

Local Authority Support With Access To Exams For Home Educated External Candidates

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<http://edyourself.org/councilexamsupport.pdf> via <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsreport.php>

Executive Summary

Local Authority Support with Access to Exams

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Executive Summary

The present survey on local authority help with access to examsⁱ ran from September 2013 to March 2014. Local authorities were asked 13 questions about the type of information provided to home educators; plus details of LA links and development work with schools, the PRU, and local FE colleges.

81% of local authorities (123) responded to the survey, with a quarter saying that while there was nothing particularly good in terms of exams support at the moment, they did hope to do more in future.

A further 10% of local authorities said they are currently revising their paperwork and procedures to improve their service, which would include providing more information about exams.

Three quarters of local authorities say they give information about taking exams as a private or external candidate but this is mostly one to one. A quarter of councils don't have any written information at all for home educators wishing to take exams. Moreover, the information on council websites about exams is frequently out of date or misleading.

State schools don't generally let young people who aren't registered pupils go in to the school just to sit exams. There are exceptions to this rule, but at present most councils can't name any local schools where home educated young people may sit exams.

A check on numbers in early 2012 found that local authorities were aware of around 20,000 home educated children and young people.ⁱⁱ Home educated children often start taking exams early for various reasons, so there could be several thousand home educated young people actually taking - or hoping to take - exams at any given time.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Home Education chaired by Graham Stuart MP held several meetings in 2013 looking at how to remove barriers to exam access for home educators, and also seeking to identify models of good practice amongst local authorities.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Department of Education's view is that “schools and colleges are under no obligation to provide examination facilities for candidates who are not on their roll”^{iv} but “the Department will continue to encourage maintained schools and further education colleges to provide facilities for young people who are home educated to sit their examinations”^v

Case studies show that young people who had the most difficulty in finding an exam centre were those who were looking for somewhere to sit English or Science GCSEs, because of controlled assessment or practicals.^{vi}

There are very few centres that will take candidates for units that require controlled assessment, e.g. fieldwork, practical work in science, projects, artwork, research.

Qualifications without controlled assessment such as International GCSEs or IGCSEs^{vii} are a better alternative for external candidates.

Not many state schools offer IGCSEs as they are not state-funded qualifications, therefore many schools who in theory will accept external candidates are still not a good fit for home educators.

Another group of external candidates who face considerable hurdles are young people with some form of special needs who require adjustments to the normal set-up in the exam hall, for instance by having extra time or the use of a keyboard.^{viii}

Only 10% of authorities have helped with Access Arrangements ie where an exam candidate needs an assessment for extra time or use of keyboard or scribe.^{ix}

GCSEs are difficult for home educators but this does not mean that home educated young people cannot obtain well-regarded academic qualifications.

One in three councils says it knows of local schools which accept private candidates; some local authorities say that their schools will take external candidates on a case by case basis but don't want to become known as “the centre for private candidates.”

42% of the councils surveyed had asked schools about taking private candidates but only one in five said schools had responded positively. 15% didn't feel it was necessary - possibly because the Pupil Referral Unit or local Further Education college was already being used - or else said they would just deal one to one. A couple of authorities had talked to the Secondary Heads Forum.

15% of authorities said they hoped to put together a list of local schools which would accept home educated private candidates.

Nevertheless it remains the case that some LAs simply do not see "support" as any part of their role; one respondent to the survey said the job was about "*attending homes from the point of judging whether the education provided is suitable...to gauge the quality of arrangements...not in providing support and advice*".

It is a more sensible use of limited resources for a local authority to have accurate up to date written information about exams on the website which signposts to relevant sources of support, than for councils just to pass on information via individual conversations.

Where possible the overview for external candidates should also be combined with details of any local schools, colleges, PRUs or other exam centres which have indicated a willingness to take

external candidates.

Electronic versions of leaflets can be easily produced and printed on request. The information and links can then be reviewed annually possibly in conjunction with ringing round/emailing to check that the information about local exam centres is still current.

Buckinghamshire, Devon, Doncaster, Durham, Lancashire, Leicester City and Staffordshire have leaflets about exams online and/or a list of exam centres willing to take external candidates^x.

It is relatively straightforward to provide basic information about taking exams as an external candidate. The best place to signpost for information is the FAQ on the home educators' exams wiki <http://www.home-education-exams.org.uk/>

The most highly recommended online peer support group is [http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/HE-Exams-GCSE-A AS Levels-OU-Others/info](http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/HE-Exams-GCSE-A_AS_Levels-OU-Others/info)

There are hundreds of local home education peer support groups throughout the country. Local groups can be an invaluable source of support and some local groups may be able to signpost to local study or tuition groups or have the most up to date information about local exam centres.

A long established home education group in South Hampshire with support from the local authority and the Examination Officers Association has become registered as an exam centre, and will be accepting candidates from Summer 2014.

Schools and colleges may be cautious about taking private candidates and it can be helpful to have answers ready. The Exams Officers External Candidates FAQ <http://edyourself.org/articles/examofficers.php> deals with the most common issues raised.

10% of authorities are considering organising some sort of group meeting for home educating families in the coming year, and agree that access to exams could be one of the topics.

A Working Group could look at improving local access to exams.

An Open Meeting could be held, perhaps including representatives from college to explain the different options at 16 with and without GCSEs.

