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My name is Vivienne Fox. I have five children who have never been to school. My older children have gone on to University, and my eldest graduated from University at the age of 18, and has been employed in his field since graduation. I have home educated for over 15 years.

As an experienced home educator, for many years I have volunteered my time as part of the support services the HEA provides. This has involved helping and supporting parents with the practice of home education, resourcing them to provide a good quality education to meet their child's needs. During that time, when parents knew what to do, it enabled them to meet registration requirements.

In the last 2 years the assistance required has changed dramatically. Rather than understanding the practice of home education, what parents now need is support to understand the registration process. The change started with differences in Authorised Persons' approaches to registration, and was consolidated in the publication of the 2013 Information Pack. This document is not user friendly, is convoluted and describes an inflexible approach. Providing support to home educators has become a process of helping parents understand what is required, and to jump through the hoops of the registration system.

Adding to this already difficult situation, the Questions and Answers document, which purports to provide clarification for parents, has been added to many times in the last year, and directly contradicts the Information Pack. This bureaucratic minefield is the everyday experience of the parents who choose home education for whatever reason, and does not improve the quality of the education they provide to their children.

I have been part of the HEA's lobby for change because I have sat with and helped many parents who have been unduly distressed by the registration process. I would like to draw the Committee's attention to Case Study 3 on page 201 of the HEA submission. This shows a capable, engaged home education applicant who was already providing quality educational experiences to the child in her care. In her own words, the process made her 'worried and fearful'. As she says,
"Even though I am determined to home educate, as it's the only solution for this little girl, the registration process has made me feel worried and fearful. I have stayed up some nights, worrying about the home interview and whether I have covered all the requirements to satisfy registration."

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- I have more to say, which I have written in this document I wish to table, addressing some issues raised in Friday's hearing, and providing
 - A copy of the 2013 Information Package
 - A document showing the changes between the 2011 and 2013 Information Packages
 - The Questions and Answers document from the BoSTES website
 - A document showing the inconsistencies between the Questions and Answers and the 2013 Information Package.

What determines whether or not a parent can home educate?

Federal Government research has identified the importance of parental involvement in children's learning - "the key to facilitating positive change in a child's academic attainment is the engagement of parents in learning outcomes in the home"¹

Dr John Kaye said, during the first hearing of this inquiry, that home educating parents are "interested in education". I would agree wholeheartedly, but say more specifically, that they are highly interested in the education of their own children, and in obtaining the best outcomes for their own children. These parents are definitely interested in engaging in learning outcomes for their children.

There is no doubt something more is required than "interest" - It would seem sensible to assume that parents might need specific skills needed to be able to teach one's own children, outside the institutional school setting? How does a parent gain the skills needed to home educate, or discover if they have the necessary skills, or not? How does a parent engage with a child's learning to the extent needed, in order to provide that child with a full, high quality education?

It is BoSTES policy to check that parents can meet their requirements, to comply with registration policy. The BoSTES requirements are about particular forms of planning and documentation of that plan. They do not provide any support to parents, to enable them to engage in their child's learning. That is not considered to be their role.

When a parent begins the process of home education, particularly bringing their children out of school, they have to learn a totally new process. They need to be able to locate and provide the best learning opportunities and resources for their individual child. This is often far outside their previous experience - most home educating parents have come from the institutional school system themselves, which is substantially different in form from home education.

Where can they gain the skills they would need to do that most effectively?

Bostes would say that the first steps in the process of home education is to download the Information Pack, fill in the application form, send it in, and then the Authorised Person will come out and assess the application to work out how the requirements will be met. This must, under current requirements, occur before the parent even begins home educating.

(Please see 2013 Information Package, provided with this statement.)

If you read the Information Package, do you learn how to go about home educating your child?

¹ Emerson L, Fear J, Fox S, Sanders E. Parental engagement in learning and schooling" Lessons from Research. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) for the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau; 2012.

The answer is, actually, no! The Information Package provides information about how to comply with the registration process. The registration process itself is not the same as the actual education that parents provide day-by-day. The practical things one does in educating a child, providing individually for their needs, are many and varied. There is no one way to do that which would provide the best education for each individual. Once the child is home educating, is it simply a matter of sitting the child at a table from 9-3 with a pile of textbooks and getting them to work through them? That is what we might think, coming from a school model ourselves. It is, I imagine, what most people think of, when discussing home schooling. But although textbooks and tables are a way of providing education outside institutional school, there are many other ways. In reality, home education looks very different from this - I would say, in fact, that every family does it differently, drawing on a range of styles, and tailoring to fit the individual needs of the child.

So, where can a parent gain the skills they would need to educate their child most effectively?

If a parent wants to actually learn about the process of home education, and what they will do, day-to-day, to provide their own child with a high quality, individually tailored education designed to meet the needs of that child, where do they go? Where do they find out where to go to find resources? Which resources, textbooks, online programmes, etc have been effective in home education settings? Where are the local support networks?

