

There is a private school that regularly takes Home Ed pupils in the south of the County. They have an excellent reputation with the local Home Ed co-op that organises exam tuition. The home educating parent who runs the exam centre co-op gave a lot of tips on how they had begun and I decided to see if I could replicate the same situation closer to home.

As my daughter was only 9 and not that academically inclined, I was doing it for her future requirements. My daughter is still too young for exams but via the arrangement in place with the local school, there will be 2 candidates age 13 and 15 taking exams in Summer 2012. I volunteered as the Exam Liaison Officer because the school is not set up to deal with lots of parents.

The most helpful advice I received was to get the school on board before you decide what exams are do-able. Get the school to register for AQA, Edexcel, CIE and any other exam board that you can think of. The school have now done this so they can offer exams from any of the exam boards. They are happy to offer any exams providing they are exam-only and not controlled assessment. They stop at Level 2 and won't do A Level as that is beyond their expertise.

I had a good relationship with the Elective Home Education Co-ordinator and we had talked on and off for about a year about the best way forward but hadn't set ourselves a specific deadline. This year I decided to make it all happen. The LA were very supportive. They see the arrangement in the south of the County as positive.

The fact that I am willing to put the time and effort in to make it happen in the north was welcomed - no budget and little staff for home education so they always glad to support the time we put in! - now it is up and running for the first intake of students they are looking to replicate the same experience across the County if enough home educating folk will take the responsibility for it. The LA tells parents to get in touch with me if they are looking for an exam centre in the area. I also put the word out locally once I had the school on board.

I didn't ask colleges because we had the school alternative but I do know of families who have made private arrangements with colleges.

In terms of cost, the school only charged base price for exam, no admin. This might change if there are lots of candidates though. When our time comes, I expect to pay base price for the exam, and text books. I imagine we will share the cost of a tutor with other families.

I'm glad we started the process early. As we have home educated from the beginning, I always expected to have to organise something. I didn't expect it to be so easy or so quick and I think this can be attributed to the successful model already established in the South of the county and the fact that we enjoy a good relationship with the local authority which we have worked very hard to establish. The LA are keen to promote exam access.

I always advise families to consider exams at an early age as it may be more difficult than they think. It is not impossible to have a successful career with no formal qualifications but why make life more difficult than it need be? None of the local colleges will take students on any post 16 courses without some exam results. You can take GCSE's at one of the colleges but the other 3 no longer offer them as they say you should be able to get them in school.

Someone with no formal qualifications will have to do a literacy and numeracy test and then you would be expected to re-take English and Maths before you can join any of the courses. This would make you a year older than the rest of the class should you decide to go ahead with the course.

Unless you have a successful family business you can enter /are rich enough to travel / volunteer your time and services / have a marketable musical talent / have a successful invention you can sell - then my personal opinion is you are doing your children a dis-service in not making an effort to offer exams at an appropriate time in their development.

It is not necessary to do 8 exams in one year, but newer families are sometimes misled into believing that colleges / universities are happy to take Home Ed students with no formal qualifications. It may have been true for a handful of very articulate youngsters who have a full portfolio of work experience a year or two ago but the reality today is that few colleges will take on someone with nothing concrete to show for the years they have spent at home.