

Report on Access to Exams for Home Educated Private Candidates 2012-13 Fiona Nicholson, November 2013

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

Please check the web page for the latest information

[Education Committee Report Support Home Education](#) 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.

Report on Access to Exams for Home Educated Private Candidates

[Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted](#): When we inspect local authorities we will be asking are local authorities supporting children at home and funding access to qualifications and examinations

Improving Access to Exams for Private Candidates [Westminster Roundtable Discussions Chaired by Graham Stuart](#)

Update November 2013 Positive Examples

Warrington has just started offering free exam access to IGCSEs for home educators - English and Maths this year (sat at a Warrington College) Parents get access to the Virtual Learning Environment and can have a termly meeting with a tutor.

Croydon has helped a home educated private candidate who has learning difficulties. The family had independent professional reports outlining the special needs, and the Elective Home Education Advisor knew the family and was able to arrange an interview at the LA's own exam centre who in turn arranged an assessment with an educational psychologist to provide further specific evidence for [access arrangements](#).

Kirklees offers the PRU where home educated young people can take either GCSEs or IGCSEs. The centre can accommodate candidates who need to use a keyboard or who require extra time. Parents would need to obtain and provide the appropriate level of proof. The examinations officer at the PRU is contactable for queries and advice.

Newcastle also 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.

Buckinghamshire has parents from other nearby LAs contacting the LA for information and advice based on recommendations. The PRU is used for private candidates. The LA is in regular contact with local FE colleges.

Local Authority Positive Examples 2012

1 - Barnet: Pupil Referral Unit Allows Private Candidates

The Council's PRU will take home educated students to sit exams as long as it is in subjects and exam boards that they offer. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/barnetfundingfoi.pdf>

2 - Barnsley: Pupil Referral Unit Allows Private Candidates

The Council Elective Home Education Advisor works in the Behaviour Support Service and is able to enter home educated young people for exams through links with the Service's Exams Officer. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/barnsleyfundingfoi.pdf>

3 - Birmingham: Council Found Local School for Home Educators To Take IGCSEs

The Council facilitated a meeting between the exams officer at a local school and home educating families which resulted in an offer for EHE children to sit IGCSEs at the school since controlled assessments has been identified as an issue for GCSEs in our previous EHE meetings. We are looking into offering a package of exam support for EHE young people. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/birminghamfundingfoi.pdf>

4 - Blackburn with Darwen: Pupil Referral Unit Allows Private Candidates

The Council has an agreement with the Pupil Referral Unit that they will allow children on elective home education to sit their exams there. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/blackburndarwenfundingfoi.pdf>

5 - Blackpool: Gives Information On Taking Exams, PRU Is Available, Uses Alternative Provision Funding

Parents are given information regarding exam boards, syllabuses and somewhere local to sit exams. 25% of our high schools allow private candidates to sit exams subject to certain conditions such as compatible exam boards and linear exams not requiring controlled assessment. The PRU offers the facility and we have one private tuition centre currently applying for that status. The clarification on the Alternative Provision Funding means that the Council can now claim back any funding it opts to pay for home educated children to take courses at KS4 or indeed any SEN support agreed on a case by case basis, for home educated children. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/blackpoolfundingfoi.pdf>

6 - Bolton: Talks To Schools Exams Officers, Facilitates Meetings, Keeps List of Schools

The Home Education Advisor has discussions with schools' examinations officers. Families are informed and meetings are arranged for mutually convenient times. In addition the Council keeps a list of local schools which allow private candidates to sit exams. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/boltonfundingfoi.pdf>

7 - Brent: Arranging with the PRU for Home Educators To Take Exams

The Education Welfare Service (EWS) is currently in discussion with Brent Education Tuition Service (BETS) to enable parents to apply through BETS to enter their children for GCSEs and to sit the exams as a BETS candidate on site at the tuition service building or Centre for Staff Development next door, both of which are registered exam centres. The Education Welfare Service holds all the data on home educated children and will be contacting home educating parents with children in Key Stage 4 in the New Year to inform them of this option. BETS will be charging for each GCSE and administering the process.

The EWS does not yet have a list of schools that allow private candidates, but this is something that we will be investigating. Should any Brent schools wish to take outside candidates we will make this known to home educating parents. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/brentfundingfoi.pdf>

8 - Bromley: Council Currently Registering Exam Centre For Private Candidates

Bromley Local Authority recognises the difficulty home educating families can have in finding exam centres for pupils. The Council currently signposts families to 2 borough schools which offer private examination entries and an out of borough provision that allows the same facility. Further to this, as provision is sparse, the Council is currently registering one of its small centres as an exam centre and plans to make this provision available to EHE families later this year. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/bromleyfundingfoi.pdf>

9 - Croydon: Council Arranged For Home Educators To Take IGCSEs At Online Learning Centre

