

2012 Education Committee Report: Support for Home Education

Fiona Nicholson, November 2013

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On December 18th 2012 the Education Committee published its report on Support for Home Education which can be found here

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/559/559.pdf> via this page

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/559/55902.htm>

I gave Oral Evidence to the Education Committee and the witness session on September 5th can be read [here](#). Click [here](#) for my Written Evidence, which cited [my research on local authorities and home education](#).

Concluding Remarks from Education Committee Report

58. "We share the view of our witnesses—home educators and those from central and local Government— that a parent clearly has, and should have, the right to home educate their child(ren) if they so wish. We note that a significant body of evidence to our inquiry makes clear that many parties, on both sides, have made real efforts to engage, to understand each other's motivations and constraints, and to ensure more constructive relationships and better support.

59. At the same time, though, we acknowledge that there is clearly some way to go, particularly in terms of raising the quality and consistency of support, and ensuring that all local authorities are compliant with Government guidance. We hope to see improvements concerning the wide variety of practice and performance across local authorities, which we do not consider acceptable, and we look forward to seeing the development of local offers of support, a national association to share best practice and professionalise home education officers further, increased Government monitoring of local authorities, and other mechanisms to ensure a more consistent approach to home education across the country."

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/559/55908.htm>

Recommendations from the Education Committee

Local authorities have a responsibility to follow the law, and to be seen to do so. Considering evidence that only thirty do not currently have ultra vires statements on their websites, regarding home education, we urge all local authorities to undertake a swift review of their own material, and to ensure that their policies reflect the guidance available. (Paragraph 12)

We believe that the case law definitions of 'suitable' and 'efficient' education are sufficient, and encourage local authorities to use these as required. However, some aspects of existing guidance require clarification, and we recommend that the Department for Education undertake a review of the guidance concerning home education, working with local authorities and home educators to iron out any tensions. (Paragraph 15)

We are pleased to support innovative models such as joint local authority services and associations of home education officers, which aim to share best practice and to achieve more consistency between local authorities with regard to home education. We believe that these models have significant potential to lessen the 'postcode lottery' which was described to us, and we encourage more local authorities, especially smaller ones, to develop shared services, and to join existing networks of home education officers. (Paragraph 20)

The development of a more formalised professional association of, and/or annual conference for, home education officers, driven by those in the profession themselves, could be a welcome step in terms of sharing best practice nationally, and in turn might consider issues such as accreditation and improved training for local authority officers. (Paragraph 21)

We recommend that the Department for Education carry out an audit of local authorities' performance regarding home education, and the information they make available on their websites and elsewhere, and publish the results, ascertaining which local authorities are performing well with regard to home education. We consider that, far from damaging the Government's localism agenda, this review would fit well with the Department for Education's transparency drive. (Paragraph 24)

The team within which local authority home education officers sit can give out an important message about that authority's view of home education. For example, it is inappropriate for such officers to be located with those working on attendance, children in care or safeguarding. Local authority officers dealing with home education ought to be situated within a dedicated team, or sit within a neutral location such as learning or library services. (Paragraph 28)

Based on the current state of the public finances, and the evidence we have heard from local authorities and home educators, we do not recommend any system-wide changes to financial support for home educators. However, where funding is available, central Government needs to explain better how this can be obtained and utilised. We cannot understand why some local authorities refuse to utilise or claim such funding, and urge those that have done so to change their position. (Paragraph 34)

It does not seem reasonable to us that home educators in some areas have such a struggle accessing examinations centres for their children. We recommend 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. (Paragraph 43)

As noted previously, we do not believe that the State ought routinely to finance home education. That said, many home educators do contribute to the education system through their taxes, and yet still have to meet the costs of sitting public examinations. We do not consider this to be fair, and therefore recommend that the costs of sitting public examinations be met by the State. The Department for Education should work to establish the appropriate level of entitlement, and to which examinations this ought apply. (Paragraph 44)

We recommend that the Government monitor, as part of the audit previously recommended, local authorities' current provision of advice regarding transitions to further education for home-educated young people. The Government should ensure that local authorities are providing high-quality advice, through their home education services or websites, to those who request support. (Paragraph 46)

We congratulate the Government on [giving further education colleges the power to admit 14 to 15-year-olds directly](#), and welcome this policy move, which we hope might benefit home educators as well as others. (Paragraph 47)

Whilst we agree with the Minister's view that local authorities, and not central Government, must be responsible for service provision in their area, we do not consider it acceptable that home-educated young people receive such different levels and quality of support dependent purely upon their postcode.

Local authorities should be expected to produce a **'local offer of support' for home educators**, stating what services are available, how these differ from those for parents of schooled children, and enabling home educators to compare with practice elsewhere.

Critically, local offers must be developed in consultation with home educators and their families. We recommend that the Department for Education support pilots for such a scheme, and play a role in monitoring the quality of local offers and the adherence applied to them by local authorities. (Paragraph 52)

We are pleased that the Minister confirmed, in her evidence to us, that local authorities remain responsible for ensuring that provisions in Statements are met, and were equally pleased that she agreed the issues relating to home-educated young people with SEN or complex health needs, but without Statements, should be investigated.

