

WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY Home Education Scotland

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Scotland's largest and most active membership charity (SC050530).**

Home Education Scotland was established in 2019 as it was identified that a membership organisation was required in order to take a proactive approach in ensuring that Scotland remains a great place to be home educated. A charity which truly represented the needs of its members and acted on behalf of members had been absent for several years. We offer information and support to families who have chosen home education for their children or are considering this option. We also work to ensure that professionals working with children and families have access to information, training and research. We often work in co-operation with the peer support network The Scottish Home Education Forum.

We enjoy a positive relationship and regular discussion with the Scottish Government. We also engage with LA officers, local councillors and MSP's, some of whom have raised issues on behalf of our home educating community.

Our contribution will be relevant to the Committee's work as many of the same concerns have arisen in Scotland albeit in different circumstances.

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

Home education is a right conditional upon the parents providing an efficient education suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and choosing this option does not in itself require permission.

The duty of the LA is to only get involved in the event of a parent failing to provide a suitable and efficient education, existing guidance already covers this.

Home Education is a key aspect of parental choice and is an equally valid choice alongside the option to send a child to school.

Home Educating families can routinely feel stigmatised just by the very nature of our choice of education. The stigma of being 'hidden' is one of huge

concern when in fact simply because children are not in school it is assumed, they are not safe. Frequently compliments by professionals are followed by a 'but' which then raises concern about distorted reports which can be entirely damaging.

Because our choice of education is less familiar and due to the sheer lack of quality training in professionals this can and has created a very hostile environment. This has contributed to all sorts of completely unnecessary situations for families and can be associated with hateful conduct towards them.

Home Education presents no more of a risk, and in many cases much less of a risk to children than school attendance, this is especially the case for children with additional support needs and disabilities. Many of whom have had their safety compromised to a serious level and needs not met within the school environment. Many home educating parents on the other hand have been viewed with suspicion by hospital staff, health visitors and other health, education and social work professionals so the hostile environment created by linking HE with inflated concerns has stigmatised HE children and their families.

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

The provision of educating is a parental duty and elective home education has equal status to schooling. No other minority group has a register, and no need has been evidenced to warrant the targeting of home educators who are simply choosing a different type of education for their children.

By introducing a register, elective home educating families who are already exercising an equal lawful choice (and who are subject to legislation that already permits necessary state interference in the event of parental failure) would amount to interference under EHCR, GDPR and the Equality Act.

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

Home education provides benefits that can only be described as the learning journey of choice for more and more families at a time when a significant number of children's needs have not been met by schools. It can be life changing and lifesaving in some cases. At a time when anxiety is a national

concern among young people it works perfectly by giving control over learning, encouraging a happy and relaxed learning environment at a child's own pace. The emphasis on books and curriculum does not work for many children and home education allows a unique style of learning that continues as the child develops. Life skills are given time to develop and flourish as is confidence in ability. The opportunities available have never been better both online and in various groups and courses in the community. Many home educated children go on to academic attainment and highly paid employment as the opportunity to study for exams in normal times is also very possible.

Possible disadvantages of home education mainly come from the hostile environment by professionals who have vested interests in the schooling system and those who wish to erode parental responsibilities and children's rights in favour of imposing state-controlled one size fits all provision.

In the 2016 'named person' judgement, the Supreme Court referred to the need to guarantee respect for individual differences. This was welcomed by home educators and other minority groups.

There is also a postcode and postholder lottery across the country which seriously affects home educators (England included). Many of whom have reported huge inconsistencies in approaches between authorities and officers. The sheer lack of training and unconscious bias amongst authorities and officers must be addressed if the culture of home – edophobia is to be successfully overcome and trusting relationships can be developed. Home Education is an equal choice in law but not built into the culture of many local authorities who assume suspicion and act like it is a 'less than' choice. Equality is not shown through actions and communications from local authorities to the extent to which it should be.

