

**Submission
No 163**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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Background of the Author in relation to home schooling

Terry is one of the pioneers of both home schooling and non-government distance education in Australia.

He has been influential in the development of both of these forms of education, from the viewpoints of:

1. A Practitioner – Terry and his wife, Diane, educated their 5 children in home schooling & non-government distance education for 15 years;
2. An Educational Administrator – He led a team, which over 20 years, has grown a home school organisation to support 4000 students. He has also played a key role in assisting with the commencement and development of non-government distance education, in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia;
3. A Researcher – He has an MEd and a PhD, which researched home schooling and distance education, with particular emphasis on why people choose these modes of education and what are the roles of parents who educate their children at home; and
4. An Informer of Policy – He has and continues to inform both state and federal governments concerning home schooling and non-government distance education, as they develop policy for both of these modes of education.

(a) The background of home schooling including comparison of practices with other jurisdictions in Australia and New Zealand.

Relevant Definitions and Terms

Home schooling refers to the education of children within and around the home setting, independent of a formal school context and usually is overseen by parents or other adults significant to the child and family (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Harding and Farrell, 2003, Harding, 2011).

The term home schooling has been interchanged with many other alternate educational labels. The term home education would be the main term most frequently interchanged with the home school label. This terminological confusion exists both internationally and within Australian jurisdictions and has made its way into various Australian states' legislation, regulations and policies over the past twenty years. Brabant (2008), has sought to clarify the terminology in her entry in the *International Encyclopedia of Education*. Brabant defined the term home education as a parent category under which the pedagogies of home schooling and distance education find their place.

At one end of the spectrum, children can be enrolled in distance education learning programs executed on a strict daily schedule; at the other end of the spectrum is a "freer" version of education called "child-led learning" or "unschooling", where the only framework for learning is the child's natural curiosity and adaptation to their environment, with parental intervention in the form of facilitation only. (Brabant, 2008, p. 297)

Home schooling in Australia may be seen as three different modes along the home education spectrum. Home schooling practices are inclusive of a formal, sequenced, structured approach similar to what occurs in schooling, an eclectic approach whereby parents pick and choose preferred formal texts and resources and unschooling, where the interests of the child direct the learning in an unstructured pedagogical approach (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, Harding, 1997, 2011).

Beginnings and a Re-emergence

Whilst, indigenous Australians practiced family-based learning well before European colonisation, the first formal European education in Australia's history was practiced in homes by some of the first English settlers.

When the first fleet of Europeans arrived in New South Wales, in 1788, there were thirty six children on board the eleven ships. This flagged the obvious need for education in the new colony. This need was first met by a convict named Isabella Rosson, who established a "dame school" in her home in Sydney, about 1788 (Barcan, 1965). Two similar home-based dame schools were founded on Norfolk Island and at Parramatta around the same time by Thomas McQueen and Mary Johnson, respectively. Cleverly (1971) explains that dame schools were usually conducted in the living rooms and kitchens of the homes of women who

would teach the children of convicts for free and the children of military officers for a small fee. Thus, the origin of formal education in Australia was in the family home.

Eliza Marsden, wife of the Australia's second minister of religion, the Reverend Samuel Marsden, educated her children at home. She wrote (Marsden, 1799) of her young daughter's literacy whilst living in a colony devoid of schools (Australia's first school was burned down in 1798) and suitable private tutors.

"and there not being one good school that I should have been very happy to have heard of her being safe with, my mother. She (Eliza's daughter Ann) is now 5 1/2 years old, she reads a little and works very neat." (p.20)

Eliza also wrote (Marsden, 1799) of the literary ability of Milbah Johnson, daughter of the Reverend Richard and Mary Johnson, who was also educated at home for some time.

"Milbah and Henry are two fine children. Milbah you will see what progress she has made in her writing and it is a great pity she is not in England." (p.20)

Thus, the roots of formal education in Australia, are to be found in the private, family home.

By 1807 Governor Bligh recorded that there were 1831 children in New South Wales (Griffiths, 1957). This rapid population growth accentuated the need for a more structured, school-based approach to education. Thus, formal education moved from its home-based beginnings, to a school-based focus, characterised by much competition between church and state in the 19th century. During this century, however, home-based education was still the only form of education experienced by many children, living in remote locations throughout the nation's developing colonies. For these children, home education was not a matter of parental choice, but a matter of necessity.

Between 1872 and the 1880s every Australian colony passed laws to initiate state-controlled school systems, which made education "compulsory, free and secular". The passing of these laws, established classroom-based schooling as the dominant educational methodology throughout the 19th century and home-based education became far less common.

The modern home schooling movement developed in many Western countries, during the 1970s, as a re-emergence of home-based pedagogies, which has arisen amid strong critique of state-controlled education. Citing philosophers such as Mill and Dewey, a body of educators grew seeking more humane alternatives to traditional schooling, which they viewed as a limited, post-industrialist, one-size-fits-all enterprise (Freire, 1976, 1985; Good, 1962; Holt, 1964, 1967, 1969, 1972, 1081; Illich, 1971; Kemp, 1971; Neill, 1960). Richards (2000) describes these developments as a search for a new educational paradigm, with home education as one logical outcome.

The first formal, national, home schooling support institution was the Australian Christian Academy, which commenced in October 1982 supporting six home schooling families. The Australian Christian Academy grew to supporting over 4,000 students, nation-wide during the 1990s and into the 21st century.

However, since the modern re-emergence of home schooling many local, regional, state-wide and national support institutions and networks have developed to serve this significant pedagogical movement.

