
*Response and Clarification of some points in the Inquiry into
Homeschooling, Friday, 5th September,*

HESAN – Home Education Support and Action Network

Firstly, we would like to thank the Committee for being committed to investigate Home Education in New South Wales and consider various submissions.

HESAN appeared before the Inquiry on Friday, the 5th of September.

We would like to add a short list of recommendations, address a few points that arose from the day, some concerns, clarification and add some further information.

Recommendations:

We believe that having a home educator as a stakeholder or a Homeschooling Board under BoSTES will not solve the ongoing problems or have a long lasting effect. Instead, we would like to recommend that a new independent body – an Independent Homeschooling Board be set up to be directly responsible to the Minister.

1. Establish an independent body to oversee, facilitate and support home education.
2. That registration is managed by the above independent body. That the registration process is a basis of meaningful engagement with the Home Education community conducted by those who understand and are supportive of home education.
3. That home educators are given notification and equal access to educational support services, resources, opportunities and any initiatives which are available to children in the institutional school system. This will ensure that there is no discrimination against Home Education providers.
4. That “Centres of Homeschooling Excellence” be set up in various locations as resource centres for home educators. These centres provide facilities which homeschooling groups may use for shared classes, access resource materials, and may be used as an alternative location for registration visits.

We believe that with such an Independent Homeschooling Board in place, both the state’s requirement to ensure that all children have access to a quality education and the parental responsibility to educate their children can be addressed. HESAN welcomes appropriate registration under a Homeschooling Board as home educators can be assured that those who oversee home education understand the uniqueness of homeschooling, be supportive, recommend resources, offer help and provide access to the support services which are available to all school children.

Concerns:

As the main aim of the Committee is to search out more information regarding home education and the issues we are currently facing in NSW, we find it very disconcerting that Hon. John Kaye asked questions irrelevant to the Inquiry. We recognize that it was fair to ask if we teach evolution to see

if we follow the guidelines, but once that was clarified, the discussion should have moved on. Personal belief was not the focus of the Inquiry nor was it one of the Terms of Reference. We see this continuous line of questioning, honing in on one factor as a waste of valuable time which could have been used more beneficially to answer questions related to the Inquiry and related to our submission. It was also seen as a way to discredit us as a group because of the personal religious belief of us as representatives. It is a well-known fact that faith schools are allowed to teach other viewpoints beyond the Syllabus so therefore this should not have been included as a point of distraction from the investigations of the Inquiry. This was a disturbing and narrow line of questioning as it seemed to indicate that a State curriculum was there to control and limit not only parental influence but also the possibility of widening one's perspective and investigating other viewpoints.

Clarification:

We would like it noted that the answers we gave to the Inquiry on the issue of belief were personal answers and not the views of HESAN as a group. We would like to make it clear that we do not know the individual beliefs of the families represented by HESAN. HESAN is a supportive network for families based on our common desire and choice to home educate our children. We felt pressured into answering as a whole, when in fact, we can only present our personal views in regard to belief and the individual program that each of us teach. If there is an issue of whether a certain aspect of personal significance to members of the inquiry have been continuously overlooked by many APs over many years, then that should be raised with BoSTES. In our submission we stated that our programs have been approved.

Initially the questions raised by Hon. John Kaye were regarding our understanding on the theory of origins. Yes, we believe and teach Creationism as a theory of origins. Yes, we believe that it is a valid theory of origins and we believe that it is equally valid for us to present Creationism as it is valid for others to present evolution as a theory. Yes, we also teach our children Evolution as a theory of origins. Origin Science could also be known as Historical Science. Both evolution and creation fall into the category of origins science. The same evidence is available to everyone, but the way the evidence is interpreted is different to explain what happened in the past. We believe that understanding of origins comes from how we interpret the data from our individual worldview. We believe that they are both theoretical inferences about history. The terms "creation theory," and "evolution theory," are appropriate terms as long as it is understood that the inferences we make regarding the history of origins is based on scientific data rather than testable scientific theories.

Creation implies the existence of a Creator and Evolution excludes the interference of any outside body. Creation and Evolution involve fundamentally different world views. We understand in our opinion and stated that both are statements of faith.

