

Interim Home Education Survey Results: Local Authorities Help with Access to Exams

Fiona Nicholson, November 2013

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Since 2011 the All Party Group for Home Educationⁱ has been looking at access to exams and funding for special needs and college. Research has been publishedⁱⁱ together with models of good practiceⁱⁱⁱ. The Education Committee has also investigated these issues, making a series of recommendations at the end of 2012^{iv}.

Subscribers to my free bimonthly newsletter^v are kept up to date with relevant changes to funding or guidance and the information is also freely available on my website^{vi}

For my most recent survey I sent out a questionnaire^{vii} at the end of September 2013. At the end of November 2013, responses have been received from 75 out of 150 local authorities.

Schools accepting private candidates?

One in three councils has a list of local schools which accept private candidates, with a further quarter saying they answer queries on an individual basis. One in ten say they have identified this as an area for development.

Half 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. Only a couple of authorities had talked to the Secondary Heads Forum.

Feedback from councils about asking schools

“schools are reluctant...parents leave it too late...it's a small financial return for wodge of extra admin...it's hard work...some schools have been very helpful including with access arrangements...it's difficult but we have had a few successes...it's even more difficult with academies...most schools don't want the extra work or to have unknown candidates...significant resistance from schools re admin and ID...a working group looked into it but secondary heads weren't supportive...schools say they will then turn out not to...my plan is to make an appointment to see the Exams Officer in each school, as I need to know what they offer and any criteria or restrictions that may apply.”

Using the Pupil Referral Unit for private candidates

Just under 10% of local authorities are using provision for children unable to attend mainstream school^{viii} whether for behaviour or for medical reasons^{ix}. Over half the LAs who do use this type of facility say there is help with access arrangements (ie special accommodation to meet learning difficulties in exams^x) One LA also said the Pupil Referral Unit had helped with controlled assessments^{xi} for private candidates.

A minority of Pupil Referral Units confirmed that external candidates could take IGCSEs^{xii} irrespective of whether the PRU's own internal candidates were doing these exams or not^{xiii}, but

some local authorities specified that home educators would only be able to take the same subjects as the internal candidates.

Several authorities point out that they use a medical PRU or alternative learning centre for children out of mainstream education, and not a "behaviour" PRU. The impression is given that alternative learning centres may be more likely to take private candidates for IGCSEs than the "behaviour" PRUs.

A quarter of local authorities said they were currently considering using the PRU, though one council said that restructuring means this can't go ahead at present

Access arrangements

Only one in ten authorities has helped with access arrangements ie where an exam candidate needs an assessment for extra time or use of keyboard or scribe^{xiv}. However, a further two in ten said they would help if appropriate and one in twenty mentioned that the college or pupil referral unit would deal with this situation as it arose. A more typical response came from the LA who said *"unfortunately, at this time, we do not have the capacity within the authority to offer any other services"*.

More positive feedback included the following: *"The LA have had involvement with individual cases to support access arrangements and have been able to involve specialist teams to support young people into appropriate provision"*. Another said that in one case the EHE advisor knew the family and was able to set up 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.^{xv}

Exams courses and careers advice

One LA offers free IGCSE English & Maths, plus free access to the authority's Virtual Learning Environment, and a termly meeting with a tutor.^{xvi} The exams can then be taken at the local college. In another LA, the local college has agreed that home educated young people can sit English and maths at the college if they use the same exam board. A third LA signposts to the local colleges which are offering twilight and evening courses to home educators

Two LAs have paid for home educated young people to have access to interactive careers advice^{xvii} while others provide details of local exam centres which have agreed to take private candidates. Some authorities advise families that support is available to arrange an exam centre.

Exams information sheet/FAQ

30% of LAs give some information about exams during one to one conversations with home educators but don't have anything in writing. Some LAs have a Parents Booklet or similar which makes reference to GCSEs and has links to awarding bodies^{xix}. Relatively few LAs mention IGCSEs^{xx} which are favoured by home educators because of the lack of controlled assessment^{xxi}.