Australia's modern home schooling movement was initially unregulated by the state in its early days and home schooled children were often deemed to be truant and their parents in breach of state education acts. However, nowadays, each state and territory now has its own registration regime and most also include some form of monitoring.

The question of whether home schooled children should be registered provoked divided opinions ranging between the views of the state's responsibility for children and the rights of parents as the first educators of the child (Harding and Farrell, 2003). There has been ongoing controversy over these issues, with the Queensland government (2003) finding that a significant number of home schooled children were not registered in 2003. This controversy over the registration of home schooled children still seems to be the case today (Townsend, 2012).

Thus, whilst it may be that many would view home schooling as a new phenomenon, this is not true. Home schooling has been a part of Australia's history. Its re-emergence as a modern pedagogy is an indication that it is fulfilling a need on the Australian educational landscape.

(b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales including:

(b) (i) Outcomes of home schooling including in relation to transition to further study and work

Academic Performance

The academic performance of home schooled students has been addressed by many researchers, mostly from the USA. The academic achievement of home schooled students has been measured in the US, for reading, mathematics, language, science and social studies (Calvary, Bell & Vaupel, 1992; Rudner, 1999). Literacy and numeracy achievement of home schooled students in the US has also been measured. (Delahooke, 1986; Frost and Morris, 1988; Juneau, 1984, 1985, 1986; Rakestraw, 1987, 1988; Ray, 1986, 1990, 1992, 1997a&b, 1998; Richman and Richman, 1988; Scogin, 1986; Tipton, 1991a, 1991b; and Wartes, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990). Each of these studies demonstrated that home educated students perform as well academically as, if not better than, their traditionally educated counterparts.

There is little Australian research evidence, which documents the academic performance of home schooled students. However, Harding (2003) has demonstrated that there is little difference in the academic performance between home schooled students in Queensland and Victoria and with students who are enrolled in a state-registered distance education school in Queensland. Further, Harding (2003) demonstrated that home schooled students Australia-wide have performed well academically, in competitions sponsored by the Educational Testing Centre, based at the University of New South Wales, Canberra University, and Charles Sturt University. Similarly, this study demonstrates that home schooled students have performed well in the international SAT1 test and have subsequently gained entrance into tertiary institutions such as universities and TAFE colleges around Australia.

Tertiary Entrance

In similar vein, there is limited research evidence of the post-schooling study pathways of home schooled students. Harding's study (2006) of 438 graduates of the Australian Christian Academy demonstrates that home educated students are able to gain entrance into Australia's tertiary institutions in all states. Of the cohort of respondent graduates, the study found that 36% entered Bachelor degree studies, 21% commenced Diploma studies and 43% entered Certificate and Apprenticeship courses, as indicated in Figure 1. These results only provide the graduate's first course of study. They do not indicate further courses taken after the student's first course of study, such as a Diploma, Bachelor degree, Masters Degree or Doctorate.

Appendix A lists the name of the institutions and the courses, by state and territory, which these respondents gained entrance.

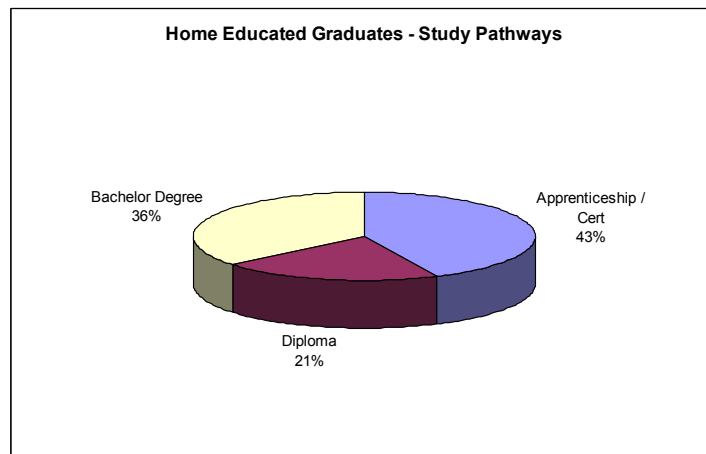


Figure 1: Graduate Study Pathways

Carins' (2002) study of a smaller cohort of home educated students in Tasmania, indicated that 78% of graduates had entered university courses and that since completing their courses, had been employed in either the technical, scientific, teaching or nursing fields as indicated in figure 2.

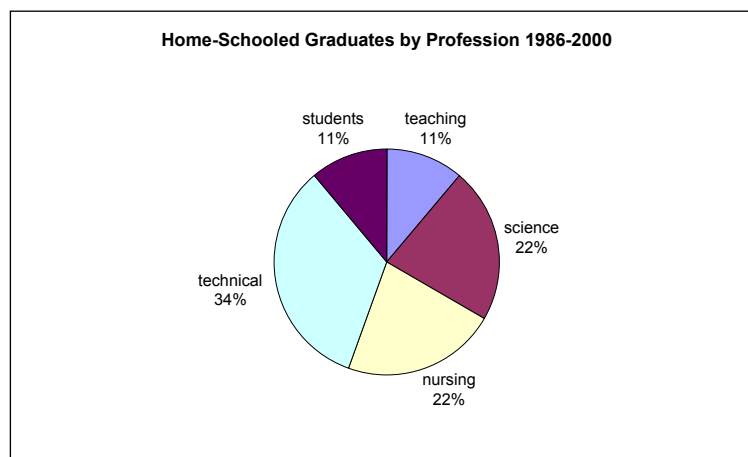


Figure 2: Graduates by Profession

McColl (2005) researched Year 12 graduates of the Australian Christian Academy, examining their attitudes, as adults, to their educational experience. McColl (2005) reported that:

- 90% of his research cohort stated that their home schooling education had prepared them well for life after schooling;
- 81% agreed that it had not limited their educational opportunities;
- 98% stated that their education had not limited their career opportunities;
- 92% agreed that it had advantaged them as adults;
- 94% agreed that they were happy with their educational experience and
- only 5% of the cohort stated that they would not access a similar educational methodology for their own children.