The Council has an arrangement with Croydon Digital which is a supported online learning provision for students who are not at school. Home educated children in Croydon can take IGCSEs with this Centre since these exams do not involve Controlled Assessment. In addition the Centre currently offers ALAN [Adult Literacy and Numeracy] Tests to home educated private candidates. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/croydonfundingfoi.pdf>

10 - Cumbria: Encourages Schools To Accept Private Candidates And Keeps List of Schools

"The council encourages schools to take home educated children as external candidates by speaking directly with local schools or writing to schools to ask head teachers to consider accepting external candidates. Schools are reassured that their results are unaffected by external candidates and that a small administration fee can be charged to cover costs. The home education officer keeps a list of schools. This is currently being updated, as many secondary schools have recently changed to academy status or have had a change of senior leadership." See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/cumbriafundingfoi.pdf>

11 - Dorset: Leaflet on Web With List Of Local Schools Taking Private Candidates

The Council's web page dealing with home education has a pdf leaflet giving contact details of local schools which accept private candidates. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/dorsetfundingfoi.pdf>

12 - Dudley: Runs GCSE Maths and English Classes And Provides Centre To Sit Exams

The Local Authority runs GCSE English and Maths classes weekly at Pensnett 14-19 Education Campus and the students sit their exams at the local High School. The local authority officer responsible for electively home educated children is also aware of local schools who can facilitate private candidates to sit exams. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/dudleyfundingfoi.pdf>

13 - Durham: Contacts Schools And Provides List for Home Educating Families

The Council actively contacts schools on behalf of the Elective Home Education community to establish whether they are prepared to allow private candidates to sit exams. The Council has a list of schools which accept private candidates and has added this list to the Home Education Guide which is distributed to all home educating families and is also available on the Council's website. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/durhamfundingfoi.pdf>

14 - East Riding: Encourages Schools, Provides Information + List Centres Including Schools/Adult Education

East Riding of Yorkshire Council encourages schools to allow external candidates to use school centres for exams. An Education Welfare Officer works with families who electively home educate and where a parent wants their child to sit examinations, advice can be given to both schools and parents to support this request. The local authority provide an information guide to parents with details of registered exam centres, this is included in the initial information pack given to all students when commencing elective home education, enabling parents to make a valid and informed choice in finding a suitable location which may be a school or adult education centre. As East Riding of Yorkshire is a predominantly a rural area, the availability and access to centres are often restricted by the distances involved, but we would help the parent to look at possible options. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/eastridingfundingfoi.pdf>

15 - Enfield: Arrangement With Local FE College, Also Offers ICT Course Leading To GCSE

The Council has an arrangement with a local FE Colleges which facilitates any exam entries that may be required on an individual, bespoke basis. Most secondary schools in Enfield will also accommodate a private entry if they offer the particular exam board and syllabus being studied. The Council also offers a weekly dedicated ICT course for EHE children at one of the City Learning Centres. This has been offered for the past 2/3 years, and this year it was decided to offer an ICT GCSE qualification which will be taken in June at the Council Centre. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/enfieldfundingfoi.pdf>

16 - Essex: Actively Encourages Schools To Take Private Candidates, Keeps List, Sends Out Newsletter

Essex Council encourages schools to accommodate the individual needs of private exam candidates. The Council gets in touch with local schools every year and keeps a list of local schools which allow private candidates to sit exams, together with contact details and a guide to fees charged by the centre. This information forms part of a newsletter which is circulated to families. The email newsletter also contains guidance on taking exams as private candidates and draws attention to the problems caused by Controlled Assessment for GCSEs. A possible alternative is suggested with IGCSEs. Contact details are given for distance learning correspondence courses but families are advised that paying for a course doesn't ensure access to an exam centre. Private Tuition Centres are mentioned as a possibility as are online virtual schools. Families are signposted to awarding bodies such as Edexcel and AQA who may be able to offer guidance on finding a local exam centre. In addition, the newsletter states that "it is possible but difficult to simply study at home and make a direct exam entry. The newsletter closes with contact details for the Council's Home Education Service. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/essexfundingfoi.pdf>

17 - Hampshire: Works In Partnership With Local Home Educators To Develop Exam Centres

Initially a local Home Education Co-op forged a positive working relationship with a private school where home educated children were able to sit exams. This provided a good role model for home educators at the other end of the County. At the regular Council meetings with home educating families, the subject of exam access was raised and a local home educating parent volunteered as Exams Liaison Officer in order to develop a second exam centre. The Liaison Officer found a maintained school which would let private candidates sit exams with the proviso that all arrangements be made through the Liaison Officer in order to save the Schools Exams Officer multiple queries from home educating parents. The school agreed to register with additional Awarding Bodies for GCSEs and IGCSEs, which has proved extremely helpful to home educators. Throughout the process the Council was happy to facilitate a dialogue with the County's schools in order to support and encourage exam access for private candidates. It was not feasible for the school to take responsibility for private candidates' Controlled Assessments, so the offer is exams-only. There are now two exam centres available to home educators in the county with a third in the pipeline if an additional local home educating co-ordinator can be found. The Council signposts parents to get in touch with the Exams Liaison Officer, who also circulates information via local home education groups and support networks. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/hampshirefundingfoi.pdf> and [SEN Pathfinder FOI answer from Hampshire](#)

