the potential to immediately make the recipient feel that by electively home educating they are acting corruptly which, of course, home-educating families are not.

Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required:

A statutory register of home-education is not required. Both registration and requiring positive “proof” of a child’s education, would be beyond the scope of the state’s responsibilities. Should the Government opt to establish a notification scheme as referred to in the 2018 Home Education Consultation (rather than impose a register of electively home educated children), such a notification should constitute as sufficient information regarding home-educated children.

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:

It is essential that it is made easier for external candidates to sit examinations in existing local examination centres – be these private centres, or centres registered within the state schooling system. As detailed in the 2012 “Support for Home Education” report, the Government should consider requiring all local authorities to have a proportionate number of such examination centres available for use by home educated children to sit accredited public exams. However, as home-educating parents, we would still expect to cover the cost of such examinations, as the cost of our children’s education is something we agree to undertake by electing to home educate.

The role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education:

I do not feel it is appropriate for home-educating families to be inspected: inspection insinuates that something is wrong and needs further investigation. For home educators to be subject to inspections implies an assumption of guilt, and an expectation for such families to prove their innocence: this fundamentally goes against our society's moral conscience of "innocent until proven guilty".

What improvements have been made to support home educators since the 2010-15 Education Committee published their report on 'Support for Home Education' in 2012:

I am unable to identify any improvements that have been made to support home educators since the publication of the "Support for Home Education" report (2012). As I have previously mentioned, I would urge for the recommendation for the Government to place a duty on "local authorities to ensure access to local centres for home-educated young people to sit accredited public exams" (that was made within that report on page 5) to be actioned.

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:

My children attend classes and activities at clubs that provide tuition for adults and children across the board – lessons for home-educated children, after-school classes, elite provision etc. During the initial Covid-19 lockdown, all such clubs had to cease (or move online where possible) which, whilst saddening, appeared fair as home-educated children and school-attending children were equally disadvantaged. During this second lockdown, all sports for children have been required to stop: this cessation has been viewed as unfair by my children. They attend gymnastics classes and trampolining classes solely for home-educated children (during traditional school hours), but as the gymnasiums have been ordered to close, they have had this aspect of their educational provision withheld from them. I would urge for the restrictions on classes such as these – where the provision is purely for home-educated children and forms part of their education – to be reconsidered and revised in favour of the children's right to receive a balanced and well-rounded education.

The multitude of online learning resources that were provided during the initial lockdown – such as Draw with Rob (Biddulph), and Let's Go Live with Maddie and Greg – were very welcome; we utilised these, along with broadcasts from organisations such as English Heritage and [place] Wildlife Trust in order to supplement our learning when access to the places of interest was not possible.

A key concern on how Covid-19 has negatively impacted home-educated children would come in the form of the cancellation of GCSEs and A-Level examinations: I sadly know of many young people who have been penalised – to the extent of not being awarded any qualifications over the summer and instead having to sit the exams at a later date – as there was no viable alternative option for them to receive a school teacher's recommendation for their results. This has equally been a problem for young home-educated people who received tutoring (the tutor was unable to recommend a result for the student). The current system most definitely favours school-attending children over home-educating children in the midst of this pandemic.

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