Whilst the small corpus of Australian research into post-home schooling pathways is limited, what exists indicates that home educated students are able to gain entrance into tertiary institutions and that home education is not a disadvantage to students who wish to pursue tertiary studies and employment.

Since 1994, I have been an academic consultant and the manager of Australia's oldest and largest home schooling support organisation, the Australian Christian Academy. During that time I have supervised the education of thousands of students. Anecdotally speaking, I am aware that home schooled students have become attractive to tertiary institutions, because they already have the independent study skills, which many graduates from traditional schooling do not have, prior to commencing their tertiary studies. Given Australia's very high drop out rate of first year university students, home schooled graduates are often deemed to be welcome in those institutions (Personal correspondence Dr. Alan Thomas – Charles Darwin University, now of University of London, to myself, 1995).

Employment

Whilst there is no research evidence in the literature regarding home educated students and employment, over the past twenty years I have noted that home educated graduates are, in general, well received by and well suited to employment in the market place. I have many letters and work experience response forms from parents of students with references from work experience employers and full time employers in general, stating that home schooled students are deemed to be excellent employees in the market place.

Usually such anecdotes are accompanied by statements by employers such as "Do you have any more of these?". Such statements are frequently made. They indicate the unexpected, pleasant surprise employers have when they first employ a home schooled graduate in their business. These type of complimentary statements arise due to characteristics displayed by the home schooled graduates, such as their level of maturity, dependability, willingness to learn, the ability to work independently and to work diligently. It is appropriate to give attention to this phenomenon, as it has been a frequent occurrence, in my experience.

Both research and anecdotal evidence demonstrate that home schooling has not precluded its graduates from entrance to tertiary education and from employment.

(b) (ii) Financial costs

The costs of home schooling a child vary. Several factors contribute to this variation including the mode of home schooling, which is chosen by the family.

At this point in the submission, I want to point out that, whilst there has been some research into home schooling and that I have contributed to that small corpus of research in a small way, I wanted to refresh some of the data for the purposes of commenting to this Inquiry into Home Schooling. Thus I developed an *Australian Christian Home Schooling Survey* instrument, processed and analysed the data and included some of it in this submission. Of the many home school families in Australian Christian Home Schooling (ACHS), 24 families completed and returned the survey. Some of their responses are included in this submission.

Standard Educational Costs

Families that choose to home school with Australian Christian Home Schooling, pay a fee per child and then purchase individualised, sequential, curriculum resources. They have access to educational services such as academic diagnosis, teacher advice, record keeping, online resources and graduation advice etc.

Families that operate in the eclectic and unschooling modes also have to purchase curriculum resources according to the choices of parents and the child's interests.

All home schooling families, irrespective of the mode of learning they choose, face not only the costs of curriculum resources, but also the costs of information communications technologies (ICT), field trips, educational excursions, social outings, camps, awards evenings, concerts etc.

Social Welfare

A further financial cost to home schooling families is the loss of educational and social welfare benefits, which are systemically linked to school enrolment. There are several welfare benefits, which are only accessible to families via their child's school enrolment and are verified by the child's school's identification number or their participation in an "approved course". Because home schooled children are not enrolled in a school they do not have a school identification number, nor can they give evidence of being enrolled in an "approved course", they must forego financial benefits which are available to all other Australians.

They in effect experience the deprivation of standard social welfare benefits, accessible to all other Australians, because of their exercise of educational choice. Whilst governments have championed the exercise of parental educational choice in Australia, they have not taken into account that one cohort of parents, that of home schooling parents, are financially penalised due to their educational choice.

A current example of this situation is the introduction this year by Australia's Department of Human Services of a school-linked qualification for Family Tax

Benefit Part A. Recent changes to the eligibility for FTB Part A have been interpreted to preclude home schooled students' families, whose children are aged 16-19, from that benefit.

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/corporate/publications-and-resources/budget/1314/measures/families/36-10823>

Eligibility for FTB Part A requires that a child aged 16-19 years is:

“undertaking full-time study in an approved course of education or study that would, in the Secretary’s opinion, assist or allow the child to complete the final year of secondary school or an equivalent level of education, or

is studying overseas full-time in an approved foreign course of education or study that would, in the Secretary’s opinion, assist or allow the child to complete a level of education that is broadly equivalent to an Australian secondary qualification.”

http://guidesacts.fahcsia.gov.au/guides_acts/fag/faguide-1/faguide-1.1/faguide-1.1.f/faguide-1.1.f.53.html

Home schooled senior secondary students are deemed to not meet the requirements of this Activity Test as they are not engaged in a traditional school-based “approved course” even though they may be studying Year 11 or Year 12 senior courses, which lead to tertiary entrance, or entrance into the defence forces (Harding, 2014).

One mother in response to the ACHS Survey, wrote about the hypocrisy of home schoolers having to comply with the BOSTES educational requirements, but then they are excluded from some social welfare payments. She put it this way:

“We have to register but lose family payments when they (our children) turn 16 even though they are full time students and one parent has given up income/work to ensure their education.”