However, part way through our discussion, the wording was moved from Creationism being a theory, which is valid for us to teach, to Creationism as a "scientific theory". Unfortunately, due to the fact that we are not practiced or accustomed to answering in this forum, we did not clarify our position and failed to recognize the significance of the change in semantics. A scientific theory must be testable by repeatable observations and so can only attempt to explain processes and events that occur repeatedly and are within our observations. Thus, theories of Historical Science – the history of origins are not scientific theories. We would concede that both Evolution and Creationism are not verifiable, repeatable events and so, are not scientific theories.

So, the clarification we would like to make is that we (those interviewed on the day, and not the families which HESAN represents) teach Creationism as an explanation for the origin of the universe and from the evidence we see today, we firmly believe in a Designer God. As the Hon. David Clarke helped us to clarify - although we do present both theories of origin to our children, our personal religious belief and understanding is in favour of Creationism.

At that time, we failed to distinguish between the “theories” and “scientific theories” of origin and we apologize for the misunderstandings caused by this.

[Further Information regarding Regulations and Duty of Care](#)

We acknowledge the validity of the question presented by Hon. Catherine Cusack and would like to add some thoughts on that question.

A Question raised by Hon. Catherine Cusack... (p 12)

I hear what you are saying. I will keep making this comment: This is fantastic for the families who are doing it the right way, but we have to accept that there is a group—as I have to accept as a passenger on an aircraft—that there are people out there, unfortunately, who want to do the wrong thing. Every system has that group of people in it. The Board of Studies has this problem. They have a duty of care to those kids as well. Those situations have to be addressed properly. The regulation you are now reacting against is not targeting you but we have to target those families. Do you accept that problem?

We understand that there may always be the possibility of those who slip through the cracks in any registration system. In our personal experience, we do not have any evidence of that nor come into contact with those who are claiming to be homeschooling, but not to be actually involved in home education with the best interests of their children at heart. We would not support any false claim of home education.

The Inquiry is about the regulations for those who come to register. Those who are truant, who are using “homeschooling” as a pretence are not correctly placed under our banner and will need to be followed up through other means.

Nor do we not see that tightening the regulations is the answer to target the people who are doing the “wrong thing.” Tightening and making the regulations less appropriate to home education will push those who are seeking to home educate away from the registration process. Surely one would see that a model with an appropriate registration process (appropriate to both the home educators as well as the governing authorities) with supportive officers would encourage those who are currently fearful of the registration process to apply for registration.

As a part of the registration process, parents could be asked to indicate the child’s involvement with ongoing social groups to ensure that the child is visible to the community.

It should also be noted that there are less unregistered home educators under the Tasmanian model and we believe that this is due to it being a supportive system recognizing the diversity of home education approaches.

Further Information Regarding Changes in the Information Package:

Hon. Paul Green raised a question to us regarding the changes in the Information Package.

“What is the specific problem with the 2013 Information Package?” (p 3)

We would like to draw the Committee’s attention to the document which we have in our Appendix, Information Package Change Comparison Chart 1998-2013. This attached Comparison Chart is a comprehensive document which shows the changes in the Information Package from 1998 to 2013. Below is a summary of the major changes in the Information Packages over this time period.

Summary of Changes in the IPs from 1998 to 2013

Role of Information Package and the Authorised Persons:

2013: There is a definite change in tone in the 2013 which seems to be more from a governing body imposing regulations than an officer willing to assist the registration process, “be flexible and take into account the ethos of the applicant and the needs of students and their parents.”

Information Package Created with Meaningful Consultation and Feedback Welcomed

1998, 2004, 2006: The packages were developed in meaningful consultation with experienced home educators and feedback is welcomed;

2010, 2011, 2013: Not created with consultation, no feedback welcomed;

Requirements for Registration / Conditions and Process

This part for the requirements for registration shows a strong move away from minimum curriculum – a comprehensive, balanced approach to the Key Learning Areas (KLAs) to the adherence to the BOS Syllabus requirements.

1998, 2004, 2006: the quality of the education meeting the minimum curriculum requirements and that the teaching program reflects a course of study in the KLAs;

2004, 2006: **minimum curriculum** is defined in a glossary as “the courses of study in each of the key learning areas.” (This is still in the Information Package after the Change in the Act in 2004)

2010, 2011: the educational program must be based on and taught in accordance with the BOS syllabuses and learning outcomes, content and teaching approach required, however the KLAs are still included in the curriculum section of the document for us to follow.