18 - Kirklees: PRU Is Available For Home Educators To Sit Exams

The Pupil Referral Service provides facilities for home educated children to sit exams at their Key Stage 4 centre. In the first half term of the academic year a letter is sent to the parents of registered EHE pupils who are in Year 10 and 11 explaining the arrangements for this and providing parents with the names and contact details of the examinations officer. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/kirkleesfundingfoi.pdf>

19 - Manchester: Researching Local Centres + Looking Into Alternative Provision Funding For FE Courses

The LA is currently working with examination boards and local centres on behalf of home educating families to identify any centres which could provide somewhere for home educated young people to sit exams. Manchester Council has also undertaken research into funding which now enables the Council to access Alternative Provision Funding where young people are taking Further Education Courses. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/manchesterfundingfoi.pdf>

20 - North Yorkshire: Council Encourages Local Schools + Makes PRU Available

If requested by parents we would contact a local school to strongly encourage them to make facilities available. It is, however, at the discretion of individual schools as to whether they do so. We have also made arrangements with our LA Pupil Referral Service so that home educating families can sit examinations within some of the centres. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/northyorksfoi.pdf> and [North Yorkshire SEN Pathfinder FOI](#)

21 - Reading: Council Approaches Schools Via Secondary Heads Meeting

The Council may approach schools through the Secondary Heads meeting to ask if they are willing to enter private candidates. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/readingfundingfoi.pdf>

22 - Richmond on Thames: Council Brokers Arrangement With Local Schools/Arts Centre Also Available For Exams

The Council provides an information guide to parents and carers which contains details of registered exam centres that can be used by EHE children in and around Richmond upon Thames. The Council makes contact with the borough secondary school on behalf of the families. Parents are advised that their child will either be in the back of the exam hall or, if we can arrange for an additional invigilator, the student will be in a room on their own. We make every effort to ensure that the situation is as stress-free as possible. The agreement with schools is that a student who is home educated will only sit their exams in a school at the same time as the other students in the school are sitting the same exam. The Council also uses a local Arts Education Centre Gallery which is a registered exam centre." See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/richmondfundingfoi.pdf>

23 - Sefton: PRU Is Available To Home Educators

The Council has a nominated centre which provides facilities for all home educated children to sit exams. 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 young people reach the appropriate age for a particular examination. Feedback suggests the facility has been found to be very helpful. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/seftonfundingfoi.pdf>

24 - Sheffield: Brokers Arrangement With School + Uses Alternative Provision Funding For FE Courses

Over the past few years the Council reached an agreement with several schools who agreed to offer home educated children the opportunity to sit English/Maths GCSEs. The Council knew from meeting with home educators that finding somewhere to sit exams was an ongoing problem. All maintained schools in the City were approached and by Autumn 2012, 2 local schools had agreed that home educated private candidates could sit IGCSEs at the school. The Council was also aware that private candidates would need a centre to deal with Controlled Assessments for GCSEs. One of the schools which had initially offered exam-only GCSEs was encouraged to broaden the offer for the following year. The Council pays for GCSE courses (where available) and Vocational Skills courses for home educated young people through vocational skills providers and local colleges in the city . The cost is claimed back via the Alternative Provision Census. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/sheffieldfundingfoi.pdf>

25 - Somerset: Works with Schools/Keeps List of School Centres/Uses FE College/Pays For Exams

Somerset Elective Home Education Service works with local schools' examination officers to ensure home educated learners can access advice from the school with regard to possible exams for private candidates. The Council has a list of local schools which allow private candidates to sit exams. The list is available to home educating families. Somerset reviews and updates the list throughout the year and is proactive in reaching out to schools and seeking to add additional schools to the list. Somerset has also been meeting regularly with home educating families for a number of years to talk through issues of concern to home educators. The problem of finding somewhere to sit exams is often raised. A group of home educators has built bridges with a local FE college where home educated young people can sit exams. This initiative is supported by the Local Authority. More information here http://www.homeeducationcentre.org.uk/HEC_News.html

Somerset Council will also consider funding examination costs for home learners who have been registered with the LA for two years or more, are in NC Y10 or Y11 and taking

core subjects. This includes invigilation costs but does not include extra costs incurred by late registration or coursework costs. **NB** See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/somersetfundingfoi.pdf>

26 - Southampton: Council Officer Invigilation at PRU/Council Signposts To Local Home Education Group

The Elective Home Education Officer undertook exam invigilation training in order to facilitate exams for a home educated student taking exams at the PRU. The Council signposts to a local home education support group which offers social opportunities and information about home educators taking exams. The LA Advisor also signposts to information for private candidates provided by AQA and Edexcel. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/southamptonfundingfoi.pdf>

27 - Staffordshire: Provides Information About Exams, Liaises With Schools, Compiles List Local Centres