17% of local authorities have some form of arrangement for home educated young people to sit exams at a centre which provides education for children unable to attend mainstream school such as a Pupil Referral Unit or medical education centre, and a quarter of local authorities said it might be possible to use the PRU as an exam centre for home educated private candidates in future.

Alternative learning centres may be more likely to take private candidates for IGCSEs than the "behaviour" PRUs.

Half the LAs who do use this type of facility – including **Bromley, Croydon Kirklees and Southampton**^{xi} - say there is help with access arrangements (ie special accommodation to meet learning difficulties in exams)

It was suggested by several delegates at the Westminster APPG meeting^{xiii} that Pupil Referral Units could be used more widely for external candidates, particularly where candidates required non-standard arrangements.

For candidates who need Access Arrangements^{xiii} the centre must “paint a picture of need” which includes “normal way of working within the centre.” Evidence of “normal way of working within the centre” will **always** be required for Access Arrangements, even where a candidate already has a statement of SEN; a report from specialist assessor (which may cost hundreds of pounds); or a verifiable psychological/medical condition.

The local authority may already have established links with centres for pupils not in mainstream education – including Pupil Referral Units and Medical Education Centres or hospital/home tuition - and this type of centre will have experience of carrying out assessments and making arrangements for candidates' special needs. The PRU will also expect to make special or individual arrangements anyway rather than just putting all the candidates into a large exam hall.

The issue for external candidates is that the centre is not familiar with the candidate's needs and therefore cannot attest to “the normal way of working within the centre” which JCQ requires for Access Arrangements^{xiv}. However, the local authority can facilitate introductions and act as a point of contact for any additional queries.

In March 2013 the Home Education APPG also held a meeting to look at the position for home educated under-16s applying directly to college^{xv}. In June 2013 the Department for Education published guidance on new funding arrangements for electively home educated children at college.^{xvi}

A relatively high number of local authorities – over half – had already approached local colleges but some have reported that colleges weren't responding positively or that colleges think it doesn't apply to them or they aren't willing to take under-16s.

Local Authority Support with Access to Exams

The present survey on local authority help with access to exams^{xvii} ran from September 2013 to March 2014. Local authorities were asked 13 questions about the type of information provided to home educators; plus details of LA links and development work with schools, the PRU, and local FE colleges.

A check on numbers in early 2012 found that local authorities were aware of around 20,000 home educated children and young people.^{xviii} Home educated children often start taking exams early for various reasons, so there could be several thousand home educated young people actually taking - or hoping to take - exams at any given time.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Home Education chaired by Graham Stuart MP held several meetings in 2013 looking at how to remove barriers to exam access for home educators, and also seeking to identify models of good practice amongst local authorities.^{xix}

Guest speakers at the APPG have included the Examination Officers' Association^{xx}; the Department for Education and the awarding bodies Pearson Edexcel^{xxi} and CIE^{xxii} as well as local authorities identified as models of good practice with regard to support for exams and/or college^{xxiii}.^{xxiv}

Home educated young people take exams as external candidates. This involves selecting an exam board with suitable courses and finding an exam centre which accepts private candidates.

Exams must be taken in a designated or inspected centre and all centres have to follow the JCQ rules and regulations^{xxv} which are not helpful to private candidates.

State schools don't generally let young people who aren't registered pupils go in to the school just to sit exams.

The Department of Education's view is that “schools and colleges are under no obligation to provide examination facilities for candidates who are not on their roll”^{xxvi} but “the Department will continue to encourage maintained schools and further education colleges to provide facilities for young people who are home educated to sit their examinations”^{xxvii}

In 2013 Sir Michael Wilshaw of Ofsted said: “When we inspect local authorities we will be asking are local authorities supporting children at home and funding access to qualifications and examinations”^{xxviii}

At the end of 2012 the Education Committee recommended “that the Government place a duty on every local authority to ensure access to local centres for home-educated young people to sit accredited public examinations”^{xxix}

Case studies show that young people who had the most difficulty in finding an exam centre were those who were looking for somewhere to sit English or Science GCSEs, because of controlled assessment or practicals.^{xxx}

There are very few centres that will take candidates for units that require controlled assessment, e.g. fieldwork, practical work in science, projects, artwork, research.

Controlled assessments must be completed during class time under controlled conditions, often require input from the teacher and are usually marked by the teacher. Most GCSEs currently include some form of controlled assessment.

By and large controlled assessment^{xxxii} for GCSE is simply not possible for external candidates because the teaching staff must fit the supervised project work into the rest of their timetable throughout the year and home educators cannot be integrated with this.

Qualifications without controlled assessment such as International GCSEs or IGCSEs^{xxxiii} are a better alternative for external candidates.

Not many state schools offer IGCSEs as they are not state-funded qualifications, therefore many schools who in theory will accept external candidates are still not a good fit for home educators.

Another group of external candidates who face considerable hurdles are young people with some form of special needs who require adjustments to the normal set-up in the exam hall, for instance by having extra time or the use of a keyboard.^{xxxiii}

Only 10% of authorities have helped with Access Arrangements ie where an exam candidate needs an assessment for extra time or use of keyboard or scribe.^{xxxiv}

Some state schools only consider private candidates for exactly the same qualification as they are already offering, either to minimise administration or staffing or because they will have staff who know the requirements of the course.

Some exams officers have established ways of supporting private candidates while others simply avoid the issue because they think the process will be complicated.

The situation was summed up by one LA as follows: "Schools are less than enthusiastic in this area. There is a small financial return for a wodge of extra administration."

