

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.]

To whom it may concern, my response to the call for evidence regarding Home Education, following Mr Robert Halfon's interview on BBC Radio 4 Today, 16/11/2020.

I am a young adult who was Home Educated from preschool through to 17 years old, before attending a grammar school Sixth Form to study for my A-Levels. I am currently undertaking a gap year, having deferred my unconditional offer to study at university until September 2021. My evidence is drawn from my own experience of Home Education, and what I know of the experiences of friends who have also Home Educated.

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

I do not believe that the Local Authority has any duties regarding elective Home Education, beyond those they hold towards all children and families regardless of educational decision. Their responsibilities do, however, include providing a high standard of education and support to children whose families have made the decision to place them within the school system. Despite this, concerns about the quality of education provided by schools are often voiced by parents and teachers nationally, regarding issues such as peer pressure and bullying, mental health support, provisions for children with additional educational needs, and lasting under-achievement by children from certain backgrounds.

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

Government reviews completed in previous years have deemed a compulsory register unnecessary, based on the evidence provided. Home Education is a legal option for education, and there is no reason to consider it a safeguarding issue. In addition, Home Education cannot be compared with education provided by mainstream schools, which means that those who have chosen to follow this route should not be required to register for inspection and academic monitoring by the Local Authority (LA). It would also be unreasonable to expect LAs to dedicate a portion of their already limited time and resources to attempting to complete such inspections.

The benefits children gain from home education:

Socialisation: Throughout my time Home Educating, I benefited from attending a wide range of regular social clubs and groups, both those organised for Home Educators, and those attended by children enrolled in school, such as Brownies, theatre, gymnastics, and multi-sport, as well as shared trips to places of interest with other Home Educating families. As a result of being Home Educated, I also learned to interact confidently and successfully with people of all ages, which is an invaluable skill. I was able to develop strong friendships with likeminded individuals at my own pace, which was immensely beneficial to me. I have

observed, through interactions with individuals who have been home educated, and those who have attended school, that issues such as peer pressure and bullying, which are sadly common in schools, occur far less frequently among Home Educators.

Ability to learn at my own pace: Home Education allowed me to progress through my education at the speed which suited me best, as I could spend more time focussing on topics and skills I found harder, and less on those areas I mastered more easily. This also allowed me to maintain consistency in my learning. In addition to this, I received individualised support from my parents, who made use of online resources and the knowledge of other adults, to teach things they are not personally as knowledgeable about, further allowing me to progress in my education.

Independent learning skills and self-motivation: Home Education has taught me how to learn independently and stay on top of my workload, without relying on an adult to teach or motivate me – something which my Sixth Form teachers praised me for on multiple occasions.

Ability to focus on topics of particular interest in addition to core subjects: Home Education provided me the autonomy to spend more time learning about topics and subjects that fascinate me, such as psychology, which is rarely offered as a GCSE in mainstream schools, but which I was able to complete as a result of being Home Educated. I was also able to learn based on my own innate curiosity, and the intrinsic rewards gained by learning, as opposed to extrinsic motivators such as stickers, house points, or the threat of punishment. In addition, I benefitted greatly from being able to ask questions at any time, and have them answered at a level that was appropriate to me.

Less stress from exams: I did not take any exams before sitting my first GCSE at the age of 15, which meant I was not placed under the pressure of sitting tests at as young an age as is expected of children who attend school. I was also able to spread my GCSEs out over three years, which meant I was under less pressure each year. I feel that this was beneficial for my mental health, as I know a lot of people who found taking GCSEs in school extremely stressful, and stress has been proven to be detrimental to mental wellbeing.

Holistic, real-world learning: My learning was not separated into distinct subjects, but was taught holistically, which gave me a more solid understanding of my knowledge. Similarly, it was founded in real life skills, such as shopping and cooking.

Learning in a range of non-classroom environments on a regular basis – the library, museums, theatres, sports clubs, outdoors, etc.