There is a page on the Council website which gives information about taking exams as private candidates and lists the main exam boards and a checklist of key dates and deadlines in the exams calendar. In addition, Council staff liaise with Schools Exams Officers to establish which of their centres are available to home educated children. Where possible, further information is provided re restrictions on exam boards and controlled assessment provision at the centres, together with contact details for exams officers. Information about local exam centres is summarised in a separate document which is freely available via our website. The list is also shared with home educating families and the information is reviewed annually. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/staffordshirefundingfoi.pdf>

28 - Stoke: Council Seeing if 6th Form College Can Help

Discussions are taking place with the local sixth form college to look at how we can support students. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/stokefundingfoi.pdf>

29 - Sutton: After Trying Schools and PRU, Council Now Works With FE College

None of Sutton 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. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/suttonfundingfoi.pdf>

30 - Swindon: Local FE Colleges Will Take Private Candidates

We do not have any schools which we are aware of that offer exam centres to EHE children currently. The colleges will take in a private candidate. Our EHE guidance is being updated in 2012 and we are hoping to add some local schools/PRU who would act as an

exam centre for individual candidates. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/swindonfundingfoi.pdf>

31 - Torbay: Local FE College Takes Private Candidates

The Council gives advice to families on where they can enter their children for exams as private candidates which will often be through the local FE College. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/torbayfundingfoi.pdf>

32 - Trafford: Works With Schools to Promote Exam Access For Home Educators

The Council works with the schools so that they have an understanding around the issues around home education, and positively encourages them to take on external candidates dependent on subject, syllabus, examination board, etc. The Council tries to use all its schools. See also <http://edyourself.org/articles/traffordfundingfoi.pdf>

Action List For Local Authorities

Introduction

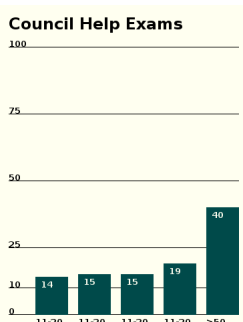
Start with providing basic written information; ask round local schools; consider a pilot; invite local home educators to a meeting to discuss exams access; ask the PRU; ask the FE College; investigate support for Access Arrangements; run a course leading to a qualification

- Be aware that [Ofsted says it will ask LAs what they are doing to help home educators with exams](#)
- Provide [basic information about taking exams as a private candidate](#) including GCSEs, Controlled Assessment, IGCSEs.
- Make [FAQ](#) available on the Council's Home Education web page + via pdf/printed leaflet for new families Add pointers on how to find an exam centre and signpost to awarding bodies and local home education support groups and national support network for home educators taking exams
- Ask round local schools to see if anyone is willing to let home educated young people sit exams. (This could initially be restricted to the same exams which are being taken by children at the school.)
- Be proactive in engaging with schools and explaining what is involved, as [Hampshire](#) have done. Seek to understand barriers and challenges for schools and consider how these might be overcome. Follow up initial enquiries, don't just wait for positive responses. Could you start with a pilot?
- Invite home educating families to a meeting to discuss access to exams
- Consider partnership working with local home educators to develop a viable exam centre. Could you start with a pilot?
- Investigate the possibility of using the Pupil Referral Unit (or equivalent) as exam centre for home educated private candidates. (As with schools, be proactive in engaging with the PRU and consider starting with a pilot)

- Approach the local FE College to see whether home educated young people could take exams as private candidates. As with schools and the PRU, be proactive in engaging with the college and consider starting with a pilot.
- When you are talking to the local FE colleges, find out what GCSE courses are being run, as these will be eligible for funding by the EFA under [the new FE funding arrangements for home educated 14-16s from September 2013](#)
- Think about whether the LA could help with assessments for Access Arrangements
- Run exam courses for home educated young people - possibly in partnership with the local college - + an opportunity to sit the exam

[FOIs from LAs: Home Education + Access To Exam Centres](#)
[Case Studies: Home Education + Exams Report into Home Education Funding 2012](#)
[Home Education Funding FOI Responses 2012](#)

Can Local Authorities Help Home Educators Find Somewhere To Sit Exams? 2012 Results



- 14% Give Information
- 15% Do nothing
- 15% Build Bridges With Local Schools
- 19% Tell Families To Ask Schools
- 40% One-to-one Help

In May 2012 the Education Committee announced [a short inquiry](#) closing on July 9th, looking specifically at the support available for home educators, financial and otherwise, and examining progress in this area since [the 2009 Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee](#) which noted that *"the biggest complaint from home educators as regards support and services was the difficulty that they have in accessing examination centres and the fact that local authorities do not cover the cost of sitting examinations."*

In 2007 [the NFER Survey on Support for Children Who Are Educated At Home](#), concluded that "there were inconsistencies in the amount and types of support different local authorities were able or willing to provide."

