

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.]

This submission is provided in response to the Parliament Education Committee call for evidence on Home Education. Our response is based on the following experience:

- Home educating our daughter from [academic year] and [academic year]
- Our daughter's experience of mainstream education up to [academic year] and [academic year]
- Experience of mainstream state education – and independent education – as qualified teachers.
- Ten years of experience of working with school groups in an out-of-school setting.

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

Local authorities should concentrate on assuring the quality of education in schools rather than in home education. Parents are the primary educator of their children: Ofsted (and the local authority) should focus on monitoring and assuring the quality of school education which the state provides *on behalf of parents*. Many parents opt to home educate for the very reason that they consider state provision to be inadequate and they will educate in ways that are effective, but which do not match the models, methods or expectations of Ofsted. Home education is not merely the translation of school into the home environment.

Safeguarding is perhaps one area of concern, as schools do provide one of the environments where children are 'seen' and where relevant concerns about child welfare can be raised. It is possible that some parents/guardians will withdraw their children in order to hide evidence of abuse. However, it is unlikely that parents will withdraw children with the intention of providing a poor education. Thus, some form of monitoring for safeguarding purposes may be appropriate whereas doing so for monitoring quality of education will not.

Whether a statutory register of home-educated children is required

Perhaps, for safeguarding purposes, but not for the purpose of assuring educational quality.

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

Benefits:

- An education that is tailored to take account of the child's interests, passions, natural preferences and learning style.
- Flexibility: not being tied to a curriculum or timetable allows home educators to better respond to educational opportunities that might arise. Nothing is missed if a child is sick: you just pick up where you left off.
- More efficient use of time. Even with effective differentiation in the classroom (which is always a challenge for teachers), progress through the curriculum is slow in schools as delivery has to meet the needs of all the students in the class. It is possible to cover more ground in 45 mins in a home-education environment than it will be in a 45 minute lesson in school.
- More opportunity for independent learning: our daughter has thrived as an independent learner and the opportunity to manage her own time, preparing her well for A-Level and, eventually, university.
- Freedom from the peer pressures and 'group think' that is prevalent among students in our schools: there is no pressure to 'fit in' in the home-education environment. I would also

argue that a home educated child is less at risk from the mental health issues that affect so many children from their experience in schools.

- There are many supportive and effective home education networks to support parents and provide children with a shared and social experience. This allows positive and supportive social interaction with children of a varied age range: the year group barriers that exist in schools do not exist in home education. There is something bizarre about how, in mainstream education, we group children of the same age together. Children learn from each other: if this is only among their own age group then that 'learning' has more chance of being erroneous and perhaps even damaging. Our experience is that home educated children are socially mature.
- Examinations – and the stresses that come from them – do not need to be taken at the same time. Our daughter sat one GCSE in Year 9, 1 in Year 10 (would have been 3 if not for the pandemic) and has just sat three this autumn (Year 11).

Disadvantages:

- Financial restrictions may present some families with limitations on what they can offer, e.g. the purchasing of books and resources, subscription to online courses, travel.
- Families without adequate internet may be limited in the online resources that they can access.
- Stigma: there can be a negative response to home education, presuming that the child has problems that have necessitated them coming out of school, or that they will not have adequate socialising experience.
- Having to find – and pay for – exam centres that will take external students.
- Home education is only really a viable option when both parents do not have to work full time, especially when children are younger and cannot be left unsupervised.
- The difficulty in home educated students undertaking examinations that require coursework, as this can normally only be assessed in school.

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;

Although only being on relatively modest salaries, we have not found that home educating our daughter to be a financial challenge: we have been able to cut our cloth accordingly. However, families on lower incomes, or with more children, will find it more of a challenge. We have no direct experience of home educating a child with SEN, disabilities etc., but know of families who have. Some children with SEN will be better served at home, with parents who inevitably know them well and can support them. However, we would expect that some may benefit from, and would welcome support, in areas where the issues (e.g. mental health) go beyond a parent's (and a teacher's) expertise.

Our daughter will be re-entering mainstream education for 6th form and has aspirations to go to university. As yet we have not experienced any significant difficulties or need for support. Our understanding is that, in general, universities have a positive attitude to students who have been home educated as it can be an indicator that the student has the preparation and potential for the independent learning that is required at university. *Potential* issues might be:

- Whether parents have chosen examination boards/specifications that are accepted by the universities.
- Whether universities will view a student who has spaced their GCSEs out over 3 years with less favour than ones who have not.

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';

We do not have experience of exclusion or off-rolling but recognise that these could be problematic when wanting to ensure the wellbeing and academic achievement of children who have been excluded or 'off-rolled'. We would argue that this is compelled home education and whereas there might be some justification for regulating it, it does not follow that *elective* home education should be regulated.

Parents collaborating in home education is a positive feature of some home education networks. For example, our daughter would go to one family's home where the mother taught French (via putting on a play in French), another would offer sewing lessons, another science. We would consider this as different to 'unregistered schools': if the environment created is essentially the same as a mainstream school (eg classroom, desks, syllabus, relative inflexibility, teacher rather than parent involvement) is, essentially, a 'school' and should be registered/regulated.

the role that inspection should play in future regulation of home education;

There is no role for regulation or inspection in home education. Parents are the primary educator and should be supported rather than regulated or inspected. In the context of mainstream schools, the state is effectively commissioned to provide education on behalf of the parents, and thus it is these schools that need regulating and inspecting to ensure that they are providing an education of appropriate quality.

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

We have not accessed local authority support to home educators, so have no experience of the implementation of this report. However, on moving to a new local authority in 2016, the information they provided to home-educators was suggestive of an attitude that was more supportive than our previous local authority.

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 main impact for us has been the cancellation of GCSE examinations in summer 2020: our daughter was due to sit two this summer, which were cancelled. Having not been taught in a school, there was no process for her to be given a mark based on teacher assessment, so she sat these this autumn in addition to one other previously planned. She will now be focussing on working towards four examinations in the summer with the risk, should examinations be cancelled again, that she will not be able to get a teacher-assessed grade in the way students in school will.

I mentioned earlier that there can be problems in finding an exam centre that will accept external candidates. We are already finding that some centres are not taking any external candidates for summer 2021, and others have decisions pending. Even if a private or online tutor can provide a teacher-assessed grade, this will be invalid if we have not been able to register at an exam centre. So far, we have only one exam centre that will guarantee registering our daughter for an exam, and

that is because they are an international centre and will be continuing irrespective of decisions regarding exams in UK schools. However, the centre examines for one board only and the change will mean a change of syllabus despite the work for the original examination being complete for an exam she would have sat this autumn, if there had been a centre willing to register her. If she had worked for a GCSE in a subject which the board that this centre does not examine, then it seems likely that we would find no centre willing to register her.

[name]

7 November 2020

November 2020