More time spent developing extra-curricular and life skills: Being Home Educated meant that I could spend time on a daily basis developing skills such as cookery and sewing, which will be invaluable when I leave home.

Opportunities to learn through play: My younger brother and I benefitted immensely from the opportunity to spend time engaged in imaginative play and reading novels, which helped us develop language, social skills, and understanding of the world and the social scenarios and roles within it.

More time outside: My younger brother and I also benefitted from spending numerous hours playing outdoors, exploring public wild spaces, gardening, and walking in the countryside, which I feel helped us remain happy, healthy children.

Close relationships with family: Home Education allowed me to spend a lot of time with my close and extended family, enjoying their company and working on common goals. This has brought us extremely close, which is something I treasure.

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.

My family have received a lot of support from other Home Educating families, both locally and via online networks, relating to educational resources, exams, workshops, trips, etc. When I reached 16 years old, I visited and applied to local Sixth Forms in the usual way, and my chosen school facilitated visits so I could experience what lessons would be like, to help me make an informed decision on whether to join the school. I transitioned smoothly into Sixth Form, and my teachers were unaware that I had been Home Educated until I told them. They praised my work ethic, independent study skills, eagerness to engage with lessons, and how quickly I had settled in and made friends, all of which I can credit, in part, to Home Education.

I am not aware of any support, financial or otherwise, offered specifically to Home Educators by the Government.

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’.

Almost all of the Home Educating families I have met have chosen this route because they feel it will be beneficial to their children. Most of the Home Educating parents I know have been educated to a high standard, feel that education can, and should, be a positive, rewarding experience, and are fully capable of teaching and raising their children. As a community, Home Educating families have had to defend their decision in response to repeated reviews such as this one, to prevent unnecessary and intrusive inspections by LAs.

Families of children who have been excluded or off-rolled, or attend unregistered schools, are in vastly different circumstances to elective Home Educators, such as my family and the majority of families we know, and may be grateful for any guidance or support offered, but the Committee should view them as distinct from elective Home Educators.

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

This statement suggests that inspection should, without question, play a role in Home Education, which is not appropriate coming from a Government review. What evidence is there to support this claim?

The Home Educating parents I know hold firm family, moral and ethical values, and are extremely dedicated to their children's wellbeing, welfare and education. They raise their children in ways that suit their individual needs and personalities, to the best of their capability. It is disappointing to me, and the majority of other elective Home Educators I know, that the Committee feel that inspection is required to monitor us as a result of our legal educational choice, using safeguarding as a guise under which to do so. I am concerned that, should LAs be given power to oversee Home Educators, they will attempt to ensure we follow an educational model similar to that of the school system – one which is adult led, and driven by passing exams set out by the National Curriculum. The fact that this can be detrimental to young people in many ways is a factor in many families' decision to Home Educate, as Home Education can facilitate children's unique interests, personalities, skills and curiosity far more ably than mainstream education. I feel that my Home Educated friends and I are testament to the success of the approach – all of us motivated, knowledgeable, curious, confident and sociable.

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; and

I am not personally aware of any improvements or changes resulting from the report.

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.

Home Educated children suffered far less disruption because of lockdown, as the majority of their learning is adaptable, flexible, and home based, although, like all children, they were unable to attend regular clubs or workshops, or visit places of interest, such as libraries and museums. The main impact that COVID-19 has had on Home Educating young people was the cancellation of exams, as the majority did not have access to qualified tutors to provide predicted grades, and no viable alternative was offered. I studied for my IGCSEs with no tutor, as I was able to complete the courses with minimal support, or with my parents' aid, achieving two A*s, three As, and a B, in English, Maths, and four sciences. I was extremely lucky to have completed my exams prior to COVID-19, as I may not have been able to attain results otherwise. I am aware that some exam centres are now reluctant to accept external candidates as a result of COVID-19, which will make it far more challenging for Home Educators to sit exams this academic year, and possibly further into the future. This highlights the inequality in relation to exam access between Home Education and mainstream schools, despite Home Education being an effective, common, and legal alternative.

November 2020