Positive Examples Are Not Typical

I have chosen to focus on the minority of positive examples in the hope that this may offer a way forward for other Councils. The positive stories quoted in [Appendix 2 at the end of this Report](#) - representing only 20% of Local Authorities - are not typical. **The clear message from most Councils is that they have no statutory responsibility and they are not in a position to help home educators find anywhere to sit exams.** Read all the Council responses [here](#)

Home Educators Believe Councils Could Do More, But Is This Realistic?

Via home education internet support groups and [Twitter](#), I asked home educators about their experience of taking exams as private candidates outside the school system and posted the responses [here](#) Click [here to read the full set of questions](#). *"We had initial consultations with the Council at the start of their policy review. When the LA asked was there anything we felt home educators needed from the LA, we said help for somewhere to sit exams. EHE officer said the Council had spoken to various centres but none had been willing to allow private candidates. Not heard anything since."* **Home educating parent.** Click [here](#) for more views from home educating parents.

Overview of Council Responses

Introduction

When I asked Local Authorities specifically about their outreach work with local schools to promote access for home educated children to sit exams, many Councils responded by saying that they offered support and advice to families on a one-to-one basis, instead of tackling the issue across the authority. Councils might aim to visit families once a year and will wait to pass on any information until the home visit. Click [here](#) for more details. Some Councils say that information about exam centres quickly goes out of date, and offer this as a reason for not putting anything in writing on the Council website for example, but this would not preclude having [a basic information leaflet](#) with [Useful Links](#). I have put together an Action List with suggestions for Local Authorities [here](#)

Read the full set (147) Local Authority responses [here](#)

Most Councils Do Not Help With Finding Somewhere To Sit Exams

15% of Councils take the position that they can fulfil their statutory responsibilities by doing nothing.

85% of Councils Are Not Liaising With Local Schools

Only a small number (**15%**) of Councils reported that they are actively working to build bridges with local schools.

Very Few Councils Keep List Of Schools Accepting Private Candidates

Only **14%** of Councils keep a list of schools which take private candidates.

Most Councils Don't Provide Information About Taking Exams As Private Candidates

Only **11%** of Councils direct families to the information for private candidates held by awarding bodies such as AQA and Edexcel and only **14%** of Councils mentioned that they provided information about taking exams as private candidates.

Councils Tell Families To Ask Schools

19% of Councils tell families to ask local schools yet the vast majority of schools are unable or unwilling to help, and it is not clear whether LAs are aware of this. **8%** signpost to FE colleges with a further **3%** hoping to make use of college facilities in the future.

Using the PRU

14% of Councils have taken an alternative route and are using their own Pupil Referral Units as exam centres for home educated children and these Councils are disproportionately represented in the Appendix containing positive examples.

Will Councils Do More In Future?

4% of Councils told me that they have tried to find suitable schools without success. **15%** of Councils while offering only limited help at present, acknowledge the problem and would like to do more in future.

Positive Examples

In [Appendix 2](#) I have included more detailed answers from: Barnet, Barnsley, Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Bolton, Brent, Bromley, Croydon, Cumbria, Dorset, Dudley, Durham, East Riding, Enfield, Essex, Hampshire, Kirklees, Manchester, North Yorkshire, Reading, Richmond on Thames, Sefton, Sheffield, Somerset, Southampton, Staffordshire, Stoke, Sutton, Swindon, Torbay and Trafford, representing 1 in 5 local authorities.

Background

In July 2011, **the Education Committee** noted [the difficulty faced by home educated young people taking exams as private candidates](#). In September 2011 MP Graham Stuart, **Chair of the Education Committee** said there should be a duty placed on local authorities to ensure places where young people could sit exams as private candidates. Click [here](#) to read more from the **Home Education All Party Parliamentary Group** In November 2011 I sent Freedom of Information requests to all LAs in England asking what they were doing to promote access to exam centres for home educated young people. Read my FOI questions [here](#) **Responses were received from 147 out of 152 Local Authorities.**

My FOI questions were narrowly focused on provision for private candidates in local schools as there seemed to be a widespread belief firstly that local schools were able to help and secondly that if local schools were initially unwilling, then intervention from the Council would make a difference. This belief may be misplaced. However, the options are not limited to maintained schools, and in some of the more innovative Local Authorities private candidates benefit from access to exams in a variety of settings including **Pupil Referral Units and FE Colleges** as well as in **private schools and independent tuition centres.**



Councils may find it helpful to read the [Case Studies with home educators' experience of taking exams](#) outside the school system.

Home educating families tend not to take as many exams as children do in school and there may be flexibility or non-standard entry where colleges understand more about the applicant's background. For a variety of reasons, long term home educators may also begin exams earlier and take one year courses rather than two.

Some Families Come To Home Education At Crisis Point Part-Way Through Exams

Home educating families tend to progress through the course material by self-study working through recommended textbooks, signing up for a correspondence course or using the services of a private tutor. Families have also set up their own self-help groups. Some families come to home education in crisis when the young person is part-way through the GCSE course and are dismayed to find there is nowhere to take the final exam, whereas long-term home educators may have friends who have already navigated the system or have access to a support network.

