

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Q1. CHAIR: Could you give me a snapshot of what the UK system looks like?

There is a thriving home education community across the UK. Universities and employers recognise the merits of taking on home educated adults as they are seen to be focused and self motivated. Home education groups in the UK are focused on social activities and working together to bring to their children useful learning experiences. The government and local authorities recognise this and mutual respect is afforded.

If a parent chooses to use school, they apply for a place at the school of their choice. If a parent chooses to home educate, they do not apply for a school place. Sometimes the local authority becomes aware that there is a child in their area who is not registered at a school - in this instance they will inquire of the parents as to the reason for this (is the child's education simply being ignored or neglected?).

If the parent informs the Authority that the child is being home educated, then the authority is satisfied and makes no further enquiry. Some authorities do enquire further, although they have no legal right or obligation to do so. In these cases, home educating families will usually reply with a simple letter assuring the Authority that their child's education is being taken seriously and that their child is receiving an education suitable to their needs, age, ability and aptitude.

Provided it can be seen that the parents are 'engaged' in their child's education, then the Authority has no further cause for concern and involves itself no further.

More information can be found at:

http://www.educationotherwise.net/attachments/article/125/guidelines_for_las_on_elective_home_educationsecondrevised2_0.pdf

Q2. Dr JOHN KAYE: What percentage, roughly speaking, of people in HOVA would have an ideological objection to any form of registration?

WITNESS: I could not tell you that. Do you mean in HOVA the little group that has been formed to help people get their voices heard on the inquiry or do you mean the people HOVA is representing?

Dr JOHN KAYE: I think more the latter. Is it a strong trend that people actually object to any form of registration whatsoever?

In 2013, the Homeschooling Registration Reform Alliance of NSW undertook a survey of 512 NSW homeschooling parents. They have included the results of that survey in their Submission to the Inquiry (#138). They report (page 6) that 94% of respondents support changing the NSW homeschooling registration regulations to bring them into line with the less restrictive Victorian regulations.

In August of 2014, HOVA conducted a survey of over 850 homeschooling parents. Results from that survey formed part of our Submission (#172). On page 201 of our Submission we report that 63% of the respondent parents had a first preference for no registration requirements. A further 24% had a first preference for a simple requirement to notify of parental decision to home educate. A further 12% had a first preference for Victoria's system. Only 1% had a first preference for a system in which parents must teach in accordance with a compulsory syllabus and submit to ongoing regular assessment.

99% of respondents had a first preference for the Victorian model or a less regulated model than that.

Q3. The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I am sorry, but I do not think your answer is actually responsive to my question. I am actually asking for you to point us to some hard factual material, either in New South Wales or more generally, that actually supports the claim that "unschooling is a successful form of homeschooling".

Dr Alan Thomas has researched unschooling in several countries, including Australia, for many years. He is currently a Fellow at the Institute of Education in the University of London. He is the author of several books including "Educating Children At Home" and "How Children Learn At Home". He is also the author of Submission #159 to this Inquiry.

His research documents the effectiveness of unschooling (or 'informal learning') as a means of education. "Compared to the careful way in which the curriculum is presented in school, the chaotic nature of input from everyday cultural knowledge and the individually led interests of children themselves, seem like a chancy combination. It nevertheless does seem that the informal curriculum is as good a preparation as any for moving into formal education. Children entered the formal system, either by going to school, college or university or by taking home-based formal courses such as correspondence courses at around the GCSE (Year 11) level or later. Whenever this stage arrived for them personally, it seems that the young people themselves were able to decide on their own terms what and how they wanted to study and had both sufficient subject knowledge and study and personal skills to make the transition with apparent ease." Thomas, Alan; Pattison, Harriet: "How Children Learn at Home" p.47.

