

Notes from Home Education APPG July 9th 2013: Exams Access Private Candidates

<http://edyourself.org/appgnotesjuly9th.pdf>



The discussion was chaired by Graham Stuart who briefly set out the issues for private candidates, particularly in finding an exam centre. This has not been helped by controlled assessments in most GCSEs. In December 2012 the Education Committee said there should be duty on local authorities to help, and Ofsted also said they would be asking authorities about support for home educators taking exams. Graham Stuart said the meeting would be looking to find out why it was so hard, and whether we could find positive examples which could be used to encourage others. Graham Stuart also asked should there be a duty on LAs to help and would it make a difference?

Andrew Harland from the Examination Officers' Association (EOA) approached the situation from several angles, firstly explaining the barriers for centres in taking private candidates and how the EOA can help to get the information through to the centres, and then going on to say that EOA believes there must be a structural change - backed by the Government - in order fully to improve the position for private candidates. The EOA has members in state schools and private schools throughout the country and provides a range of support materials and networking opportunities for colleagues working in this sector.

Angela Horn outlined the areas to be covered in the Exam Officers Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and also highlighted the benefits of the home educators' peer support network. Angela took a pragmatic approach, advocating that home educators should opt for IGCSEs (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) because these exams don't have controlled assessment. Angela also ran through some of the reasons people gave for not accepting private candidates, for example that the results would be counted with the school's. Angela has now had official confirmation that this is not the case and the FAQ will explain how private candidates' results can be separated from the main body of results and removed from the records.

Gillian Newham, exams officer at Monkton Combe School outside Bath, confirmed the picture already emerging with different types of private candidate, and thought people generally found out about her school via word of mouth, with some external candidates being prepared to travel a long way as they had not been able to find anything closer to home. Controlled assessment is simply not possible because the teaching staff fit the supervised project work into the rest of their timetable throughout the year and home educators could not be integrated with this. However, the school will take private candidates in subjects which aren't being taken by its own internal candidates, including Modern Foreign Languages with an Oral component.

Peter Monteath from Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) was able to dispel some widely-held myths such as CIE charging for a centre to register. Delegates expressed reservations about the CIE online forms which are different from the other main awarding bodies. Peter recognised that some of the material which is available for private candidates is not easy to find on the CIE website and this will be addressed shortly. CIE was praised for having interesting syllabus for many subjects and home educators would be very keen to have more centres where they could take CIE exams.

One MP asked whether private candidates could get access to past papers, which led to a very useful discussion about whether the very latest past papers could ever be made available to home educators (since schools use them for mock exams) It seemed that this might just not be possible, though it will be followed up. The question also highlighted the benefit of belonging to the home educators' peer support networks for parents whose children are taking exams, since the vast majority of past papers are in fact available if you know where to look and peer support networks can signpost newcomers.

Another MP was very interested to hear of Hampshire's innovative practice: working with home educating parents to encourage schools to take private candidates, with the council also funding the cost of sitting the exams (not tutors or course materials)

Feedback from local authorities at the event suggested that Hampshire was exceptional in funding exams (though Somerset who didn't attend is also doing this) and also in making it clear to schools that they had a duty to support all children in the area, not just registered pupils. It was notable that Hampshire did not join the consensus that it was best to talk to the exams officer first, since they had gone directly to headteachers and asked them to come on board.

One authority said that they had arranged somewhere local for home educators to take IGCSEs. Other LAs had compiled a list of schools in their area which would take home educated private candidates for some subjects. The general view from the meeting was that many more authorities should be made aware of what Hampshire has been able to achieve, even if it subsequently turned out that aspects of the model were incompatible with the local culture in some areas (for example where home educators might prefer not to be part of a group or collective solution)

Questions were also raised about special arrangements for candidates who need extra time or to use a keyboard in the exam. Families find that some centres who theoretically take external candidates in practice will not accept anyone with non-standard requirements. It was suggested by several delegates that **Pupil Referral Units** could be used more widely for external candidates, particularly where candidates requiring non-standard arrangements. Click here to read about LAs who are already using PRUs <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsreport.php>

Action Points Following the Roundtable Discussion

Hampshire County Council will write up the Hampshire Model with a view to promoting awareness among other local authorities

Local authorities and home educators will be asked for alternative models of good practice

EOA will liaise with members of home educators' peer support networks to build a more comprehensive list of centres which will accept private candidates

Awarding bodies and Ofqual will be asked about recent past papers being available to teachers but not to home educators

EOA will further embed advice and information on private candidates in the Toolkit for exams officers

Home Educators' FAQ for Exams Officers will continue to be developed

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) will be asked for a clear statement of the position regarding Access

Arrangements for candidates with learning difficulties, medical needs, or other special requirements which can be incorporated into the bank of readily available information for exam officers

Looking ahead to the Autumn, it may be possible to launch the paper on Hampshire Model, EOA Toolkit and the Exams Officers FAQ at a joint event

References

Useful links exams for private candidates <http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#links>

Sample email to send to MP <http://edyourself.org/appguly2013exams.pdf>

Briefing circulated to delegates prior to the event <http://edyourself.org/3pagebriefingappguly9th.pdf>

Notes from 9th July meeting as pdf <http://edyourself.org/appgnotesjuly9th.pdf>