Private Candidates May Only Be Able To Take Same Exams As School's Internal Candidates

Home educators talk about “finding an exam centre” but this doesn't mean that the young person will be able to sit all the exams at the same place or even in the same town. The offer will probably be limited to the same exams as the centre's own internal candidates. A few Councils such as Staffordshire and Essex are aware of this and will mark up their list of exam centres accordingly.

The Problem of Controlled Assessment

[Controlled assessments](#) which have replaced coursework, makes most GCSEs extremely difficult for home educated young people. In my survey, controlled assessment was only raised by 8% of Councils, yet this can make finding an exam centre much more complicated, as can be seen from [Home Educators' Case Studies](#).

It is up to the exam centre to organise Controlled Assessments for its own candidates. Home educated private candidates would either have to attend the school CA sessions for its own pupils, or arrange with the school for dedicated home education CA sessions at the centre. **I would welcome any feedback on Controlled Assessment possibilities for home educated private candidates.**

Private candidates need to find a registered centre that will:

1. accept them for all elements of Controlled Assessment Task Taking and Task Marking, including preparation and analysis prior to the Task Taking
2. undertake authentication of Controlled Assessment Tasks
3. keep their work securely between sessions
4. undertake the assessment of any Controlled Assessment Tasks.

Private candidates will be asked to undertake all elements of controlled assessment. This can include writing-up sessions and research and analysis sessions. All elements with high or medium levels of control must be undertaken within the centre, or externally with centre supervision e.g. a field trip. The timings of these sessions will vary but **writing-up sessions can be as long as 6 hours and research and analysis sessions can be as long as 20 hours.** [AQA page for private candidates.](#)

IGCSEs

Difficulties with controlled assessment lead many home educating families to opt for IGCSEs but this brings its own problems. Maintained schools, FE colleges and Pupil Referral Units do not routinely offer IGCSEs to their own pupils, and in most cases do not want to get involved in the paperwork required for a different type of exam.

IGCSEs are predominantly exam-based ie the candidate is not required to submit coursework as part of the overall mark scheme. The main exam boards or awarding bodies for IGCSEs are CIE and Edexcel. More exam centres are registered with Edexcel though this does not necessarily mean that the centre will accept private candidates for IGCSEs.

"The Pupil Referral Unit is able to provide the facility and parents are told via the information sheet that goes out to all Elective Home Educated families annually. However, the PRU is not able to offer controlled assessment for GCSE and IGCSEs cannot be taken at the PRU."

Local authority FOI response

Access Arrangements

Access Arrangements, can be a significant factor for candidates with special needs including those on the autistic spectrum, who will have difficulties with unfamiliar surroundings, extended travel or large exam halls. I am planning a follow-up question to

local authorities asking what information is given to families about Access Arrangements and SEN. **I would welcome any feedback on Access Arrangements**

Private candidates with additional needs who believe they may need extra time in exams or to use a keyboard or the services of a scribe will need to plan in advance for this. The exam board will expect evidence and the exam centre will need plenty of advance notice. Some exam centres will not be able to accommodate private candidates who have special requirements.

Distance Learning/Correspondence Course

Home educators responding to my survey did not generally recommend paying for correspondence courses such as NEC or Oxford Home Schooling though some LA advisors seemed to be under the impression that these courses – which cost around £300 per subject - carry the family through the whole exam experience and that the course providers will even arrange for somewhere to take the exams, which is certainly not the case, though they may supply a list of possible exam centres. Home educators say it depends on the quality of the tutor assigned to the course and that this can be extremely variable. Providers are under no obligation to find the candidate somewhere to sit the exam.

[The AQA Guidance for Private Candidates](#) says "it is advisable to ensure that a centre has agreed to submit your entry before paying any money to a tutor or distance learning organisation". In the past, distance learning tutors were able to authenticate coursework done by private candidates but this is no longer relevant now that [coursework has been replaced by controlled assessments](#).

Appendix 1 Responses from Home Educating Parents

Introduction

The sample below is self-selecting since I asked on home education internet support groups and on Twitter, so by definition these were parents who had access to the internet. All the case studies and responses can be read [here](#) together with [the list of questions](#) I asked of parents.

Family Disappointed With Council

We have a good long standing relationship with our L.E.A and I asked them about how home educated children took exams as external candidates, as during their visits over the years they had always asked us if the children had any thoughts on taking qualifications. To my surprise, despite annually asking us about thoughts on taking prospective exams

they had no knowledge of how home educators could actually achieve this. No idea where there were any exam centres, a list of tutors, or costs...nothing.

In the end I had to look outside of our county to find a home education group that have a good working relationship with their L.A and found a Home Education Study Group which we joined, who have a friendly relationship with a small private school, where H.E children could arrange to sit exams as external candidates.