The denial of Australian families, welfare benefits because their children are not enrolled in schools is a classic social injustice. It is a modern unintended consequence of social welfare policies that have not kept step with 21st century changes to pedagogy. Such unfair outcomes deny the laws of common sense and “a fair go” which usually characterise the Australian way of life.

Single-Income Status

Perhaps the greatest financial cost to home schooling families is that they must, by definition, be a single income family (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, Jackson, 2009; Harding 1997, 2003, 2011). Home schooling requires one parent to not enter the paid work force and to remain at home in order to facilitate the education of the children. Thus home schooling families, by default, self-relegate to a lower socioeconomic status, as compared to their dual-income family counterparts, as a result of their educational choice.

Harding (2011) has researched the roles of parents who home educate and found that one of their roles is that of an educational “partner”. The role of

partner for home schooling families means that parents embrace particular roles in order to facilitate their educational enterprise. For example one parent will earn a salary which finances the family's lifestyle and the other parent will take on the majority of the educational responsibilities. There are other dimensions to the role of partner, which are not relevant to this section of this submission.

Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship between the main formal educator and paid employment. It demonstrates that:

- It is rare for a main formal educator in a home schooling family to have a full time paid occupation. In the case cited, the person is a single parent and has a bachelor qualification, which enables flexibility of employment and a relatively higher salary.
- Some home school main formal educators also perform part time work.
- The majority of main formal educators do no paid work.

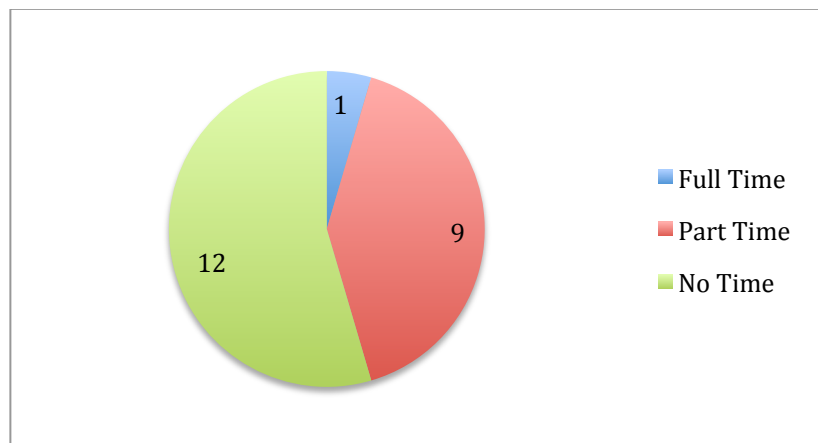


Figure 3: The Paid Employment Levels of the Main Formal Educator

Figure 4 demonstrates the relationship between the other parent in the home school family and paid employment. It demonstrates that: The majority of other parents in a home school family are in full time paid occupations.

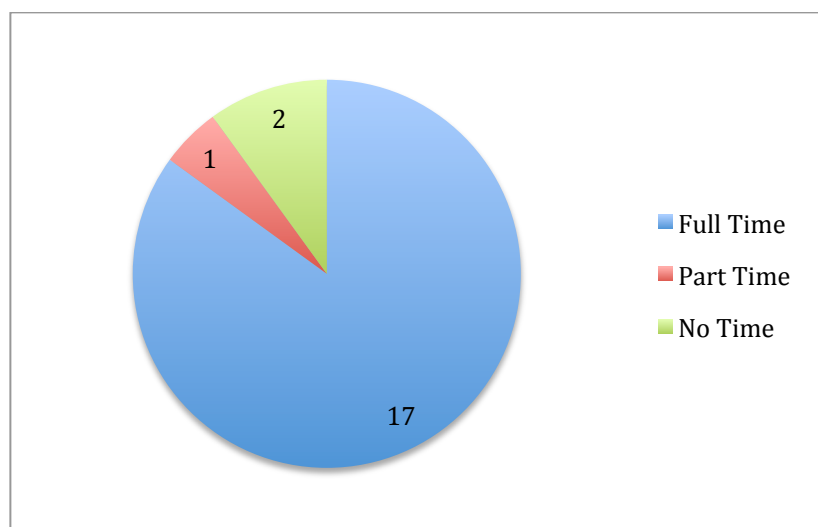


Figure 4: The Paid Employment Levels of the Other Parent

Figure 5 demonstrates the annual income of the main formal educator in a home schooling family. Because families are each in different circumstances, they employ different means to achieve their educational goals within the constraints of the family's economics. For example, parents mentioned accessing members of their extended families, sharing employment and home schooling times with spouses etc. in order to maintain the family lifestyle and educational enterprise.