Some centres feel that private candidates will be disruptive to their own students.

Accepting private candidates can 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.

Home educators with extensive experience of taking exams themselves and also advising private candidates have liaised with the Examination Officers Association to put together an Examination Officers FAQ^{xxxv}.

GCSEs are difficult for home educators but this does not mean that home educated young people cannot obtain well-regarded academic qualifications.

The fact that GCSEs are difficult is not a valid reason to try and prevent families from home educating in the first place or to insist on visiting families at home to check up or to offer advice.

Local authorities might reasonably expect to be asked how home educators can study for GCSEs at home, how much it costs, and how to find somewhere to sit the exam.^{xxxvi}

One in three councils says it knows of local schools which accept private candidates; some local authorities say that their schools will take external candidates on a case by case basis but don't want to become known as “the centre for private candidates.”

42% of the councils surveyed had asked schools about taking private candidates but only one in five said schools had responded positively. 15% didn't feel it was necessary - possibly because the Pupil Referral Unit or local Further Education college was already being used - or else said they would just deal one to one. A couple of authorities had talked to the Secondary Heads Forum.

15% of authorities said they hoped to put together a list of local schools which would accept home educated private candidates.

Local authorities tend to signpost just to exam boards but giving details of other sources of information and support^{xxxvii} would enable home educators to carry out preliminary research in order to make an informed choice about the best syllabus.

Providing details about local centres is very welcome such as how to contact the exams officer; exam boards used; whether candidates can sit IGCSEs; whether the exams are restricted to the same subject and syllabus as the centre's own candidates; and whether there is a lower age limit for external candidates.^{xxxviii}

Experience shows that simply providing “a list of schools who say they will take private candidates” without further clarifying what this actually means can lead to both the school and home educators becoming disillusioned with the process, as each new candidate has to ask the same questions of the centre.^{xxxix}

Furthermore, it can give false confidence to home educators – who won't realise the necessity for a back-up plan - if they form the impression that x school will take private candidates for all exam boards and subjects.

A third of local authorities say that information is provided one to one but there is no way to assess the quality of this support if the information is not publicly available to check.

For example, one home educator responded to my request for case studies with the following story: *"During their visits over the years the LA had always asked us if the children had any thoughts on taking qualifications but to my surprise, it turned out that they had no knowledge of how home educators could actually do exams. I set up meetings for them to learn about how exam centres can be used for the home education community, but they are still no further forward than they were when we first asked them for help all those years ago."*^{xl}

It remains the case that some LAs simply do not see "support" as any part of their role; one respondent to the survey said the job was about "attending homes from the point of judging whether the education provided is suitable...to gauge the quality of arrangements...not in providing support and advice".

Another LA simply said *"we fulfil our statutory duties and no more"*

While it is outside the scope of the present enquiry, a recent check of councils' home education policies on the web revealed that 38% of local authorities expect to visit the home; and 15% refer to "monitoring" or to judging/evaluating the parents' provision.

Some authorities answered no to most questions, adding that it was up to parents or they didn't feel there wasn't much demand.

Some authorities indicated that they would like to do more but didn't think it was feasible.

"Some good ideas there but I am over run with more on the home ed list than ever. Sadly, this does not leave time for much development work"

"Unfortunately, at this time, we do not have the capacity within the authority to offer any other services"

A quarter of local authorities who responded to the survey said that while there was nothing particularly good in terms of exams support at the moment, they did hope to do more in future.

One authority said "we are currently looking into this area, with the hope of providing an examination centre and advice/leaflet to support parents with exams etc. When we have achieved this I will get back to you with the details"

A further 10% of local authorities said they are currently revising their paperwork and procedures to improve their service, which would include providing more information about exams.

The exams process is relatively straightforward for families who benefit from good information networks and who have time to plan ahead.^{xli}

However not everyone has the luxury of time and there may be all sorts of reasons why families are in the position of trying to sort something out at short notice. In these situations, good information and signposting to other sources of information and support is even more vital.

Only a quarter of local authorities said they had some sort of FAQ about exams on their website, with a further third saying they didn't have anything as yet but hoped to add something soon.

Families do not legally have to accept a home visit and even where home educators want someone from the council to call at their home, funding cuts mean that many councils can no longer afford to send someone out year after year.

It is a more sensible use of limited resources for a local authority to have accurate up to date written information about exams on the website which signposts to relevant sources of support, than for councils just to pass on information via individual conversations.

Where possible the overview for external candidates should be combined with details of any local schools, colleges, PRUs or other exam centres which have indicated a willingness to take external candidates.

Electronic versions of leaflets can be easily produced and printed on request. The information and links can then be reviewed annually possibly in conjunction with ringing round/emailing to check that the information about local exam centres is still current.

Buckinghamshire, Devon, Doncaster, Durham, Lancashire, Leicester City and Staffordshire have leaflets about exams online and/or a list of exam centres willing to take external candidates^{xlii}.

A recent comprehensive survey of local authority websites^{xliii} reveals that hardly any councils warn families why GCSEs will be problematic or explain about IGCSEs.

10% of council websites^{xliiv} still say that GCSEs have coursework which needs an independent person to verify that it is all the candidate's own work.

In fact since 2009/2010 coursework has been replaced by controlled assessment which needs to be supervised under exam-type conditions^{xliv}.

Having provided the wrong information about coursework, some councils then compound the problem by recommend distance learning providers - typically charging £300+ per subject - who they say can "authenticate" the coursework.

