

Recommendations for the Parliamentary Hearing

By Home Education Support and Action Network (HESAN)

Recommendation 1:

Establish an independent body to oversee, facilitate and support home education (based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council model - THEAC)

From HESAN Submission:

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Received by <i>Sharon</i>
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Resolved to publish Yes / No

HESAN submission p6 "We take the view that registration visits should be helpful, friendly and supportive. We have no issue with balance and consistent oversight by an independent oversight body that seeks to be supportive and inclusive of the extensive experience that home schooling parents and students bring to the oversight body."

HESAN submission p9 "The Registration Process that homeschooling families need to go through to home educate in New South Wales, does not currently reflect an appropriate and informed understanding of Home Education."

HESAN submission p11 "The model which has proven to be the most effective in Australia is the Tasmanian model – Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council. This is directly responsible to the Education Minister. The registration and monitoring process was based on the Report of the Ministerial Working Party, October, 1991 Home Education in Tasmania. The report made 21 recommendations which had bilateral endorsement without modifications. It has proven to be cost effective and has facilitated appropriate understanding of home education since the council consists of three members who have been nominated by home educators and three other member, at the discretion of the Minister for Education.

We believe that this Tasmanian model recognizes the democratic right to freedom of choice in education by providing a body which understands and gives validity to home education and shows due diligence to oversee, facilitate and support home educating families."

Report of Ministerial Working Party, Tasmania (as attached to HESAN submission) p7, Background to Review, point 6: "The State has generally adopted a stance of caution and suspicion towards home education, indicative of the prevailing view that all children should be educated in schools and colleges. This stance may have been counter-productive in encouraging a polarisation between professional educators and those involved in home education, resulting in mutual distrust and lack of communication. There has been a view that home education is 'outside' the system of education in this State, and that those who make this choice should not expect assistance or support. Too many home educators and professional educators, there appeared to be a need to clarify the relationship between home educators and the Department of Education and the Arts and to assess an appropriate means and extent of co-operation between the two parties."

Reasons for this Model:

What we like	Why
The distinction between home education and Home schooling	The recognition that education does not need to have the same appearance as 'school'
The Education Act provides for home education to be under the Minister rather than under the same umbrella as schools, and provides for the Minister to establish an advisory council to advise and assist.	Home Education is fundamentally different to schooling. The education of a handful of children of different ages must be done differently to the way as a school educates masses of children grouped into ages.
The Advisory Council is made up of equal numbers of members appointed by the Minister and formally recognised Home Educators as well as a liaison representative from the Department of Education.	This ensures that there is continued understanding and support of home education, the state has access and input into ensuring a quality education and the council can liaise with other agencies on matters relating to home education.
Monitoring Officers (same as our Approved Persons) are experienced home educators.	Using experienced home educators will ensure a more thorough understanding of exactly what the home educator is undertaking and in providing guidance and support.
Registration involves demonstration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aims and purposes for home education - programme intended, including goals, materials, methods, opportunities for social interaction, use of tutors, etc. - how records will be kept 	Registration is based on the parent showing that they have the best interests of the child at heart, they are being purposeful and diligent, they are providing a quality education, their children will be socialised (minimise abuse) and there will be acceptable record keeping.
Registration of new home educators fill in an application which is reviewed and, if it is accepted, the registration is 'Provisional' subject to a monitoring visit. The family may commence home educating. Registration is usually received within two weeks.	In some cases, is important that families are able to commence home education in timely fashion as their child is suicidal, in danger, etc. Being able to put in an application and start home educating on a provisional basis is in the best interests of the child.
Monitoring Visits undertaken with the intention of offering assistance and positive support, where needed or requested.	Monitoring visits achieve the purpose in a positive way that assists the home educator achieve the best result for the child/ren
A 'full registration' status indicates that a family has had a satisfactory initial monitoring visit. A new Family Report and follow up visit ensues within two years. Ongoing monitoring visits are used to confirm aspects of the continuing education program, while recognising any changes to that program.	Registration status is important as it allows home educators to access support and passes without it being conditional on the receipt of a new registration check and certificate (which can take several weeks). Keeping the 'full registration' status should be conditional on the Family Report / monitoring visit.
Where approval for registration is withheld and THEAC makes specific suggestions about the Program... these matters are to be given in writing to the home educator.	It is important that the report goes to the home educator and not just BoSTES. If is fair and right that we have guidance to make it work rather than being told to withdraw.
Travelling is permitted, as long as you are available in Tasmania when monitoring of your education program is due (monitoring may sometimes be brought forward or deferred)	Home Educating families tend to spend longer in an area when they travel as they take advantage of the learning opportunities available. This is an important provision.