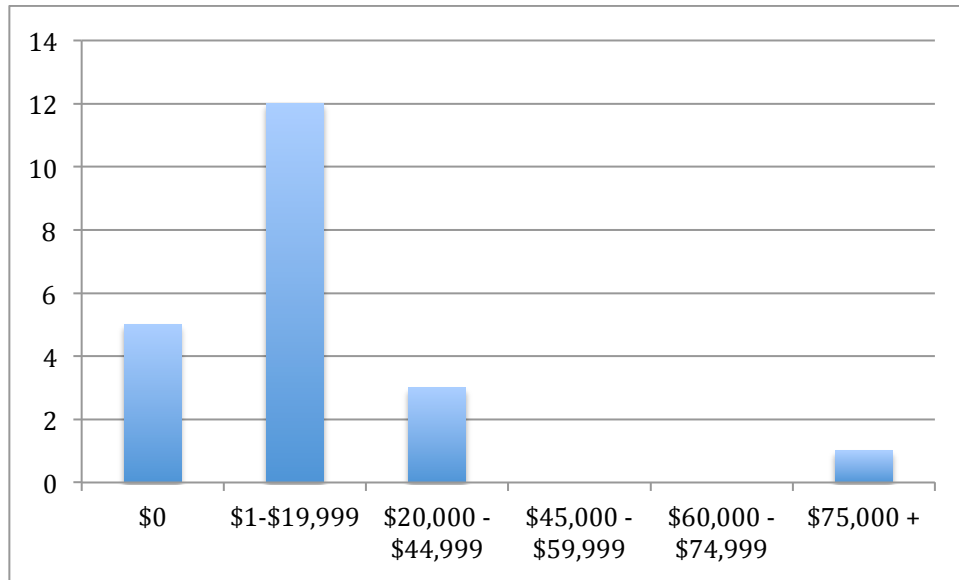


Figure 5: The Annual Incomes of the Main Formal Educator

Figure 6 demonstrates the annual income of the other parent in a home schooling family.

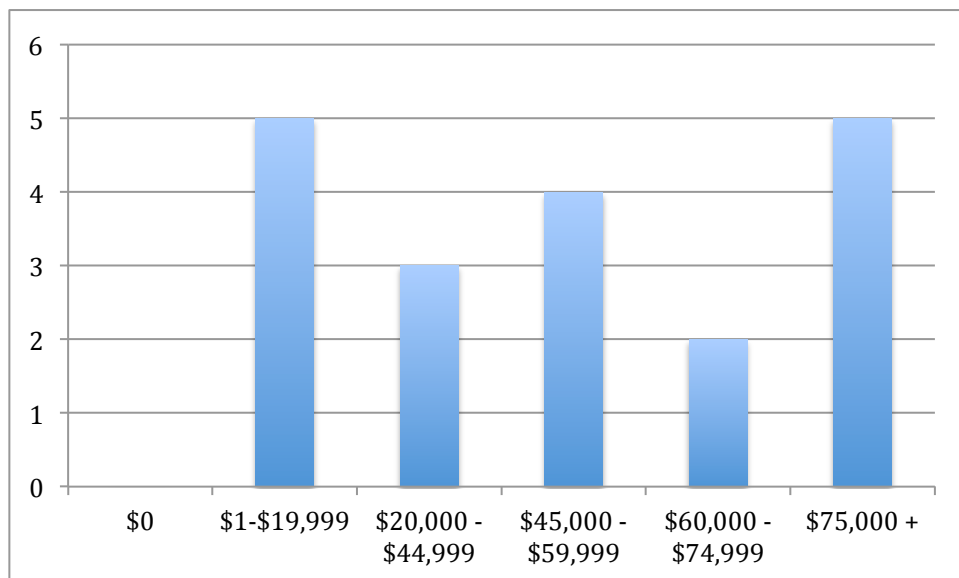


Figure 6: The Annual Incomes of the Other Parent

When one compares the incomes cited above with the number of children being home educated, bearing in mind that these families also have other children

- too young for formal home schooling
- attending traditional schools
- who have completed home schooling and are in tertiary studies or employment

it is apparent that home schooling families are generally not wealthy by Australian standards.

Thus, most home schooling families are single income families. They do not seem to be wealthy by Australian standards. They would find social welfare benefits, which are payable only to families whose children are enrolled in schools, appropriately useful. However, they are excluded from these due to well-intended, but discriminatory Commonwealth social welfare policy.

Further, unlike a dual-income family, which sends their child to a school, where many educational resources are provided (e.g. microscopes, ICT etc.), home schooling families have the added financial responsibility of providing all educational resources for their children.

The lack of governmental support may be viewed as unfair when one understands that a home schooling family is a taxpaying family, whose taxes go to support the education of their neighbours' children who attend government and non-government schools, however, their own children receive no support from the public purse, and are also precluded from many welfare benefits which are linked to school enrolment, rather than to a birth certificate.

In general, because of their educational choice, home schooling families voluntarily embrace a lower socioeconomic status as single-income families, than their dual-income family counterparts. As families with lower incomes, they do not believe it is just, when they and their children are involuntarily precluded from normal social welfare benefits, which are linked to school enrolment criteria, rather than to their children's birth.

(b) (iii) Demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children.

Motivation of Parents to Home School Their Children

The reasons why parents choose home schooling range in variety. Researchers such as Barrett-Peacock (1997), Harding (1997, 2003); Hunter (1994); Jackson (2009) and Thomas (1998) have explored this question extensively.

For the purposes of this enquiry, I have posed the question to Australian Christian Home School families in New South Wales. The following represents their answers to the question of why they have chosen home schooling.

Pedagogical Reasons

Pedagogical reasons comprised 26% of the reasons given by parents for choosing home schooling. These pedagogical reasons included:

- Parents wanted educational excellence for their children
- Parents wanted an individualised, personalised educational approach for their children
- Parents wanted greater flexibility for gifted and talented children
- Some parents had children with special educational needs
- Some parents had to move frequently so wanted educational consistency

Parenting Reasons

Parenting reasons for choosing home schooling comprised 22% of the survey's responses. Parents posited reasons indicating that they wanted to engage more with their children's education. They stated that they only have one opportunity to ensure the child's successful start in the adult world and that it was not appropriate to leave this in the hands of others, when they had the greatest vested interest in the success of their child. These parenting reasons included:

- Parents wanted to be engaged significantly in their children's education
- Parents wanted to spend more quality formative time with their children
- Parents wanted to supervise their child's development
- Parents wanted to provide positive educational influences in their children's lives
- Parents believed that education is their responsibility, rather than that of the state

Beliefs and Values

Parents stated that they wanted their children's education to be consistent with their own beliefs and values, rather than those of people they did not know.