It is relatively straightforward to provide basic information about taking exams as an external candidate. The best place to signpost for information is the FAQ on the home educators' exams wiki

There are also FAQ here <http://edyourself.org/examsfaq.pdf>

The most highly recommended online peer support group is
http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/HE-Exams-GCSE-A_AS_Levels-OU-Others/info

The following links have been put together by home educators for home educators
<http://edyourself.org/articles/briefingexamofficers.php> and the home educators' exams wiki
<http://www.home-education-exams.org.uk/>

Pages relevant to home education and exams can be found on the Edyoursel website
<http://edyourself.org/search/?q=exams>

For local authorities, a checklist of outdated information/misconceptions around “authenticating coursework”, distance learning providers or exam boards “arranging for somewhere to sit the exam” and so on can be found here <http://edyourself.org/articles/councilwebpages.php#checklistexams>

There are hundreds of local home education peer support groups throughout the country. Local groups can be an invaluable source of support and some local groups may be able to signpost to local study or tuition groups or have the most up to date information about local exam centres.

A long established home education group in South Hampshire with support from the local authority and the Examination Officers Association has become registered as an exam centre, and will be accepting candidates from Summer 2014.

Schools and colleges may be cautious about taking private candidates and it can be helpful to have answers ready. The Exams Officers External Candidates FAQ
<http://edyourself.org/articles/examofficers.php> **deals with the most common issues raised.**

One LA said: “I've emailed all the heads and only received one response, so now I plan to make appointment to see exams officer in each school as need to know what they offer and any criteria or restrictions that may apply”

10% of authorities are considering organising some sort of group meeting for home educating

families in the coming year, and agree that access to exams could be one of the topics.

Meetings to exchange views about exams can be beneficial for everyone. Home educators tend to be very resourceful and may have already found local exam centres which can be shared with the LA in order to raise awareness with other families.

Home educators may also have ideas or suggestions about the local authority could assist.

A Working Group could look at improving local access to exams.

An Open Meeting could be held, perhaps including representatives from college to explain the different options at 16 with and without GCSEs.

“At a recent meeting with the local home education community, access to exams was discussed which instigated the review of the current position”

“We have been holding consultation meetings with local home education community where the subject of exams has come up and we are currently trying to find a way forward”

“We are planning to invite local home educators to a meeting to discuss exams”

“The LA will be arranging a meeting for the EHE families within this borough and will discuss options regarding services requested”

“We have EHE coffee mornings”

“We had a group meeting for parents to talk about exams”

“We have had group meeting to talk about exams and college”

“We will discuss exams through our network meetings with home educators”

“We have held meetings where exams were discussed”

“There was a ‘Keeping in Contact’ day for EHE families in which there were discussion groups where parents could share their views about topics of interest to them.”

“There will be general meeting with home educators in the Spring to answer questions and meet the team”

“The LA has had meetings in the past with parent representatives and as a result, information about exams is now provided”

“We hold Network Meetings twice a year to pass information to home educating families on a range of topics including exams”

“The LA is planning an event in Spring 2014 that will cover exams as well as a range of other areas”

17% of local authorities have some form of arrangement for home educated young people to sit exams at a centre which provides education for children unable to attend mainstream school, and a quarter of local authorities said it might be possible to use the Pupil Referral

Unit as an exam centre for home educated private candidates in future.

Alternative learning centres may be more likely to take private candidates for IGCSEs than the "behaviour" PRUs.

Half the LAs who do use this type of facility – including Bromley Croydon Kirklees and Southampton^{xlvi} - say there is help with access arrangements (ie special accommodation to meet learning difficulties in exams)

It was suggested by several delegates at the Westminster APPG meeting^{xlvii} that Pupil Referral Units could be used more widely for external candidates, particularly where candidates required nonstandard arrangements.

For candidates who need Access Arrangements^{xlviii} - the centre must “paint a picture of need” which includes “normal way of working within the centre.”

Evidence of “normal way of working within the centre” will always be required for Access Arrangements, even where a candidate already has a statement of SEN; a report from specialist assessor (which may cost hundreds of pounds); or a verifiable psychological/medical condition.

The local authority may already have established links with centres for pupils not in mainstream education – including Pupil Referral Units and Medical Education Centres or hospital/home tuition - and this type of centre will have experience of carrying out assessments and making arrangements for candidates' special needs. The PRU will also expect to make special or individual arrangements anyway rather than just putting all the candidates into a large exam hall.

The issue for external candidates is that the centre is not familiar with the candidate's needs and therefore cannot attest to “the normal way of working within the centre” which JCQ requires for Access Arrangements^{xlix}. However, the local authority can facilitate introductions and act as a point of contact for any additional queries.

For example, **Bromley** reports that “*the examinations officer is well versed in assisting candidates who would benefit specific facilities such as the use of a scribe, laptops, extended time, individual rooms, etc.*” In **Croydon** the local authority and the PRU worked with a family to set up an assessment with an educational psychologist for access arrangements. **Kirklees** PRU can accommodate candidates who need to use a keyboard or who require extra time. **Southampton** PRU made the necessary arrangements with JCQ for a student with visual impairment^l

One way to paint a picture of need for special accommodation to meet learning difficulties or disabilities in exams is an up to date statement of special educational needs combined with evidence of “normal way of working within the centre”

Another way to paint a picture of need for Access Arrangements is a report from a specialist assessor combined with evidence of “normal way of working within the centre”

The third way to paint a picture of need for Access Arrangements is having a verifiable medical or psychological condition combined with evidence of “normal way of working within the centre.”