<p>The government has provided eSchool materials free of charge to registered home educators. There is an initial cost of \$80 refundable deposit for materials, and an annual postal charge of \$50. Materials available include educational kits on numerous topics, textbooks, science and maths kits, and readers. Some online courses may also be available.</p> <p>Other financial assistance may include discounts at bookshops and PACER program (help with airfares to visit Parliament in Canberra).</p> <p>THEAC has a resource library which houses some textbooks and teaching books, as well as books about home education. Registered home educators are also able to borrow a greater number of books from the State library than other borrowers.</p>	<p>Access to resources to help parents provide an excellent home education.</p> <p>Home Educators buy significantly more books. The HEA survey will show that this is listed as one of the major costs.</p> <p>Home Educated children generally use public libraries more than the average student as they do not have access to a school library.</p>
<p>THEAC provides information to parents to help them in career planning with their children. This includes Job Guides, work experience pamphlets, and career planning websites. Council members and staff are happy to discuss alternative entry to university, entrance to college or Flexible Learning.</p>	<p>Access to career information and career days would be appreciated by home educators.</p>
<p>The THEAC website has information on home education, the different approaches, resources, support and THEAC information sessions. They explain the registration process. This is all done in a clear, friendly way that is inviting to the reader.</p>	<p>Families that are looking to home educate should have clear, friendly access to information available to them by the NSW government on the internet. It should not be hidden under information for parents in an unfriendly document full of legalese.</p>
<p>The THEAC website has information on how to write the Home Education Summary and Plan and has samples for each style of home education. They also have information on the different approaches to home education.</p>	<p>Parents should enjoy planning their children's education in a supportive environment. Giving samples shows what is acceptable and gives confidence that they are on the right track.</p>

Note: In regard to the content of the Home Education Summary and Plan, while we are happy with the THEAC model, we would also be happy with following the key learning areas like many other states. It is the fact that THEAC understands and gives validity to home education and shows due diligence to oversee, facilitate and support home educating families, that we recommend this model

Recommendation: A working party be formed to establish an independent body to oversee, facilitate and support home education (based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council model - THEAC)

Recommendation 2:

That registration is managed by the above independent body. Registration as a basis of meaningful engagement with the Home Education community.

What is meant by meaningful engagement...

- Registration visits are to monitor quality and provide helpful assistance and support
- Registration visits to distribute new information, list of age relevant information (travel passes, vaccinations, etc.) , and other useful materials and items
- Registration visits should also gather confidential voluntary feedback from home educating parents and students on the specific home education topics where the Government or the independent oversight body could assist
- The Authorised Persons carrying out the visit to be appointed by the oversight body and have home education experience
- The Authorised Persons could, if requested by home educating parents during a visit, offer advice and suggestions to the parents and children about how the parents or child could do something (e.g. if the child is struggling with maths, ask if they have tried 'this')

Recommendation 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.

Notifications:

We recommend that Home Educated families be notified of

- a. Career days (either state-wide or directly relating to their area)
- b. Immunization updates
- c. Other information pertaining to the education and support of their children in the form of a quarterly newsletters such as that provided by the Queensland Home Education Unit.
QLD HEU Newsletter: <http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/home-education/resources/vol-51-2014.pdf>

Access:

We recommend that that home educated children should receive appropriate support including access to the following, on a voluntary basis:

- a. Part-time school with part-time home education at the discretion of school principals:
- b. Distance education (full or part-time):
- c. TAFE-delivered vocational education and training (TVET) courses, Open High School, Hospital School programs, Department of Education and Community learning centres and other similar resources available to other NSW students:
- d. Support services for students with a disability and/or other special needs including access to special educational resources and psychological testing:
- e. Other support designed to assist families in home educating their children, including ensuring that those involved in regulation of home education are also empowered and required to provide support for home educators when requested.

We recommend that the registration of Home Educators is a one-time registration with subsequent monitoring visits to ascertain whether the registration may continue. This is a very important distinction in regards to being issued travel cards, etc. If the registration is seen to be ending on a certain date, the child is refused a card until they site the new registration certificate. This means that there can be a significant time period during which the child is unable to have access to student concessions. A single registration with monitoring visits would achieve the same thing for registration purposes, but allow a more stable environment for the children and parents to access services.

Recommendation 4:

That "Centres of Homeschooling Excellence" be set up in various locations as resource centres for home educators. These centres provide facilities which home education groups may use for shared classes, access resource materials, and may be used as an alternative location for registration visits.

Centres of Homeschooling Excellence

- a. Make effective use of disused community and school buildings
- b. Provide a library for parents and children in both education and Home Education information and resources.
- c. Provide rooms that can be booked for:
 - i. Student classes in art, drama, science, history, etc.
 - ii. Student groups such as book clubs, discussion groups, language practise groups, robotics teams, special interest groups, etc.
 - iii. Parents to meet for introduction to home education nights, information nights, support groups, etc.
 - iv. Parents to meet with their AP for their monitoring visit.
- d. Provide storage for sports equipment that can be booked out for use in a recreation room or oval nearby.
- e. Provide a playground to provide for younger siblings while older siblings are attending a class or while parents are attending their assessment visit.
- f. Be a place of support and socialising for Home Education families.