These reasons comprised 19% of the responses and included issues such as

- Religious beliefs
- Moral beliefs
- Ethical beliefs
- Parental beliefs.

Social Development

Parents chose home schooling to enable their children to have a social developmental experience than was broader than the age-based segregated social experience, common to 13 years of traditional schooling. The socialisation reasons referred to how the child related to others in their communities. The socialisation reasons comprised 11% of the responses and broadly divided into two areas:

1. Providing positive socialisation experiences across all age ranges in their broader communities and
2. Avoiding developmentally harmful socialisation experiences in traditional schooling

These reasons included:

- Emphasising good social mores
- Connecting with their wider communities
- Avoiding excessive bullying
- Avoiding being shaped by negative peer pressure

School Did Not Meet Student Needs

Parents indicated that, for their children, their school did not meet particular needs. This reason comprised 8% of responses. These included:

- Teachers were unprofessional
- Schooling was inflexible to meet special needs e.g. gifted in the arts or sports, special educational or health needs.
- School was too far away
- School was too expensive

The Child's Personal Development

The reasons given in this category differ from the reasons relating to the child's social development. The category of personal development refers to how the child develops personal qualities, self-confidence and self-concept. This category of reasons comprised 7% of the responses. They included:

- Developing a strong self concept
- The ability to "be themselves"
- The freedom to pursue their interests, gifts and talents
- Preparing themselves to thrive in the broader community as adults

Environmental Reasons

Environmental reasons comprised 7% of the responses. Parents sought to have their children educated in an environment which was conducive to learning, non-disruptive to learning, which was encouraging rather than threatening and which was a safe environment. These reasons included:

- Parents preferred the warmth of the family environment for their children's learning
- Parents preferred the honest critique of the family environment for their children's learning
- Parents wanted an environment conducive to learning minimising distractions
- Parents wanted a safe environment for their children's education

When one considers that it would be far more convenient to send a child to a school for a relatively cost-free, state-based education and rather than committing to undertake their children’s education for over 12 years and to also forego the opportunity to earn a second income for the family, one must consider that it is quite logical to assume that parents do not choose home education on a whim or frivolously. The data in this section would support that view. It is also important to note that no parent expressed anarchical or anti-social reasons for choosing home schooling. All parents gave reasons, which they considered to be in the best interests of their children.

Figure 7 indicates the percentages of reasons that parents gave for choosing home schooling for children.

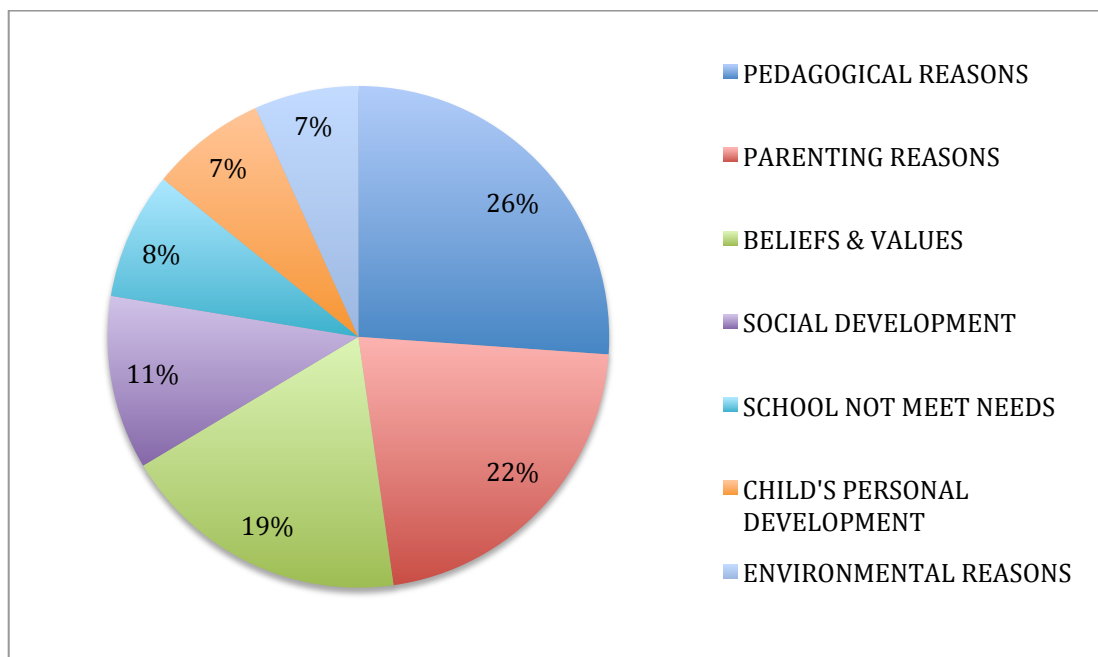


Figure 7: Reasons for Choosing Home Schooling

Location

The respondents to the *Australian Christian Home Schooling Survey* demonstrated a residential spread over city, suburban, regional towns, rural towns and remote locations.

Figure 8 demonstrates the percentage residential spread of these families.

