

Case Study 12

http://www.nwilts-he.org.uk/he_exams_wiki/index.php/Ingle_Family

via <http://edyourself.org/articles/examshomeedexp.php>

The Ingle Family - on taking GCSEs/IGCSEs and A-levels at home, by Jill Ingle

Quite a few people take GCSEs/IGCSEs at home, but I don't think many have done all their A-levels from home without any assistance from tutors or distance learning courses. I hope that sharing our family's experience might help those who have considered doing the same, especially those who might not have thought it was possible.

I have three children. The eldest two, Eli and Niamh, went to school initially and we withdrew them at the end of primary. Our youngest has not started school.

We didn't set out to do the exams unassisted, it was more due to circumstance at the outset when they did the first ones age 13 and 14 (Maths and English). We had signed up with Oxford Open Learning to do Maths, but they could only provide a tutor late on in the evening, at a time when neither of them wanted to start talking about it. They offered a refund and we decided to go it alone. My daughter (Niamh) had been having 'extra help' lessons for Maths before she left school, because she found it difficult. We thought at 13, she was too young to take the GCSE but she had other ideas! She was adamant, so we decided that if she had a go in a relaxed way, if it didn't go so well, she would have plenty of time to do it again in the future, if that is what she wanted. She thought it would be good practice - she got a grade A.

In total they did five GCSEs/IGCSEs (Maths, English, Biology, Spanish and Astronomy). We stopped at five, reasoning that any sixth forms or colleges, that we were aware of, never asked for more than that. If at any point they wanted to go back to school or college we didn't want any obstacles in their way. Niamh seriously considered going into sixth form to do A-levels. She applied and got accepted into all the ones she wanted to, including the top two sixth forms in Sheffield. In the end she decided to carry on being home educated. One of the main reasons for this was because of the school rule that she needed to start doing four subjects. She wanted to do three A-levels, so she would have had to do an AS level in the first year for no reason at all. She felt it would detract from getting the best grades she could in her three chosen subjects, especially as the university course she wanted to do only accepted UCAS points from A2 and not AS level.

So after their GCSEs/IGCSEs they went on to do three A-levels. My son (Eli) took Business studies, Sociology and Psychology. Niamh took Sociology, Psychology and Biology. All these were with AQA. They were easy to arrange as private candidate entries, and we used a local school as an exam centre. All were done with nothing other than a book and the internet. They found the courses relatively straight forward.

One thing I would like to do is dispel the myth (I feel many would like us to believe) that these qualifications are only available from select places and taught only by the elite. When Eli started one of his first A-levels, I needed to ring the exam board for some minor issue. They asked who his tutor was. When I said he didn't have one, they said with gusto that he couldn't possibly do the course with out a specialist tutor. I wish I could have telephoned that person back to tell them he got an A*.

I would also like to say that by taking these exams at home it doesn't mean that your life needs to be structured and time consumed, as would be at school. We aren't structured in our approach and neither are we an academic family. It certainly didn't dominate our time; we managed to fit in a three month trip around Europe in our campervan and the arrival of our youngest :)

In our opinion, qualifications don't have to be the opposite of free learning. As someone once said, if it is the child that chooses to do the exams, this is still autonomous learning. If nothing else, our experience can be used as an example to say that it can be done if that is what you want.

Niamh is having interviews for midwifery as we speak and waiting for her final A-level results. My eldest has now finished and is now at university. His A-level results were A, A*A*. Here is an [article about him in the Huffington Post](#). If I can be of any help thinking about doing the same please get in touch on [inglefamily \(AT\) hotmail.co.uk](mailto:inglefamily(AT)hotmail.co.uk) .

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