I took the head of our L.A to view the out of county H.E study group and set up meetings for them to learn about how exam centres can be used for the home ed community. They still haven't done anything. They still haven't set up any exam centres or links for H.E students in our county and as far as I am aware have no future intention to do so. This year after four years of sharing meetings, emails, chats with local MP's and L.A's they are no further forward than they were when we first asked them for help all those years ago. The local L.A now pass my home phone number to other local H.E families if they wish to sit exams.

[read more here](#)

Partnership working with Council

Our Council - with help from us - has registered the PRU as a centre for CIE exams and identified a local school to set up for GCSEs and IGCSE for home educators. The local independent school is already being used

Council Says Nothing Can Be Done

We had initial consultations with the Council at the start of their policy review. When the LA asked was there anything we felt home educators needed from the LA, we said help for somewhere to sit exams. EHE officer said the Council had spoken to various centres but none had been willing to allow private candidates. Not heard anything since.

Council Procrastinates

The council does nothing. We have asked the EHE officer repeatedly, as individuals as as a group) for help in finding an exam centre locally. We have provided the Councils with examples from neighbouring LA plus contact details for further enquiries. Every month or so we ring to see how they are getting on and they either say "Sorry, I forgot all about you" or "Wait until the next head teachers' meeting and I'll try asking there" or "I'm planning to set aside a whole afternoon to ring around the secondary schools to ask. Just give me a few more weeks."

Didn't Ask LA As We Felt They Were Only Ever Interested In Checking Up On Us

When our eldest reached fourteen we decided to start thinking about GCSEs. We have never had a very good relationship with the LEA because we felt they were only ever checking up on us, not that they were interested in helping. Read more [here](#)

Using the PRU

This year we received a letter from our Council telling us that we could use the Pupil Referral Unit to sit exams and listing most of the exam boards.

Home Education/LA Partnership Using Local Maintained School as Centre For Home Educated Candidates

I got the school to register for AQA, Edexcel, CIE and any other exam board I could think of. The LA tells parents to get in touch with me if they are looking for an exam centre in the area. In terms of cost, the school only charged base price for exam, no admin. I always advise families to consider exams at an early age as it may be more difficult than they think. Read more [here](#)

Local Private School Objects to Younger Candidates

The local private school took private candidates for years and years then the parents

kicked off about why such young candidates were sitting exams alongside their children. They didn't say no to future candidates but they added a £50 or so "admin" fee to the £100 or so exam cost.

Home Educators Running Small Schools

Nearby we have Southdowns Small School and Etudeo both of which are run by home educators and organise exams.

Find a Centre First

We began looking for an exam centre as soon as we decided to think about exams. We had help from other home educators, such as on the home education exams Yahoo group. The most useful advice was to find a centre first, then work out how to take the exams. Read more [here](#)

Started With English Course; Centres On Council List Didn't Cater For IGCSEs

My daughter decided at the age of 12 that she wanted to try Catherine Mooney's English course and, as it leads to the Edexcel IGCSE, we decided that we'd start exploring options for exam entry. When we were about halfway through the course we contacted the LA for a list of local exam centres. Read more [here](#)

Used Edexcel Exam Centre List

We contacted Edexcel and picked the nearest exam centre from their list which was in a school. The exams officer at the school was absolutely brilliant.

Shared Cost of Practical And Mock Exam With Other Home Educators

The exam fee was £40 per qualification paid to the exam board. We also paid for the English course and for the ICT, we shared the cost of the practical and an on-site mock exam.

Approached 189 Schools

I approached 189 schools before I found one where my son could take exams. He wanted to take English, Maths, a science and a humanities subject. Read more [here](#)

School Only Accepted Private Candidates For Same Exams As Its Own Pupils

We thought we'd ask other home-educators first. We joined the GCSE home-ed yahoo group and asked for advice as to where to start, and were advised to find an exam centre first, so we started this straight away. I emailed all the local schools and was really shocked and concerned when they all said No, we won't accept private candidates. Read more [here](#)

Taking Exams In One Year Rather Than Two

My son took 2 GCSEs aged 14, then six more age 15. We didn't think about asking the local FE college. The school only charged £25 per exam plus £25 admin. We couldn't afford tutors or correspondence courses so we just bought textbooks and did it ourselves.

If You Are Going To Do Exams, Might As Well Get it Sorted Earlier

I think that if you are going to do exams you might as well get sorted out earlier and make it less stressful. I don't think there's any need to wait until 14-16.

Started At 13 And Used Local Private 6th Form College

My daughter decided this year that she wanted some GCSEs. She is 13. She started with a distance learning course for English Language, and then sat the IGCSE at a local private 6th form college which cost £160. The LA advisor seemed a bit frustrated by the situation herself, and I think would like to have been more help, but didn't know where to go, to find that magical pot of money that seems to be available. Read more [here](#)

We Are Doing Drama GCSE Through Home Education Group

My daughter is doing drama GCSE through a home education group, which will only cost

£55. Music GCSE is not available to private candidates because 60% of the marks are controlled assessments in performance and composition.