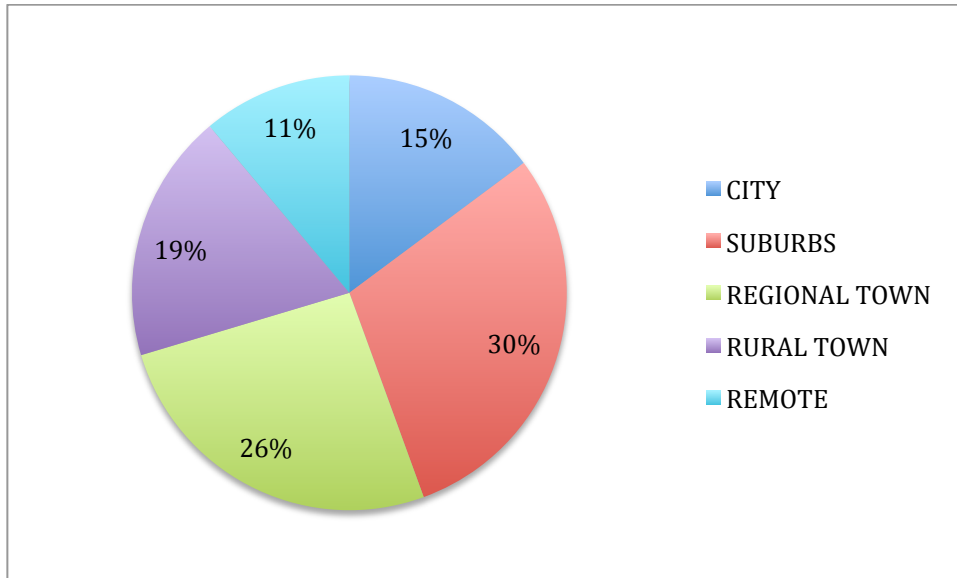


Figure 8: Location of Families

The data demonstrate that home schooling families reside in all location regions across Australia. This pattern tends to reflect demographic research in the field of non-government distance education, which, contrary to community expectations, demonstrated 95% of students residing in metropolitan regions and only around 5% of students in remote and very remote regions (Harding, 2012)

Number of Parents in the Home

Figure 9 indicates the number of parents residing in the home of home schoolers. Two-parent families comprised the majority, being 83% of respondent families, single-parent families comprised 17% of the respondents. Some of the single-parent families stated that they had extensive outside assistance from aunts, uncles and grand parents in the home schooling of their children.

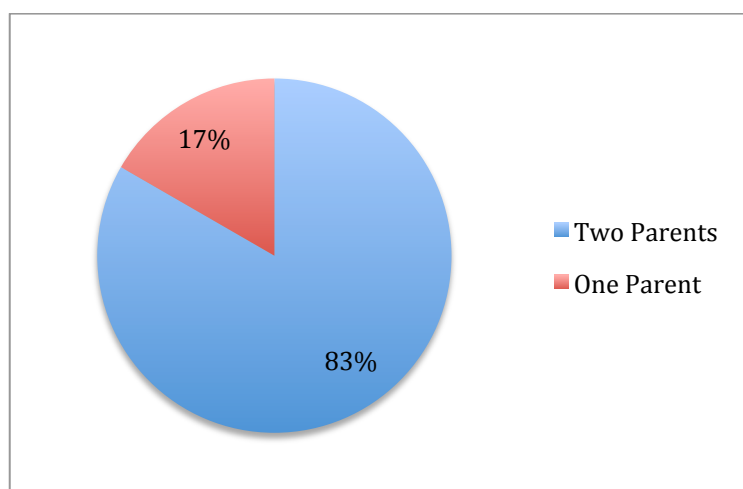


Figure 9: Number of Parents in the Home

Because of the very nature of home schooling, it logically lends itself to dual-parent families. The fact that the data show that there is a significant number of single-parent families home schooling, suggests that these parents see such

advantages in this pedagogy, they are willing to home school despite any lifestyle and financial difficulties it may present to them.

Main Formal Educator

All 24 families in this group of respondents indicated that the main formal educator was the mother. It is important to note that home schooling families consider both the main formal education (usually the mother) and the other formal educator (usually the father), who typically does not spend normal weekdays in formal educating of his children, are both committed to the formal education of their children (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, Harding, 2011).

In addition to formal education, home schooling parents view themselves as conducting informal education at all times by conversation, and general life's experiences (Harding, 2011). The awareness that these parents have of both the formal education and informal education is heightened. They see all of their family activities as educational experiences, which are of profit in Vygotskian terms and which are conducted in real life contexts (Vygotsky, 1997, 1998). In essence, this means that the parent is the ideal mediator to take a child through the zone of proximal development, or from the known to the unknown, in the context of a real life setting.

Vygotskian educational practices are lauded in the educational literature. However, for home schoolers, the educators who practice Vygotskian principles more than most educators in Australia, such practices are not recognised and are even discouraged by BOS registration criteria and according to some home schooling parents, by some Authorised Persons (APs).

(b) (iv) Extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers

Respondents to the ACHS survey did not indicate whether they were registered or not. However, they did offer their views on whether home schooled students should be registered. Table 1 indicates their view on this matter.

Response	Frequency
Yes	8
No	12
Not Sure	1

Table 1: Response to the question “Do you believe that home schooled children should be registered?”

Various respondents offered the following reasons for not registering for home schooling:

1. They stated that the education of their children is their responsibility. It is not the responsibility of someone else or of the state. These parents believed that parents have this responsibility in the first instance and that registering their children would be inconsistent with this responsibility. The Minister for Education has this responsibility only in the second instance if parents choose to delegate it down to the Minister. Some have cited the doctrine of subsidiarity as the explanation for this reasoning.

Others referred to statements, which supported the view that parents are primary educators, such as that of Pope John Paul II (1981):

The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is *original* and *primary* with regard to the educational role of others on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is *irreplaceable* and *inalienable*, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others. (Article 36)

These parents then inferred that the state does not have a role in shaping the minds of the young in the way that is commonly accepted.