We look forward to the outcomes of the Department for Education's investigations in this area. In the meantime we urge local authorities to comply with statutory guidance and ensure that home-educated young people with SEN or medical conditions are not being discriminated against. (Para 57)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/559/55909.htm>

Government Response to Education Committee Recommendations

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmeduc/1013/1013.pdf>
published March 18th 2013

Local Authorities

Local authorities should ensure that their websites do not contain misleading statements about their powers. We have no plans to change the way the current arrangements operate and no plans to amend the guidance on home education that was published by the previous Government. Local authorities must decide their own priorities. Local authorities have much to gain by [learning from the experiences of others](#).

Officers with responsibility for home education should be properly trained. We do not think it is for Government to audit local authorities on their performance on home education. Local authorities must decide for themselves the services they offer to home educators.

We agree that the way in which local authorities approach home educators in their area is an important factor in establishing good relationships. Local authorities are responsible for quality assuring any advice they give to home educators. This is a matter for local authorities, not Government.

We agree that home educators and local authorities should work co-operatively to shape the services that the local authority provides. However, it is not the role of Government to monitor those services. Local authorities and home educators should work together to iron out tensions.

Direct Funding For College 14-16s

A new school funding system is being introduced with effect from the financial year 2013-14, and that one of the effects of this is that local authorities will no longer be able to claim funding in respect of specific pupils.

So far as further education is concerned, the Department is moving to [a new system of direct funding for places in further education colleges that are being taken up by 14-16 year olds](#), including home educated children.

Rather than the local authority claiming funding from the Education Funding Agency, from the academic year 2013/14, the Department will be funding colleges directly for such provision. Therefore there will be no funding for local authorities to claim separately for home educated children. There will be interim arrangements for reimbursing local authorities for expenditure on such places in the financial year 2012-13.

The Government's policy of giving further education colleges the right to admit 14 to 15 year olds directly will ensure that every child has the option of choosing to follow high-quality, specialised vocational courses as well as the critical academic core.

From the academic year 2013/14, colleges will receive funding for these places from the Education Funding Agency just as they do for 16-18 year olds. Local authorities will cease to be funding gatekeepers so accessing further education courses should become easier for home educating parents.

SEN

The special educational needs (SEN) reforms that we are introducing with [the Children and Families Bill](#) aim to benefit all children and young people with SEN, including those who are home educated. Local authorities will remain responsible for ensuring that the SEN of children with Education, Health and Care plans, which will replace statements, are met. We are working with home education representatives to make sure that the statutory guidance in [a new SEN Code of Practice](#), which will reflect the provisions of the new Bill, will promote appropriate support for children with SEN, whether they have EHC plans or not.

Funding For SEN

For home educated children with special needs, under [the new funding system from April 2013](#), local authorities will have an identified High Needs Block within their Dedicated Schools Grant to enable them to fund all children and young people in their area, including those home educated where appropriate, who have special educational needs or who require alternative provision from that in schools. The High Needs Block for the financial year 2013-14 is based on past expenditure by the local authority, not on the number of pupils funded. The Department is writing to local authorities with an updated explanation of how funding works in relation to home educated pupils.

Access To Exams

We understand that some home educators can find it difficult to access examinations centres for their children. 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.

We will also encourage exam boards to continue to assist private candidates where they can by providing candidates with any information they hold on examination centres that are known to accept private candidates. As well as this the Department also provides relevant training, advice and support to examination officers. [Guidance to examination officers on tackling the obstacles associated with accepting private candidates](#) is also [available on the DfE website](#).

However, it is important to be clear that schools and colleges are under no obligation to provide examination facilities for candidates who are not on their roll. The Government believes that individual institutions are best placed to make decisions about how to manage their own examinations themselves. Therefore the Government does not plan to place a duty on local authorities to ensure access to examination centres for home educated students.

Funding For Exams

The Government respects the right of parents to educate their children at home. It is possible for local authorities to provide financial support for home educators such as examination fees under section 19 of the Education Act 1996. However, home educating parents have always taken on the financial responsibility for the education of their children and the Government is not seeking to change this principle

Following up the Recommendations

- Local authority officers dealing with home education ought to be situated within a dedicated team, or sit within a neutral location such as learning or library services. (Paragraph 28, Rec 6)
- FOI sent to all LAs asking about forward budget allocation for home education service, December 2012
- Response to DfE s51 consultation, December 2012
- Where funding is available, central Government needs to explain better how this can be obtained and utilised.(Paragraph 34, Rec 7)
- APG event, November 2012 to discuss High Needs Block. Follow-up funding questions sent to DfE, December 2012
- FOI sent to all LAs asking about SEN statistics and support, December 2012
- Government should place a duty on every local authority to ensure access to local centres for home-educated young people to sit accredited public examinations. (Paragraph 43, Rec 8)
- Access To Exams For Home Educators: Research and Report 2012 <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsreport.php>
- Home Education + Exams FAQ For Local Authorities<http://edyourself.org/articles/examsfaq.php>
- Local authorities should comply with statutory guidance and ensure that home-educated young people with SEN or medical conditions are not being discriminated against. (Paragraph 57, Rec 13)
- FOI sent to all LAs asking about SEN statistics and support, December 2012
- APG event, November 2012 to discuss High Needs Block. Follow-up funding questions sent to DfE, December 2012
- Postscript to November SEN APG Event
- <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php#followuptonovsen>

Click here to read the FOI answers

<http://edyourself.org/articles/2013foissenandlocationehe.php> January 2013