

Home Education APPG Exams Access for Private Candidates

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Tuesday July 9th 2013
6.00 to 7.30pm
Room Q Portcullis House
Westminster

Roundtable discussion chaired by Graham Stuart

Speakers

Andrew Harland CEO Examination Officers' Association (EOA)

Angela Horn author FAQ for Exams Officers on Private Candidates

Gillian Newham Exams Officer private school South West England

Peter Monteath Research and Strategy Manager Cambridge International Examinations

Introduction

Home educated young people who wish to take exams do so outside the state school system as private candidates. This involves selecting an exam board with suitable courses and finding an exam centre which accepts private candidates. State schools don't generally let young people who aren't registered pupils go in to sit exams.

To compound the problem, controlled assessments make GCSEs virtually impossible for external candidates. Home educators therefore have a restricted range of options for exams and must either find a centre which will deal with controlled assessment for GCSEs or find a centre to sit IGCSEs.

Summary Briefing from the Examination Officers' Association

The Examination Officers' Association is committed to providing the most flexible and user friendly environment for all students.

Exams must be taken in a designated or inspected centre and all centres have to follow the JCQ rules and regulations which are not helpful to private candidates. Exams delivery is controlled by Ofqual but inspected by JCQ which is the trade body of the awarding organisations.

Private candidates can be viewed by centres and staff as more trouble than they are worth, and if academic staff will not support the private candidate there is not much that the exams officer can do. Some centres feel that private candidates will be disruptive to their own students.

Taking private candidates might involve finding additional invigilation cover, rescheduling timetables, chasing up teaching staff and tracking all the background information on the candidate in order to process the exam entry. Nevertheless some exams officers have established ways of supporting private candidates.

The Exams Officers' Association has a number of suggestions to improve support for private candidates but recognises that there are also wider issues which have yet to be addressed, including the problem of controlled assessment. The EOA can also provide templates for accepting PCs so that new centres do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Case Studies

1/ Parents asked local authority for help in finding an exam centre but LA said no. Previous school refused. All local schools and centres refused to take a child needing extra time. Eventually found a centre 170 miles away £200 per subject PLUS travel and hotels. At last minute through a friend of a friend the boy was able to sit exams at a local school just paying the entry fee.

2/ Student in 6th form wanted to sit A Level Physics which wasn't offered at his school. He arranged to sit the exam elsewhere as a private candidate and paid the entry fee. When he later contacted the school about the practicals, he was told the centre could not supervise the practicals. It was too late to find another centre.

3/ Parent has spent a year trying - and failing - to find centre where her son with SEN could sit exam. He needs extra time and use of a keyboard, and mum has supporting documentation from medical professionals. Mum is willing to pay whatever it costs.

4/ Local schools didn't accept private candidates so parent went outside the county and found somewhere for GCSEs and IGCSEs after asking 15 schools and colleges. The head saw his school as a community resource.

5/ Parents found two different private schools for IGCSEs and travelled 90 minutes for first exams, 15 minutes for the second.

6/ Parents contacted the LA for a list of local exam centres, but these didn't accept candidates for IGCSEs. They used the list from Edexcel. A group was able to organize an ICT practical paper. The exam fee was £40 per qualification paid to the exam board. Parents shared the cost of the practical and an on-site mock exam.

7/ Parent approached 189 schools. Son had taken a correspondence course for English GCSE and had coursework marked but couldn't find anywhere to sit the exam. Couldn't find anywhere to sit science exams. Parent was prepared to pay whatever the cost.

8/ Parent paid £250 for Maths GCSE through an adult education evening class. Second son started with GCSEs but switched to IGCSEs as much cheaper and easier. The local council put family in touch with local school for exams which accommodated his SEN. Local friends told mum about private school where son could sit IGCSEs.

9/ School specified private candidates could only sit exams that their own pupils were taking.

Son took 2 GCSEs aged 14, then six more age 15. The school charged £25 per exam plus £25 admin, and the boy then decided to apply to the 6th form at the same school.

10/ Daughter took IGCSE at a local private 6th form college which cost £160. Daughter also doing drama GCSE through a home education group, which will only cost £55 and GCSE Music through a private conservatoire which costs £400 per term for three terms. Music GCSE is not available to private candidates because 60% of the marks are controlled assessments in performance and composition.

11/ The list of centres from the distance learning course wasn't helpful. All centres refused to accept private candidates. Parent tried adult education, offering to enrol on course beside her daughter and both take exams but this was refused. Parent eventually found a home education group which has good relationship with small private school for sitting exams.

12/ Parents approached the local authority for help. After a year the LA came to an arrangement for home educated children to sit their exams at the local FE college. The LA awarded money to the local home education group for exams. Names and addresses were not passed on to the authority and this was a condition that the home education group placed on acceptance of the exam fees.

13/ FE College accepts Adult Literacy for English as an entry point for Btec so parent organised this at local Learn Direct Centre which cost £40. The son then did GCSE maths and found a centre through the home education internet support list. The process was simple; the parent just contacted the school, filled a form in, paid a fee of £65 for GCSE higher maths and turned up on the specified days/times.

14/ University post - doctorate researcher in her mid 40's lacked GCSE in Maths so needed to take the GCSE as a private candidate. Centre agreed but then changed mind a few weeks before the entry deadline. Eventually the cost of taking one subject was £65 excluding entry fees.

15/ A home educating family knew of a small school that would accept private candidates for Maths, Psychology, English Language and Literature, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The overall outlay for the exams was over £500.

16/ After a teenager had been excluded and sent to a Pupil Referral Unit, the parents opted for home education. The boy was part-way through GCSEs. School would not let the former student go back in to sit exams at the school. They are still looking for somewhere as private candidate to sit exams and to have controlled assessment accepted.

17/ Student in 6th form needs higher grade in Maths GCSE for university as school only entered her originally for foundation level. School won't help so student now needs to take the higher level Maths GCSE as a private candidate.