Disability discrimination legislation does not compel schools to take external candidates who require special arrangements, although if requested they must consider it^{li}.

For more information about access arrangements for external candidates with additional needs, please refer to this web page <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php> and to the JCQ Access Arrangements <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>

In March 2013 the Home Education APPG held a meeting to look at the position for home educated under-16s applying directly to college^{lii}. In June 2013 the Department for Education published guidance on new funding arrangements for electively home educated children at college.^{liii}

A relatively high number of local authorities – over half – had already approached local colleges but some have reported that colleges weren't responding positively or that colleges think it doesn't apply to them or they aren't willing to take under-16s.

15% of LAs are planning more engagement with colleges in the future.

Early feedback suggests that more progress has been made with colleges outside London.

Although these weren't specific questions, some councils did tell me that they know of local home educated under-16s who are currently on college courses with the new funding, and several councils have worked with colleges to arrange home educators' open days.^{liv}

“Will invite local college to a network meeting”

“local college is one of few offering direct entry this year and parents are made aware”

“college has agreed that EHE pupils can access College for English and maths if they are using same Board as College”

“home educators use the college for vocational courses not GCSEs”

“We contacted all 3 colleges, 1 accepts on case by case, 1 will review policy soon, 1 won't take under-16s, other providers have also offered places to home ed...”

“An officer who specialises in alternative provision maintains links with local colleges about the GCSE and vocational courses on offer..”

“The local college is offering twilight and evening courses to home educators...we are planning an information leaflet and event...”

“The local college takes EHE students on part time courses but little GCSE provision...”

“We spent time clarifying with parents & colleges, though colleges are not always offering what families wanted ie more academic courses, investigating other providers currently...”

“We are in liaison with local colleges and advise parents, 1 local college is offering GCSEs for home ed and flagging this up to the family improved relations considerably...”

“We are keeping up with developments at an FE college in a neighbouring borough which has just started to publicise that it is going to open a 14-16 section in September 2014. We will inform all our EHE parents about this”

Appendix 1 Good Practice Exams Access

Buckinghamshire, Bromley, Cornwall, Croydon, Cumbria, Devon, Doncaster, Durham, Hampshire, Kirklees, Lancashire, Leicester City, Newcastle, North Yorkshire, Sandwell, Sefton, Somerset, Southampton, Staffordshire, Stoke on Trent, Sutton, Swindon, Trafford, Warrington, Worcestershire

Buckinghamshire has information about raising the participation age, and list of exam centres checked annually with useful introduction *"It is important to ring or email the school/examination officer to check on the examination board and subjects offered. Please contact The EHE team if you would like support with this. We are happy to help. Some only charge administration and entry fees, others charge a fee in addition to this. Most schools will only accept private candidates for examinations their students are already taking. Some will not accept students who require individual access arrangements."*

<http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/1608568/Exam-Centres-for-Independent-Applicants.docx> via <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/education/elective-home-education/#.UuVdQu5FBPU>

Bromley offers private entry exams through the Nightingale Centre which is a small centre for pupils not in mainstream education. *"The examinations officer is well versed in assisting candidates who would benefit specific facilities such as the use of a scribe, laptops, extended time, individual rooms, home setting for exams, etc."*

Cornwall signposts to schools and colleges which accept private candidates

Croydon PRU is available for external candidates to take IGCSEs irrespective of whether the PRU's own internal candidates are doing these exams or not. The LA and the PRU have worked with a family to set up an assessment with an educational psychologist for access arrangements. The LA also offers an annual meeting to home educators to explain the exams process - including IGCSEs and the problems with controlled assessment - and to offer access to past exam papers. Parents get to take away a pack of information about registering for exams and a guide to the procedures.

Cumbria has paid <http://www.u-xplore.com/website/about.aspx> for home educated young people to have access to interactive careers advice

Devon has useful web information about exams

http://www.babcock-education.co.uk/ldp/view_folder.asp?rootid=2344&depth=3&level2=24363&level2id=24363&level3=125588&level3id=125588&nextlevel=125588&folderid=125588 Devon has also briefed all FE colleges in the county about the new funding for home educated 14-16s <http://tinyurl.com/devon14-16s>

Doncaster has as list of local centres which will accept private candidates

[http://www.sycop.gov.uk/sections/educationandlearning/pupilandparentinformation/attendanceandwelfare/Frequently Asked Questions Educating your child at home.aspx](http://www.sycop.gov.uk/sections/educationandlearning/pupilandparentinformation/attendanceandwelfare/Frequently%20Asked%20Questions%20Educating%20your%20child%20at%20home.aspx)

Durham says *"on an annual basis, we contact all secondary schools in the County and ask if they are able/ willing to accept home educated pupils as external candidates. This information is included on the DCC website on a page relating to education at home."*

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=1>

<http://content.durham.gov.uk/PDFRepository/EaHGGuideDecember2013.pdf>

Hampshire works with local home educators to identify local exam centres and also pays exam fees for 5 GCSEs or equivalent. A school in the North West of the county will take private candidates and other than direct costs (examination fee to boards and invigilation) does not charge an administration fee.

In addition, a long established home education group in South Hampshire with support from the local authority and the Examination Officers Association has become registered as an exam centre, and will be accepting candidates from Summer 2014 – initially for Edexcel, CIE and OCR but with other boards to follow.