2013: Stronger language again in 2013 – MUST be complied with at all times;

2013: A special mention is the NOTE which defines minimum curriculum. This has not been defined this way previously; The note states: **NOTE: The minimum curriculum is the curriculum provided by the BOS syllabuses**; Requires outcomes based on the relevant BOS syllabuses and relevant content; Emphasis on written planning, recording and documentation; The statement which previously mentioned that a quality education was an important requirement was removed from the 2011 Pack, but in 2013, it states the need to demonstrate that the requirements (BOS syllabus) including outcomes and content are fulfilled.

The removal of the KLAs in the 2013 IP, posed a significant change for home educators.

Record Keeping Examples:

1998: Suggested formats - student records or daily teacher diary or weekly summary of achievements of the guidelines;

2013: Samples which indicate how specific outcomes from the BOS syllabus are addressed; written records of assessment added;

Time Allocation:

1998, 2006: Time sufficient to allow coverage of the work, with the understanding that some students may cover this body of work in less time;

2010, 2011: Time equivalent to a full time load for the min curriculum;

2013: Time comparable to the time allocated by schools.

National Curriculum:

2013: Incorporation of the National Curriculum;

Year Level Required on Registration:

2010: a requirement to include specific year or years of schooling on the certificate of registration;

2010, 2011: understood that the curriculum in the home may be advanced or delayed in comparison to children of a similar age who attend school.

2013: The BOS Homeschooling Unit must be notified in writing and provide details of the proposed change if you wish to deliver an educational program in advance of the Years of schooling on the certificate.

Nature of Homeschooling; How/ Where it is conducted:

1998-2011: Parents accept responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating their child's learning program; Home education allows a parent to integrate the NSW curriculum with the learning processes that occur naturally in the home throughout a child's development. Resources are generally supplemented by accessing community resources; Many approaches to home education; Education happens in many ways through the child's life and experiences. (All these statements are removed in 2013)

2013: Parents accept responsibility for developing, implementing and assessing their child's education program AS BASED ON THE BOS SYLLABUSES.

Resources other than the BOS:

2004, 2006: 6 page comprehensive list of NSW groups and contacts;

2013: Links within the BOS website to the syllabuses and other resources; the links to SHEN and Muslim support group are removed;

Special Needs:

2011: Allowed the program of study to be tailored to meet the individual needs of the child using the KLAs.

2013: Indicates that the program must be based on the BOS syllabuses. It states that the syllabuses can be adjusted, but the requirements must be met. In practice, this can only work by giving us the freedom to create our own learning program;

TAFE – Certificate of Completion of Year 10 at TAFE NSW

2013: the student who wishes to complete a Certificate II course being considered as an equivalent to Year 10, requires an Authorised Person to sign the application form for the TAFE course; The application form will then be forwarded on to the relevant TAFE by the Office's Home Schooling Unit. This is just another unnecessary and complicated step. The BoSTES responsibility is to approve a quality learning program of which a TAFE may be a component.

Homeschooling a Child outside of NSW for a period of time.

2011: If you are planning to reside temporarily outside NSW, you may be eligible to apply for distance education.

2013: If you are planning to reside temporarily outside NSW or travelling for periods longer than the typical school holiday periods, you may be eligible to apply for distance education.

This fails to see that not only are holidays worthwhile educational experiences, but those who choose to travel and home educate with a variety of their chosen curricula and resources cannot do so unless they apply for distance education.

Added Question and Answers

The Question and Answer page which was subsequently added to “clarify” the Information Package in 2013 contradicts the 2013 Information Package at many points and seems to have been written in order to retract some of the prescriptiveness and inappropriate regulations seen in the 2013 package. Had meaningful consultation taken place during the writing of this Information Package, this would not have needed to occur.

We sincerely thank you for the time you have spent investigating and understanding home education and the issues we are facing. We are eager for a better outcome and if required, we are happy to discuss any further details with you.

Mrs Marianne Vanderkolk, Mrs Sharon Wu

Home Education Support and Action Network.