Dr Peter Gray is a Research Professor at Boston College. He is the author of well-respected textbooks and of a book called "Free to Learn" which details the benefits of play as a means of learning. In his research on adults who were unschooled he reported that 83% had gone on to successfully undertake higher education. He reported "the great majority of respondents who went on to college reported no difficulty doing the academic work. Indeed most said they were at an academic advantage, primarily because of their high motivation and their high capacity for self-initiative, self-direction and self-control."

As homeschooling parents with several decades worth of experience amongst homeschoolers, the HOVA team is only aware of good outcomes for children who were unschooled. Indeed in HOVA's small organising group of around 8 parents, 4 of the children are now adults, all unschooled. All of them have done and are doing exceptionally well in study, work and life. All are particularly appreciated by their colleagues, teachers and employers for what they bring to what they do. All are very valued employees, all have completed tertiary courses. All were unschooled in NSW, and along with all the other unschoolers we are aware of, were very well-prepared by their unschooling backgrounds for productive adulthood.

Q4. The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: I will leave that line of questioning there because you clearly are not able to provide us with any data yourself. Looking at the second and third pages of your submission, I see you make the point that there are a number of objections to homeschooling and concerns but that none of them is verified by hard data. But the converse is also true, is it not? There is a lack of hard data for New South Wales about the outcomes for homeschooling. We simply do not know. That is the case, is it not?

WITNESS: We know internationally. I am not an expert on the data but I know that internationally some people have done research reviews of all the studies that have been done. They all point to equal or better outcomes academically or socially for homeschooled children. There is a significant amount of data on homeschoolers and their positive outcomes.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: From my limited reading in connection with this inquiry, the samples of information seem to be extremely small and not related to the State of New South Wales.

WITNESS: I am not too sure about ones related to the State of New South Wales. But I do not think there are aspects of homeschooling that are particularly specific to New South Wales, apart from the legislative requirements. I can take that on notice if you would like more information about the outcomes for homeschoolers.

The Hon. ADAM SEARLE: Yes, thank you.

In Australia, Jackson and Allan (2010) assert that, "Research on educational outcomes for home educated children shows good to above average academic performance, positive social adjustment, healthy self-concepts, and cohesive families relationships."

Reference: Jackson G, Allan S. Fundamental elements in examining a child's right to education: a study of home education research and regulation in Australia. International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education. 2010;2(3):349-364.

An HEA survey of over 200 home educators identified that current or formerly home educated students were undertaking, or had undertaken, a large variety of higher education courses and were employed in a large variety of occupations. The results indicate that 71% of students were studying toward a Bachelor degree or higher (52%- Bachelor degree, 12%- Bachelor Honours, Graduate Certificate or Graduate Diploma, 6%- Master Degree and 1%- Doctorate). This compares favourably with the 2013 Bureau of Statistics data in which 60% of school leavers (aged 15-24 years) who were studying, were undertaking a Bachelor degree or higher (ABS 2013). When asked to describe their employment and studying pattern, students indicated a high level of engagement in

work and study. The ages of home educated students ranged from 15-35 years, with an average of 22 years. As shown below, over 67% of individuals indicated that there were employed and 62% were engaged in study. These figures compare favourably with published results from the Australian Bureau of Statistics in which 63% of school leavers between 15 and 24 were employed, and 59% were enrolled in formal study.

The positive academic outcomes for homeschoolers world-wide are well-documented. We quote from an article by the Homeschool Legal Defence Association based in the USA which collates significant findings:

“Despite much resistance from outside the homeschool movement, whether from teachers unions, politicians, school administrators, judges, social service workers, or even family members, over the past few decades homeschoolers have slowly but surely won acceptance as a mainstream education alternative. This has been due in part to the commissioning of research which demonstrates the academic success of the average homeschooler.

The last piece of major research looking at homeschool academic achievement was completed in 1998 by Dr. Lawrence Rudner. Rudner, a professor at the ERIC Clearinghouse, which is part of the University of Maryland, surveyed over 20,000 homeschooled students. His study, titled *Home Schooling Works*, discovered that homeschoolers (on average) scored about 30 percentile points higher than the national average on standardized achievement tests.

