

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 Dad of two home-educated children. My wife and I have been home educating for over [number of] years since de-registering our eldest from school at the end of [school year]. Our educational experience thus far has been both extremely positive and enlightening.

I am providing evidence to the committee as I consider it important to share our journey – to highlight the many positives, and the few negatives that we have encountered along our way. Our eldest son's mental health, happiness, learning potential and current skillset, knowledge and wisdom is so far removed (in a positive way) from when he was in state education. I do believe in the state school system and know it is definitely something that works in varying levels for the majority of children; however there are children at either end of that spectrum where a state education is definitely not the best approach to their learning journey and/or mental health and thus I feel compelled to share my personal responses below in response to the questions posed. 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:

We currently provide a different, bespoke, and tailored education to each of our children, something they would never be able to get from school. Both of our children are thriving in this environment which can be seen by their above age progress compared to their school aged peers, but more importantly in their happiness and mental health. 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, and this is very often commented on by the parents of their school-attending friends.

I do not believe the national curriculum should be considered applicable to a home education environment. By 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 and as such we take this responsibility 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” – this definitely would not work with our children.

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 (as confirmed by Educational Psychologists) best interests: I have a child who reads (and comprehends) many years 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.

Our eldest 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 – already mastering topics that would be considering 5 years above his actual age [age] He has had inspirational meetings with astronauts and astrophysicists, and he enjoys academically challenging tutoring 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! Before de-registering, the school he attended was supportive of his unique learning style and provided him with 1:1 tuition one day a week. Under this tuition he thrived but for the school this was a temporary arrangement, due to funding, resourcing, time, getting too far ahead of his peers and thus was stopped. We understand why this was stopped, and acknowledge that the state school system just does not have room to provide this type of bespoke learning environment.

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 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. This can be seen in the US university system whereby the Ivy League (some of the most prestigious universities in the world) actively seek out home educated children, and have reserved spots in this intake for them, due to the usually higher than average Gross Point Average (GPA – grading system), love of learning, better self-learning discipline and emotional intelligence.

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

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 and I am hoping that due to the initial lockdown period will be the positive start of a slow change in hearts and minds.

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’:

There is a significant and stark difference between elective home education and illegal/un-registered schools, off-rolling and formal exclusion. 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.

Furthermore, 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”.

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

Both of our children are ‘known’ to our local authority. Our eldest through de-registration and our youngest by my wife and I voluntarily electing to inform the LA. In principle I do not have an issue with a register (as can be seen for our elective informing the LA of our children’s education status). This data should theoretically be able to be obtained from a concatenation of other sources: birth and death records, migration data, school registers etc therefore 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 home educated children to be able 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 on page 5, 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.

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

This is a very generic question and as such I cannot comment on this with any conviction. What is the purpose of the inspection? What would the inspectors be looking for? What training would be given to inspectors to ensure that all inspectors are of the same standard and quality? If this is inspection for the purpose of safeguarding, then I agree with this in principle but would need to see how this is expected to be carried out before giving it my backing or further comment to ensure it was both fair and, more importantly, effective.

Inspection for purpose of determining the quality of the education being provided would be exceptionally hard to carry out. OFSTED have an asset of criteria, qualities and activities they expect to see within a school setting, and is thus crucial in their ability to inspect, comment on education quality provided and thus compare one school against another. Schools also try to optimise their OFSTED results by trying to work towards those guidelines to ensure those boxes are ticked for purpose of inspection – this may be anecdotal but it is something I experienced first hand as a governor withing an academy trust. Transposing this approach to Home Education just does not work. How can an inspector in a short visit determine what the quality of the bespoke and individualised education we provide for each of our children is? They will not know the child, their interests, their skills. How will they be able to compare the effect on the different ways you can facilitate learning when one child could respond very well with an approach whereas another child does not. As previously stated above, Home Education gives us the ability to create a bespoke learning environment for each of our children, tailored for their individual approaches and learning styles; something an inspection would not be able to comment confidently on without multiple engagements and interactions but at that point I believe this goes well beyond the State’s responsibilities.

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:

Having read through this document 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).

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.