A minority of LAs such as Lancashire have comprehensive information about exams on the council website.^{xxii} Four LAs said it's up to parents and one LA said they don't help with exams as this is not part of their statutory duties.

Just over 10% of LAs said they are currently revising their paperwork and procedures to improve their service and aim to offer more information about exams. One LA added that information about

exams would need to be re-written anyway in the light of the new 14-16 college funding options.^{xxiii}

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.

Practice varies, with different local authorities signposting to details of college courses; where to sit exams; how to get in touch with the awarding bodies (exam boards); issues with controlled assessment for GCSEs and the benefits of IGCSEs for home educators. In one case the LA also signposts to the local home education tutor group.

Signposting to other sources of information about exams

Nine out of ten authorities said they signposted to other sources of information^{xxiv}. This tends to be done via one to one conversations, though some authorities also mention network meetings with the wider home education community; having a handout to give to parents (possibly included in the Parents Information Pack); or having a leaflet to download from website. A quarter of councils don't have anything written down

A few LAs mention home education support networks as being a source of useful information for exams though this tends to be the national charities for general information^{xxv xxvi} rather than the specific exams support such as the home educators' exams wiki^{xxvii} or the home education exams yahoo group^{xxviii}

One LA mentioned the council's E-learning service though home educators do have to buy in to this. Another LA had arranged a group meeting which included careers guidance.

Four out of ten authorities have some dialogue with families about exams. Although most councils still prefer to deal with individual families rather than organise a group meeting, one in ten councils is thinking about organising an event in the New Year, and a further one in ten already has links with a local home education network where the topic of exams could be covered.

New under-16s home educators' college funding

78% of councils know about the new funding for under-16s college places^{xxix} and are passing this information on to parents. A further 12% say they are considering more engagement in the near future. Early feedback suggests that more progress has been made outside London.

One in three LAs has made contact with local colleges but the reaction from college has been mixed. Half the councils say that colleges are responding positively while the remainder say that colleges think it doesn't apply to them or aren't willing to take under-16s.

Although these weren't specific questions, 12% of councils told me that they know of local home educated under-16s who are currently on college courses with the new funding, and two councils have worked with colleges to arrange home educators' open days.^{xxx}

Feedback from councils about college places for under-16s

“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 family improved relations considerably.”

Taking exams as private candidate at college

I also asked whether LAs had approached local colleges about exams access for private candidates. Half of the LAs who answered this question had done so, although one in five also said that colleges were not keen. 15% of LAs said this is something they might do in future.

Feedback from councils about taking exams at college

“not done this yet but will invite them to a network meeting...local college is one of few offering direct entry this year and parents are made aware...this is set up and working well...in consultation about it...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.”

- i <http://edyourself.org/articles/allpartygrouphomeeducation.php>
- ii <http://edyourself.org/articles/examcentresurvey.php>
- iii <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsreport.php>
- iv <http://edyourself.org/articles/edcomsupporthomeed.php>
- v <http://edyourself.org/newsletter.php>
- vi <http://edyourself.org/>
- vii <http://edyourself.org/examsaccess2013.pdf>
- viii <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/maintained/a00198404/pru-information>
- ix <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/a00216844/fund-staff-leg-prus>
- x <http://ehe-sen.org.uk/exams.php>
- xi <http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#controlledassessment>
- xii <http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#IGCSEs>
- xiii <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsreport.php#appendix2lapositiveexamples>
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- xv <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsreport.php#appendix2lapositiveexamples>
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- xxii http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=388&tab=20
- xxiii <http://edyourself.org/articles/WolfReport.php#14-16collegelatest>
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- xxv <http://www.heas.org.uk/>
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- xxvii <http://edyourself.org/articles/examsfaq.php#wiki>
- xxviii <http://edyourself.org/articles/exams.php#links>
- xxix <http://edyourself.org/articles/WolfReport.php#14-16collegelatest>
- xxx <http://edyourself.org/articles/WolfReport.php#14-16colleageevents2013>