

I contacted a local school a friend was using and asked them to take my son. I started looking for somewhere to sit the exams about 6 months before my son was due to start. I had lots of help from the HE-Exams yahoo group, and advice from fellow home educators locally. The most helpful advice was to join the online exams support group.

We're not known to the LEA, but my friend asked her LEA officer about exams and was advised to contact this local school, which took private candidates. We just went to the same school. Incidentally, after 3 years of taking exams there we are still unknown to the LEA.

My son took 1 GCSE aged 12 plus ECDL (a vocational IT qualification, taken at a private test centre), then 1 aged 13 (plus another vocational IT qualification), another 3 aged 14, and will sit more aged 15.

We didn't have any difficulty finding somewhere to sit exams and it wasn't particularly expensive. We just spent about £15 per textbook and then the exam fees, which are usually around £30 plus about £25 admin fee per qualification. We didn't need correspondence courses.

Starting exams early was a positive experience for my son as he felt very proud of himself, though it has left him kicking his heels a bit as he wants to go to sixth form to do A-levels, but really is ready for the work 2 years before that.

Most home-ed students I have known have found it much easier if they have at least a handful of GCSEs/IGCSEs at 16 because otherwise your options are limited to places which will accept you without. I do know an older home-ed student who has gone straight into A-level courses without doing GCSEs, but also know several who have found they had no option but to spend a year taking basic GCSEs in resit classes.