

We home-educated our three children for 12 years until 2018 when our eldest went to university and our other two went to sixth form. One of the younger two is now at university and the other has a place for 2021.

We decided to home educate our children mainly because we simply thought it was the best way to educate them! We were able to think about what good education looked like, what was appropriate for our children at their ages and stages, and then how to best go about it.

We generally followed what would be termed a Christian “classical education” approach, which seeks to work in harmony with the developmental stage of the child and enables the child to learn the skills of learning.

This involved early on, among other things, building on a younger child’s enjoyment and unique ability to memorise, often by song. A child may learn all sorts of information (times tables, English grammar, Kings and Queens, Science facts etc) which later will be useful as their understanding grows.

When a child begins to ask the inevitable question, “why?”, they are often ready for learning good questions to ask others or themselves about almost anything they come across: books, nature, music, ideas. Their natural inquisitiveness at this age is often a great time for them to begin to learn how things connect together. Lots of conversation and also opportunities to develop social skills.

Again as they grow, the child naturally can start developing stronger opinions, and is often at a good stage to learn the art of debate and persuasive writing. Creative writing usually develops alongside their growing ability to prepare and deliver presentations and speeches.

During all these years we also read a lot of good literature both together and independently - covering all sorts of subjects. We sourced informative and interesting books on History, Science, Geography, and other topics. When they were younger, I would read aloud and they then took turns to narrate or tell back what they had heard and understood (involving listening, processing and communication skills) and many lively conversations followed. Occasionally they would draw or paint a picture of what I had read and then describe the picture to the rest of the family. They often carried on conversations at mealtimes - especially when a story was exciting. Social skills developed naturally and they learned to chat easily with people of their own age as well as other ages.

Numeracy and literacy we could do individually and at the child’s pace, either moving through the work or focussing longer on a topic as required. Also, lessons were short when they were young, and they learned early on to sometimes work

independently for short periods. This benefitted them greatly as they grew older and were able to do more independent learning, which in turn was a great preparation for A levels, university life and beyond. We also arranged lots of outdoor play, practical activities and sports, and meetings with other home educators for educational trips and events, as well as joining local clubs and groups.

It was a great benefit to be able to teach core skills in a way appropriate to each child. For example, our youngest child was assessed at about six and in his mid teens, and was diagnosed as “very severely dyslexic”. However, we were able to teach phonics and literacy in a systematic way, while at other times helping him cultivate a love of learning and literature by reading aloud and discussing all the books needed to do this. He did very well in his GCSEs and achieved three Bs at A level in Chemistry, Geography and Business Studies.

Our other two children are currently at University - one studying Food & Human Nutrition after Science A levels at home, and the other studying a Liberal Arts degree.

The home education community is supportive and wide spread. There are many physical groups, online communities, publications and forums - I think more now than when we started out. I have been so heartened during our 12 years of home educating at the willingness of other home educators to share wisdom and resources with others, either in person or online. From questions about exam centres to special needs, the collective wisdom and willingness to help others has been invaluable to us.

One potential disadvantage of home educating our children was the often ongoing questioning of many people who were not aware of the legal right to home educate and their personal doubts about the “end-result”. This however also gave us an opportunity to model to and teach our children how to answer repetitive questions and to put forward views clearly and winsomely.

With regard to some of the other points in the Call for Evidence:

We recognise that the primary responsibility to raise and choose the mode of education lies with the parents and primary carers of the individual child. We are thankful for our current laws which uphold these rights and responsibilities. We are also thankful for existing laws which give the state the right to proactively safeguard each and every child and therefore preclude the need for further regulation. Any further ‘checking’ would beg the question, why only school age children? Why not under 5s? This may seem unthinkable at present but would seem to be a logical step if further regulation is brought in for EHE.

The freedom afforded parents is also reflected in the present absence of a statutory register of home-educated children. Voluntary notification seems to be in accordance

with this freedom, whereas statutory registration implies some kind of request for permission, which under law parents already have.

I am currently meet many other home educators. Covid-19 has had an impact on everyone. However, in my experience, those families who electively home educate have been less impacted perhaps than those who have had their children's schools close in lockdown and supported their children carry on their school work at home. These latter families, together with those who have been subject to "off-rolling", I think do not fall into the category of elective home educators.

Many of us were asked by numerous friends and contacts who normally had children at school for advice during lockdown, which everyone I know of was more than happy to give. For example, I was phoned and messaged by many for tips and suggestions, as well as being asked by someone to write an article for their blog to share ideas and suggestions, which again I was happy to do.

In the last 14 years, I have met and spent time with hundreds of home educators. I can't think of one who has made the decision to home educate lightly. Many I speak to have researched, carefully planned and made some personally costly decisions (such as temporarily giving up a career) to give their children the best education they can.

Many have had children with special educational needs, disabilities or mental health issues. Home educators are often uniquely motivated and placed to give their children the ongoing one-to-one and appropriate learning support they need. As a technologically-connected society, information and resources are usually available and both the formal and informal mutual support of EHEs makes this even more the case.

Fresh air, exercise, time in gardens and parks, and being close to nature have been shown to be important for everyone and especially for those with mental health issues. This is something we could incorporate into our day as appropriate. We prioritised a nature walk at midday in winter when the children were younger to make use of maximum sunlight. Summer often saw us take reading or art outside in the afternoons. As they grew older they chose themselves to go for runs and walks, garden or work outside.

Home education is illegal in a number of countries. We are thankful that it is legal in the UK and that our laws continue to recognise parents' rights and responsibilities to effectively educate their children as they choose, as well as to allow the safeguarding of children as necessary. The law is sufficient and I trust that it will continue to be viewed as such.

With thanks.