A distinctive feature of the system in Hampshire is that there is a single point of contact because the centre deals exclusively with the exams coordinator who is a volunteer from the home education community. The coordinator also liaises with parents and provides the necessary data and documentation.

The Local Authority Area Strategy Managers went directly to headteachers and asked them to come on board. The managers remain available for consultation and informal advice and support to both EHE community coordinators and school centres.

Read more here <http://edyourself.org/hampshiremodelexams.pdf>

Kirklees sends a letter to known families Y10 and Y11 explaining arrangements for taking exams at the PRU, with links to awarding bodies and tip to look at information for private candidates, and also providing parents with contact details of the examinations officer.

The letter explains about IGCSEs saying controlled assessment GCSE means "*many home educated students are choosing to study for IGCSEs because they are exams only*". Home educated young people can take either GCSEs or IGCSEs and external candidates are **NOT** restricted to same subjects and boards as internal candidates.

The PRU can also accommodate candidates who need to use a keyboard or who require extra time. There is a nominated Connexions rep with responsibility for home educated students.

Lancashire produces an exams information sheet with local centres and contact details for awarding bodies, updated annually

http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=388&tab=3&siteid=119&pageid=252&e=e#anchor1039 and

<http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/viewdoc.asp?id=106361>

Drop-In Session <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/web/viewdoc.asp?id=109909> 14 + and 16 + college options.

Leicester City has useful web information about IGCSEs, local exam centres, college, raising the participation age and work experience

<http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/education-lifelong-learning/about-us/lea-services/home-education/key-stage-four-and-beyond/>

Newcastle offers home educated young people the opportunity to sit exams at the PRU, which is made easier by the fact that the person who manages the elective home education service is also the head at the PRU

North Yorkshire VLE login for home educators has much more up to date information than on the public website. It has been possible for home educated private candidates to sit exams at the PRU and the PRU has also helped with controlled assessments for private candidates.

Sandwell *“Local colleges are active partners and have offered their facilities as venues for home educated candidates wishing to sit GCSE examinations”*

Sefton PRU provides facilities for home educated children to sit GCSEs: *“Families are automatically informed about this when the children/young people first become electively home educated. The information is then re-sent and is discussed with families when the children/young people reach the appropriate age for a particular examination. Feedback suggests the facility has been found to be very helpful”*

Somerset currently offers limited support with examination and invigilation costs, though this is set to change from Autumn 2014.

Southampton

In 2012 efforts were made to increase access to examinations for home educated students. 9 electively home educated students sat 35 exams at Compass School Pupil Referral Unit. This was funded by the LA. Most of these students have gone onto college either full time or evening classes. One visually impaired student got A*, As and Bs and is now doing Maths and Science A Levels at college.

A home education parent coordinator approached Southampton LA and the LA officer made the link with the PRU. Contact details for the families were provided by the home education parent coordinator. The home educated candidates sometimes sat exams alongside the centre's own students and sometimes independently. The EHE students were in a room with up to 9 at any one time – usually fewer.

The exams officer arranged a visit to the PRU so that the students and their families could see where the exams would take place. They had the opportunity to ask questions and be assured that they would be supported. This was also the opportunity to check ID as required. The parent coordinator supplied the relevant paper work to substantiate access arrangements for a student with visual impairment. The exams officer processed this information with JCQ and coordinated the arrangements as authorised.

The LA funded the cost of the exams, access arrangements, the administration time and the invigilators – estimated at £110 per entry. There needs to be a commitment and willingness to make all the arrangements with exam boards and to meet the access arrangements. This can take some time for the exams officer. The PRU had to employ additional invigilators who had to be trained. There was a significant time commitment especially because the exam boards and exam entries were different from the internal candidates.

Headteacher comment: "It was a pleasure to work with the EHE students and their families. Most were members of the Somali community and support with examinations was a huge benefit to widening access to higher education. Families were cautious about engaging with us and needed reassurance."

EHE Protocol for the PRU

1. List of relevant EHE student names to Compass School
October

2. Letter to parents of all EHE children aged 14/15 re- process and inviting application (via pro forma).

October

3. Student's details passed to Exams Officer for Compass School, who will make entries with relevant boards.

January

4. Confirmation of entries, exam dates etc to be sent to EHE parent

January

5. Invitation to exam prep meeting where exam venue is visited & arrangements clarified and ID provided

March

6. EHE parent & student attend exam prep meeting

Just after Easter

7. Exams are taken

Student supported by parent (eg with transport)

May/June

8. Results are posted to EHE parent

August

Staffordshire has a list of exam centres

<http://education.staffordshire.gov.uk/Curriculum/Services/HomeEducation/Resources/Qualification.htm>

Stoke on Trent reports that the LA and local colleges are working in partnership to offer a range of courses, including GCSEs to EHE students, adding that they have also "been able to tailor courses to meet specific needs for some EHE young people"

*"None of **Sutton's** schools give access to pupils who are being home educated. The Council has discussed the issue with schools and there are genuine logistical difficulties, these include the variety of Boards each with their own regulations regarding each subject, parents may not be using the same boards and even if they are they may be completing different syllabuses. There are the additional difficulties associated with having one new young person, not in uniform taking an exam in a large hall full of pupils who know each other. The Council has in the past used the PRU but the same difficulties occurred in terms of different Boards and regulations. As a result of their own needs the pupils at the PRU also had particular difficulty in a young person with whom they had no connection. Taking all this into account, the Council has worked with the local college and come to an agreement that children educated at home of school age who are taking the same Board as that offered by the college can sit the exams but will need to pay the fees."*