IGCSEs Much Cheaper Because All Exam-Based With No Controlled Assessment

Next year should be much cheaper, because the rest of the IGCSEs she wants to do are all exam based with no controlled assessment.

Are Distance Learning Courses Worth The Money?

I paid hundreds of pounds for distance learning courses to go with the GCSEs, but I didn't think they were good value for money and I wouldn't choose this option again. Read more [here](#)

Local Authority Paid Exam Fees to FE College

One of my daughters took 6 GCSEs and iGCSEs this year, another took 3. The cost was met via the local home education group who were awarded money from the local authority to be spent on exam access. Read more [here](#)

Total Cost £250 for 5 Exams

The whole process was very simple, we contacted the school, filled a form in and paid a fee of £65 for GCSE higher maths and turned up on the specified days/times. He took this one over his 15th birthday. He then opted for IGCSE Physics (to avoid the assessment problem)... Read more [here](#)

Appendix 4 Examples of One to One Support/Annual Home Visit

Introduction

I was surprised to discover that 40% of Councils still preferred to pass on information verbally in the course of a private meeting with the family, and did not follow the example of [Councils such as Essex or Staffordshire](#) and put together a leaflet or newsletter about taking exams.

Home education consultants visit families once a year and give advice on educational resources including information about exams. Consultants can liaise between families and schools. However, it is the schools that must ultimately decide for themselves, whether they allow private candidates to sit GCSE exams. We don't keep a list of schools.

We offer advice and support to parents as part of a programme of EHE Adviser visits.

During visits to families, if asked by parents, we would give advice and guidance on the issues relating to sitting exams as private candidates. We would also signpost parents to the established organisations which support home educating parents.

We offer meetings with our Elective Home Education Advisors and if during these visits parents/young people express an interest in accessing exams through a local school, we will supply them with the relevant contact in school. On occasions we liaise directly with schools to enquire on behalf of parents.

The Council's Education Officers, who monitor home education in the city, provide advice and support to individual parents regarding this issue as appropriate.

We work with families and encourage them to approach local schools as required.

Currently there is no formal plan to encourage and support local schools to provide facilities for home educated children to sit exams. The EHE Department work on a case by case basis to form positive working relationships with home educating families and to offer best advice based on individual contexts and the current LA position.

The Home Education consultant advises parents to contact the pupils' last school or a nearby one to see whether access for exams is available. The matching of exam boards is obviously a key issue to be resolved. Parents are also advised to research the issue on the internet.

If a parent asks then currently we point them in the direction of the local colleges.

We would supply individual families with contact details for schools to enquire about exams.

Families are supported on an individual case basis, which includes the provision of advice on how such children might be entered for examinations.

We will assist families who choose to home educate, by providing information on schools in their area who may be able to help, depending on exam boards being compatible. We will also liaise with schools on request.

If the Council is contacted by parents, we look at individual cases to assess if we can help. Families either approach schools directly, or we would guide them to their local school. Usually, parents who wish this to happen do manage to sort things out for themselves with the help of home education support organisations.

We offer advice to families on an individual basis when they make enquiries, where ever possible pointing them to places where they may be able to access an exam centre.

In the most part, where a child has recently been withdrawn from school, parents will be directed back to the school they have withdrawn from to discuss if registration is still available.

We always respond to requests for help with exams and would approach schools but nobody has asked in the past 3 years.

Where a family requests help regarding exam preparation in a more specialised subject, the Alternative Education Service has facilitated contact between the family and a local school that is able to provide support in that area.

Appendix 5 Freedom of Information Request November 2011

In September, Schools Minister Nick Gibb said "We recognise that it is not always easy for home-educated children to find suitable exam centres. While it is rightly a matter for an individual school or college as to whether to provide facilities for home-educated children to sit their exams, we encourage them to do so; and we provide training, advice and support to exam officers accordingly"

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2011-09-15b.71415.h#g71415.r0>

- Could you tell me what work the Council does to encourage and support local schools to provide facilities for home educated children to sit exams.
- Does the Council keep a list of local schools which allow private candidates to sit exams?
- If so, does the Council make this list available to home educating families on request?
- How often is the list reviewed and updated?

<http://edyourself.org/articles/examcentresurvey.php#questions>

Useful Links

<http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#links>

[Wiki Page with home educators' recommendations for schools accepting private candidates](#)

[AQA web page for private candidates](#)

[List of exam centres used by AQA private candidates in the past](#)

[Home Educators' Exams Wiki](#)

[Exams Wiki Frequently Asked Questions: How To Get Started](#)

[Home educators' Exams Yahoo Group](#)

[House of Commons Meeting about Home Educators' Access to Exams and FE](#)

[QCDA guidance to exam centres about private candidates](#)

[AQA Guidance on Private Candidates](#)

[AQA Supplementary Guidance for Private Candidates](#)

[Edexcel Guidance on Private Candidates](#)

[Past Papers and Mark Schemes AQA](#)

[Past Papers and Mark Schemes Edexcel](#)