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

There is currently no support offered at the moment for home educators in the UK but there has been a relentless and negative target on families who educate out with the school system, with constant consultations, calls for evidence and legislative proposals that threaten home educating families choices and ultimately impact the best interests of home educated children.

Quality support for home educators is delivered through peer support networks, local groups and advocacy services that have become very well established. Families helping other families through these support networks has been invaluable as have much more experienced home educators volunteering their time in order to share their knowledge whilst aiming to ensure that home education remains a choice.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in home educator numbers across the UK with the majority of families giving reasons such as disability, unmet support needs, severe school anxiety and ASD (and associated conditions) being amongst the main reason to find another choice of education. Reports of children being denied specialist services, the correct level of support and sheer unwillingness from schools to give access to the right identification of needs in some cases.

Despite the sheer lack of support amongst LA's access to higher education has proved very positive for home educated children who have taken a variety of different routes to colleges and university, although 2020 was detrimental as external exam candidates were excluded from alternative grading arrangements that schools benefited from.

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'

Children with disabilities and other additional support needs are highly represented and supported in the home educated community where they benefit from individualised provision and one-to-one support that cannot be

matched by schools where reasonable adjustments are rarely implemented and some children have suffered traumatic experiences as a result.

It is entirely up to parents to meet their children's wellbeing needs and the UK Supreme Court in its 2016 'named person' ruling stated that:

"Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be **their** basic concern"

There is a consistent frustration with the deliberate conflation of home education with unregistered schooling that appears stem from the prevailing culture that is biased towards schooling. Home Educated children do not attend unregistered/illegal schools and the assumption that they do is insulting when powers exist to close such establishment.

The illegal and physical restraint and seclusion practices by schools across the UK has led to some parents to a home education choice to ensure the health and safety of their children. The failures of state schools require much more attention as they have failed to safeguard children even on the school register. This is heighten by the fact that parents are not listened to by schools and the culture of the education professional knowing what is best for a child's health and wellbeing has been questioned on many an occasion, especially if that child has complex additional support needs. Education professionals are not trained in extensive health matters (to include disabilities) and with endless waiting lists of specialist services parents see the suffering in their own children if they remain within a broken system.

Illegal exclusions and off rolling should be dealt with by the relevant authorities and home educators should not be held responsible for the unlawful actions of schools nor should their children be damaged further by being forced to comply with a one size fits all system. The families involved in the above should be helped in taking legal action with appropriate compensation.

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

There is no place for inspection in home education since the provision of education is parental responsibility, it does not lie with the state. When

schools are inspected it is done on behalf of parents to ensure minimum standards are met so by introducing 'inspection' you are undermining parents across the UK and not respecting the rights of the parent.

Home education is individualised for each child whose learning needs have been identified and addressed by the parent. These needs would be completely unknown to the state appointed officer with limited or no experience outside of the school system. This is especially important for children with additional support needs, the training for education professionals on additional support needs can only be comparable to that support provided for children in schools, most of which is inadequate, unsatisfactory and damaging.

Improvements made to support home educators since the 2010-15 Education Committee published their report on 'Support for Home Education' in 2012

Families in the various support groups in England have expressed sheer disappointment that the 2012 report and that it has not lived up to expectations. There has been a clear deterioration in relationships with local authorities as a result so the sheer lack of quality training to accompany any report has ended up with those who only know the school system 'assuming' all sorts of wrong doing by home educating families. The absence of quality training to include unconscious bias is long overdue

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

The home educating community was much better equipped to deal with the many new challenges presented by the pandemic as we are already well tuned into overcoming barriers, finding other ways of doing things, sharing knowledge via our various support networks and in the community and the level of skills among home educating parents(and children) proved very useful.

We are already very used to finding solutions but we did have a huge negative impact that we couldn't get around by way of independent exam candidates, including home educated young people, being excluded from the alternative arrangements made for their schooled counterparts. In the absence of predicted grades by teachers or tutors many home educators incurred

significant financial losses as well as missing out on qualification and university places they had worked hard for.

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