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

Swindon signposts to the local colleges which are offering twilight and evening courses to home educators

Trafford uses a medical PRU or alternative learning centre for children out of mainstream education, and not a "behaviour" PRU

Warrington has just started offering free exam access to iGCSEs – English and Maths, with the exams being taken at a Warrington College. Parents get access to the Virtual Learning Environment [VLE] and a termly meeting with a tutor. **Wirral** and **Cheshire West** also mentioned in the survey that they are now able to offer this as part of the **EHE Shared Service**^{lv}

Worcestershire <http://edyourself.org/worcsFE2013-14.pdf> has developed an offer with local colleges and alternative providers for home educated 14-16s, and been proactive in raising

awareness among local colleges and alternative providers.

Worcestershire LA delivered training to colleges on the new 14-16 funding arrangements and confirmed with DfE that alternative providers who meet certain criteria are eligible for the new funding in the same way as FE colleges. Key elements of the new funding are that parents maintain responsibility for home educated young people and that a college which admits a home educated child does not have to comply with the arrangements for full-scale direct admission of 14-16s.

Where the college receives an application from a young person who is not on a school roll because they are already electively home educated, the college does not require proof of home education. Children who have Statements of SEN will be referred to Early Help/Post-16 engagement team to assist with the Learner Disability Assessment (LDA).

The LA wrote to all known home educating families with children at KS4 (14-16) giving information about how to apply for free courses on the Foundation Learning programme delivered by a range of providers throughout the county. Information has also been provided to families about the full-time GCSE course (infill) at Worcester 6th Form Centre. The LA also arranged an Open Day for home educators.

Appendix 2 Positive Developments College 14-16

Banbury and Bicester, City College Brighton, Halesowen, Newcastle, New College Nottingham and West Nottinghamshire, Telford Arts and Technology

Banbury and Bicester College

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/news/2013/dec/elective-home-educated-event> event promoted on **Oxfordshire** website

Brighton: "We have had strong links with **City College in Brighton** for some time who have now amended their Prospectus to include a mention of home education.

<http://www.ccb.ac.uk/public/pdf/6813-1-Brighton-14-16-ProspectusWEB.pdf> Students are offered GCSE English/maths along with other studies in their first year and progress in the second year to the course of their choice. We have also advised on funding for under 16's. **Sussex Downs** offer English/maths at GCSE as well as Functional Skills. They are able to offer GCSE in some other subject areas."

Halesowen College <https://www.halesowen.ac.uk/?contentarea=homeEducated> free GCSE courses for home educated 14-16s + a range of vocational courses (information passed on by **Dudley, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Sandwell Worcestershire** authorities)

Newcastle College <http://edyourself.org/newcastle14-16.pdf> one of only 7 colleges nationally to start offering specific courses for 14-16s from September 2013. Students can choose from a full-time, fully-funded programme for 14-16 year old students on either 2-year or 1-year intensive programmes. There is a compulsory core of GCSEs with further electives chosen from GCSEs and/or vocational courses. Home educated students can also join the full-time programme's courses on a part-time, fully-funded basis, selecting courses/qualifications that suit their needs.

Nottinghamshire <http://edyourself.org/newcollegenottsflier.pdf> **New College Nottingham**

Nottinghamshire <http://edyourself.org/visionwestnottsflyerdec2013.pdf> **West Nottingham College**

Telford <http://edyourself.org/telfordflier.pdf> **College Arts and Technology**

Positive reports of Carshalton, CSV Redditch, CSV Worcester, Doncaster, East Thanet, Lewisham, Milton Keynes, Moulton, Newbury, New College Nottingham, Peterborough Regional, Sheffield Online, South Staffordshire, Strode, West Berkshire, West Lancashire College, Wirral Metropolitan College and Worcester 6th Form Centre, taking home educated 14-16s.

Read more here <http://edyourself.org/articles/WolfReport.php#14-16spositive>

Appendix 3 Case Studies External Candidates

Provided to guests at the Westminster Meeting of the Home Education APPG July 2013

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.

See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/examshomeedexp.php>

Appendix 4 Survey Questions and Answers Breakdown

1. Is there anything in your local offer to home educators regarding support for exams which you think works well and which you would be happy to share as a model of good practice?

19% yes, 26% not at present. Some authorities advise families that support is available to arrange an exam centre. 10% of LAs said they are currently revising their paperwork and procedures to improve their service and aim to offer more information about exams in future

2. Do you provide basic information about taking exams as a private candidate including IGCSEs?

44% yes, 30% yes but only 1 to 1, 10% not yet, 11% no

3. Do you have FAQ about exams and home education on your website?

38% no, 25% yes, 29% not yet but hope soon, 3% verbal one to one. A quarter of LAs said they had some sort of FAQ about exams on their website, with a further third saying they didn't have anything as yet but hoped to add something soon

4. Do you have a leaflet about exams for home educators?

41% no, 28% yes (mostly included in general leaflet), 9% not yet but hope to have something soon, 4% verbal or basic information given one to one

5. Do you signpost to other sources of information such as awarding bodies and home education peer support networks?

52% yes, 5% no, 9% not yet/planning more soon, 25% one to one or basic

6. Do you have a list of local schools which accept home educated private candidates?

32% yes, 33% no, 24% case by case, 15% not yet

7. What has been your experience of engaging with local schools to explain what is involved in taking home educated private candidates?