BoSTES don't give that kind of information, and enabling parents to find out these things is not part of the registration process. That information is provided by home educators. Volunteer organisations such as the HEA, and other SHEN, which are run by home educators who freely give their time to provide information and support to parents to help them learn the actual process of home educating.

Increasingly, the HEA also provides help to parents to be able to understand the Information Package, create the documentation required which links to the BoSTES syllabus, and to have the confidence to undergo the assessment visit.

I have spent many, many hours over the years, helping show parents how to home educate. There are many others in the HEA, who also provide this support.

However, in the last year, particularly, I have actually been spending more hours in providing support to parents to create an educational plan that meets the BoSTES requirements by linking to the BoSTES Syllabus, helping them understand how to provide a system of record keeping and assessment, and how to answer questions about time allocation for learning. Many other experienced home educators have also been helping to provide others with this kind of help.

I have also been providing support to parents undergoing assessment by the BoSTES, by sitting in on their visit with the Authorised Person, as have many others. The HEA has recommended this level of support, following a number of reported cases of extremely unpleasant interactions

with Authorised Persons, who not only did not understand the process of home education, and what that might look like, but also did not understand the Education Act, for example, expecting that the same time must be allocated for science for example, as would be provided at a school, when the Education Act actually states,

S. 14(4) "Any syllabus developed or endorsed by the Board for a particular course of study may indicate generally the period of time that should be allocated to the teaching of the course, but is not to make a specific period of time mandatory."

And did not understand the BoSTES Information package questions and answers, or how they 'clarify' the Information Package - for example, by allowing Stage Statements as a method of linking a plan of learning with the BoSTES syllabus, when the Information Package states that the outcomes, which are written in much greater level of jargon must be used - for example

"SSES1 - Identifies ways in which their own needs and the needs of others are met, individually and cooperatively. (This is an outcome for HSIE at the Early Stage 1, Kindergarten level).

ENe-12E - demonstrates awareness of how to reflect on aspects of their own and others' learning (This is an outcome for English at the Early Stage 1, Kindergarten level).

EN3-9E - recognises, reflects on and assesses their strengths as a learner (This is an outcome for Stage 3, years 5&6, English)

MA5.1-3WM - provides reasoning to support conclusions that are appropriate to the context. (This is an outcome for Stage 5, years 9&10, Mathematics)."

As part of the process of providing support, I have provided my personal contact details to an Authorised Person, in order that he could provide them to parents, when contacting them to arrange a visit for the purposes of assessing their documentation. I have asked the AP to encourage parents to contact me before the visit, so that I can help them. The AP has commented to me that when I do this, "it makes the job easier". Parents have also commented that when I provide that support it eases their anxiety, and helps them understand the process and feel more confident that they will be able to obtain registration for home education.

What about parents who don't have the skills to home educate?

The HEA wants to ensure that every parent willing and committed to home educating their child has the opportunity to do so, and is not hampered by the red tape of the registration process. Trevor Khan indicated on Friday, that he did not consider he would be able to home educate. Other members of the Committee maybe consider that they wouldn't choose to home educate. Many parents do not come to home educating as a first choice. Some end up there because they have a child who is not doing well in the institutional school setting, either academically, socially, or for another reason, and, after having exhausted all avenues for making the mainstream school system work for that child, decide that home education may provide the

answer. They love their child, and want the very best education available for that child. I have watched many parents in that circumstance with no prior knowledge or educational skills relating to home education work at acquiring the skills needed, and I have watched their children flourish educationally and socially.

Mrs. Karen Chegwidden, who was before the Committee on Friday, is a midwife, not a school teacher, and described herself as a "refugee from the school system". I, on the other hand, have never put my children in school, but I did teach at school. Did my school experience equip me to home educate? Did Mrs. Chegwidden's lack of qualifications in school education make her a poor home educator? Both of us would say that we improved our skills to enable us to educate our children through the process of actually home educating and from our children - from watching them, addressing their needs, and providing a high quality, individualised learning program tailored specifically to those needs. We were supported in that by other home educators, who had experience, and could provide us with support to gain the particular skills needed to facilitate the education of our own children.

While in the process of writing this document I received an email, relating to this very thing, it said, in part,

"We don't need to worry about registration at this point [the child has just turned 5]..., but at this point [my husband] has a lot of questions and I think it would benefit him to talk to real life homeschoolers. .. he's asked me if we could meet a couple of families that are doing it, visit your house and see it "in action", just see how you set things up, talk to real life people, hear the stories."

And another which stated,

"I am considering homeschooling and don't really know where to start."

The HEA receives many emails asking about the registration process, which are then passed to one of the volunteers, such as one which said,

"So any information you could provide about registration and who I need to go through to make it happen would be a huge help!"

The process of registering and the practice of educating one's own child are very different, and the registration process does not help a parent provide a quality education individually tailored to meet the needs of the child.