This research and several other studies supporting the claims of homeschoolers have helped the homeschool cause tremendously. Today, you would be hard pressed to find an opponent of homeschooling who says that homeschoolers, on average, are poor academic achievers.

There is one problem, however. Rudner’s research was conducted over a decade ago. Without another look at the level of academic achievement among homeschooled students, critics

could begin to say that research on homeschool achievement is outdated and no longer relevant.

Recognizing this problem, HSLDA commissioned Dr. Brian Ray, an internationally recognized scholar and president of the non-profit National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), to collect data for the 2007–08 academic year for a new study which would build upon 25 years of homeschool academic scholarship conducted by Ray himself, Rudner, and many others.

Drawing from 15 independent testing services, the *Progress Report 2009: Homeschool Academic Achievement and Demographics* included 11,739 homeschooled students from all 50 states who took three well-known tests—*California Achievement Test*, *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills*, and *Stanford Achievement Test* for the 2007–08 academic year. The *Progress Report* is the most comprehensive homeschool academic study ever completed.

The Results

Overall the study showed significant advances in homeschool academic achievement as well as revealing that issues such as student gender, parents' education level, and family income had little bearing on the results of homeschooled students.

National Average Percentile Scores		
Subtest	Homeschool	Public School
Reading	89	50
Language	84	50
Math	84	50
Science	86	50
Social Studies	84	50
Core ^a	88	50
Composite ^b	86	50
a. Core is a combination of Reading, Language, and Math. b. Composite is a combination of all subtests that the student took on the test.		

There was little difference between the results of homeschooled boys and girls on core scores.

Boys—87th percentile

Girls—88th percentile

Household income had little impact on the results of homeschooled students.

\$34,999 or less—85th percentile

\$35,000–\$49,999—86th percentile

\$50,000–\$69,999—86th percentile

\$70,000 or more—89th percentile

The education level of the parents made a noticeable difference, but the homeschooled children of non-college educated parents still scored in the 83rd percentile, which is well above the national average.

Neither parent has a college degree—83rd percentile

One parent has a college degree—86th percentile

Both parents have a college degree—90th percentile

Whether either parent was a certified teacher did not matter.

Certified (i.e., either parent ever certified)—87th percentile

Not certified (i.e., neither parent ever certified)—88th percentile

Parental spending on home education made little difference.

Spent \$600 or more on the student—89th percentile

Spent under \$600 on the student—86th percentile

The extent of government regulation on homeschoolers did not affect the results.

Low state regulation—87th percentile

Medium state regulation—88th percentile

High state regulation—87th percentile

HSLDA defines the extent of government regulation this way:

States with low regulation: No state requirement for parents to initiate any contact or State requires parental notification only.

States with moderate regulation: State requires parents to send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress.

State with high regulation: State requires parents to send notification or achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation, plus other requirements (e.g. curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, or home visits by state officials).

The question HSLDA regularly puts before state legislatures is, “If government regulation does not improve the results of homeschoolers why is it necessary?”

In short, the results found in the new study are consistent with 25 years of research, which show that as a group homeschoolers consistently perform above average academically. The *Progress Report* also shows that, even as the numbers and diversity of homeschoolers have grown tremendously over the past 10 years, homeschoolers have actually increased the already sizeable gap in academic achievement between themselves and their public school counterparts—moving from about 30 percentile points higher in the Rudner study (1998) to 37 percentile points higher in the *Progress Report* (2009).

As mentioned earlier, the achievement gaps that are well-documented in public school between boys and girls, parents with lower incomes, and parents with lower levels of education are not found among homeschoolers. While it is not possible to draw a definitive conclusion, it does appear from all the existing research that homeschooling equalizes every student upwards. Homeschoolers are actually achieving every day what the public schools claim are their goals—to narrow achievement gaps and to educate each child to a high level.”

<http://www.hslda.org/docs/news/200908100.asp>