44% haven't tried, 33% to a greater or lesser degree but haven't had much success, 9% have had a positive reaction from schools, 2% have talked to secondary heads forum

8. Have you invited home educating families to a meeting to discuss access to exams?

44% no, 9% not yet/might do it soon, 18% deal one to one, 6% have other types of group meetings/networking where topic of exams comes up. 18% of councils indicated that they only passed on information one to one, while 16% organised some form of group meeting or networking event to share information and listen to feedback on a range of topics. A further 10% of councils is considering organising some sort of group or open event in the coming year

9. Do you make use of the Pupil Referral Unit as an exam centre for home educated private candidates?

42% no, 15% yes, 2% yes but medical PRU or alternative learning centre not a behaviour PRU, 3% have no PRUs, 23% it's a possibility, 2% not appropriate, 2% done in past but not now

10. Have you approached local FE colleges to see whether home educated young people could take exams as external candidates?

17% no, 33% yes, 4% yes but colleges not keen, 5% tell parents to approach college, 15% not yet/planning more engagement, 1% in past but not now

11. Do you know which GCSE courses are running at the local FE colleges and are you advising colleges and home educating families about the new FE funding for home educated under-16s?

50% yes, 9% yes but not positive, 1% designated connexions to advise parents, 2% suggest parents approach college themselves, 12% planning more engagement soon, 10% no, 5% one to one advice

12. Does the LA help with assessments for Access Arrangements at all?

49% no, 9% yes, 10% would if appropriate, 6% not been asked, 3% say college or PRU would help with it, 3% theoretically say yes within limits

13. Has the LA considered running exam courses for home educated young people - possibly in partnership with a local college - including providing somewhere to sit the exam?

26% no, 4% yes, 3% looking into it, 9% not yet but maybe in future, 2% more were available in the past, 8% not necessary because other alternatives available

- i Exams Access Survey <http://edyourself.org/examsaccess2013.pdf>
- ii Home Education Numbers <http://edyourself.org/articles/FOIhomeednumbers.php>
- iii Home Education APPG <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- iv DfE response to Education Committee
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/support-for-home-education-government-response/>
- v DfE response to Education Committee
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/support-for-home-education-government-response/>
- vi Appendix: Case Studies
- vii IGCSEs <http://www.home-education-exams.org.uk/>
- viii Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- ix Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- x Appendix: Good Practice
- xi Appendix: Good Practice
- xii Home Education APPG <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- xiii Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- xiv Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- xv Home Education APPG <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- xvi New Funding Rules College 14-16 <http://edyourself.org/articles/14-16collegeFAQ.php>
- xvii Exams Access Survey <http://edyourself.org/examsaccess2013.pdf>
- xviii Home Education Numbers <http://edyourself.org/articles/FOIhomeednumbers.php>
- xix Home Education APPG <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- xx Examination Officers Association <http://www.examofficers.org.uk/>
- xxi Pearson Edexcel <http://edyourself.org/pearsonedexcelprivatecandidatesappg2013.pdf>
- xxii CIE <http://www.cie.org.uk/i-want-to/find-a-cambridge-school/>
- xxiii Appendix: Good Practice
- xxiv Appendix: Positive Developments 14-16 College
- XXV JCQ Regulations <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>
- xxvi DfE response to Education Committee
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/support-for-home-education-government-response/>
- xxvii DfE response to Education Committee
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/support-for-home-education-government-response/>
- xxviii Wilshaw Education Committee
<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/Education/EdC130213CORRECTEDTRANSCRIPT.doc>
- xxix Education Committee <http://edyourself.org/articles/edcomsupporthomeed.php>
- xxx Appendix: Case Studies
- xxxi Controlled assessment <http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#controlledassessment>
- xxxii IGCSEs <http://www.home-education-exams.org.uk/>
- xxxiii Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- xxxiv Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- xxxv Exams Officers FAQ <http://edyourself.org/articles/examofficers.php>
- xxxvi Home Educators Exams FAQ <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsfaq.php>
- xxxvii Home Educators' Exams Wiki <http://www.home-education-exams.org.uk/>
- xxxviii Appendix: Good Practice
- xxxix Briefing Home Educators Exams Officers FAQ <http://edyourself.org/articles/briefingexamofficers.php>
- xl Case Study 8 <http://edyourself.org/exams8.pdf> via <http://edyourself.org/articles/examshomeedexp.php#casestudies>
- xli Home Educators Exams Yahoo Group http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/HE-Exams-GCSE-A_AS_Levels-OU-Others/info
- xlii Appendix: Good Practice
- xliii LA home education website survey
<http://edyourself.org/articles/councilwebpages.php#spreadsheet> February 2014
- xliv LA home education website survey
<http://edyourself.org/articles/councilwebpages.php#spreadsheet> February 2014
- xlv Controlled assessment <http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#controlledassessment>
- xlvi Appendix: Good Practice
- xlvii Home Education APPG <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- xlviii Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- xliv Access Arrangements <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- l Appendix: Good Practice
- li Exams Officers FAQ <http://edyourself.org/articles/examofficers.php>
- lii Home Education APPG <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- liii New Funding Rules College 14-16 <http://edyourself.org/articles/14-16collegeFAQ.php>
- liv Appendix: Positive Developments College 14-16