2. Parents stated that their interactions with the Authorised Persons (AP) from BOSTES left them with the view that the APs “don’t see parents as the authority in their children’s lives.” They thus felt demeaned by their APs.

3. Other parents stated that their AP viewed the role of faith in their children’s education with disdain during their meetings together.

4. Parents stated that it was unfair and unjust that one person (the AP) “has so much say in my child’s education.” These kind of statements came with an appeal for an AP with more open and tolerant views. For this reason, they were quite

circumspect with what they said to the AP during their inspection. One mother put it this way:

“We are guarded with what we share with department representatives when registration time comes.”

5. Fear is one factor that motivates families to not register their children for home schooling. As new home schoolers hear of stories from their friends of hardship, philosophical and pedagogical bias, lots of paper work, difficulty in acquiring registration and receiving short periods of registration, they balk at contacting BOSTES. One mother said, “The process was intimidating”. Another stated that she was “terrified” of the process. Fear may also have precluded many ACHS families from participating in the ACHS Survey

Concerns About the Registration Process

Further to these stated reasons, parents indicated a pessimistic view of the registration process. These statements included:

- Educating their children is a parent’s human right.
- There is no need to ask permission to do what is their right.
- They objected to the interference of the state in what they believe to be a family matter.
- There are many examples of Authorised Persons (APs) having narrow views of appropriate curriculum.
- Parents should not have to defend their views of educational methodology and philosophy.
- They do not see or derive any benefit from this process.
- BOS is biased (but well meaning) about curriculum content.
- There is too much paperwork.
- One family stated that they reluctantly registered to abide by the law but do not believe that it is necessary.
- There is no helpful direction for new home school parents in meeting BOS registration requirements.
- BOS gives no flexibility to adjust curriculum to meet the child’s special interests.
- Families are worried about a bias against religious views and curriculum.
- Parents stated that they were fearful of the BOSTES controlling and restricting their children’s educational experience.

Support For the Registration Process

There were supportive statements regarding the registration process. These supportive statements included:

- The government gives us proper guidelines.
- There is not much intrusion.
- It can protect children if a family doesn’t take teaching seriously.
- All of our inspectors have been encouraging and were impressed with the achievements of our children.
- I have found this process straight forward.
- It is a requirement.
- It was encouraging and helpful.
- It makes us accountable.

- We had a very friendly officer who was happy to give advice in reaching BOS standards.

It is clear that there are divided opinions about the registration process among respondents to the ACHS Survey. Some are terrified of the process, others see it as a stressful and complex process with APs as having too much power over their children’s education and in opposition to parent values. In contrast to these concerns other ACHS respondents saw their registration process as very helpful, encouraging and straight forward.

There are many parents who have expressed both sides of this clear division of opinion. The divergent opinions are not from an isolated minority. The data leads one to question whether there is be inconsistency in the registration process, namely that it is possible that different APs may apply different standards when assessing the viability of home school programs. The data supports the view that inconsistent standards may be being applied to different home schooling parents during the registration process.

If this is the case, the application of different standards to different home schooling families is a very serious matter and bears close examination and redress.

With so many families electing to not register their children for home schooling, it is important for the New South Wales Government to not only independently review the registration process, but also to change it so that home schooling practitioners become comfortable with it and choose to participate in it.

(b) (v) Characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children.

The number of children in the home schooling families that responded to the ACHS Survey is indicated in Figure 10

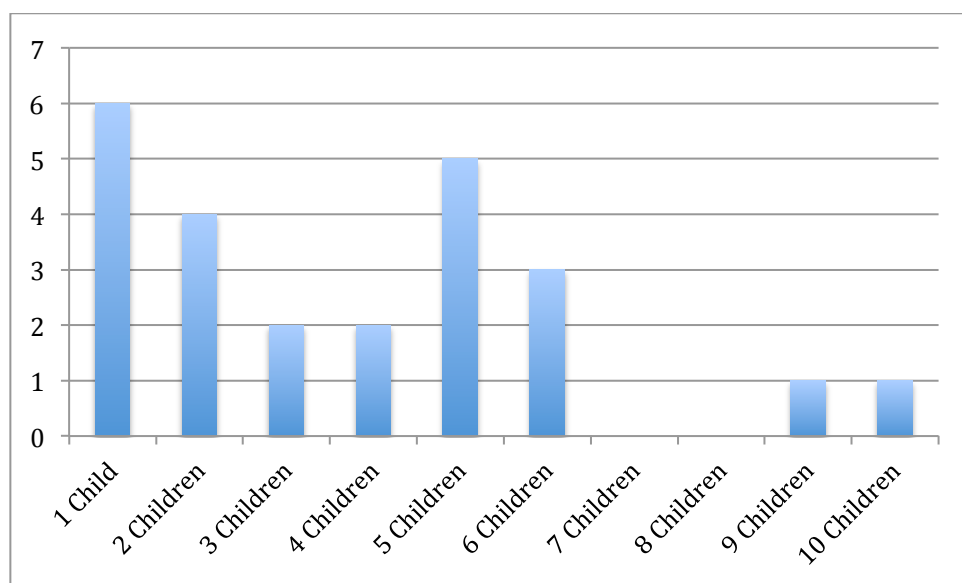


Figure 10: Number of Children in Home School Families

Whilst this is not a complete sample of ACHS students in New South Wales, it does give a balanced spread of school aged children.

Figure 11 indicates the ages of children who are currently home schooled. One family was educating one student who had a disability, who was aged 26. This mature-aged student was not included in the data set.

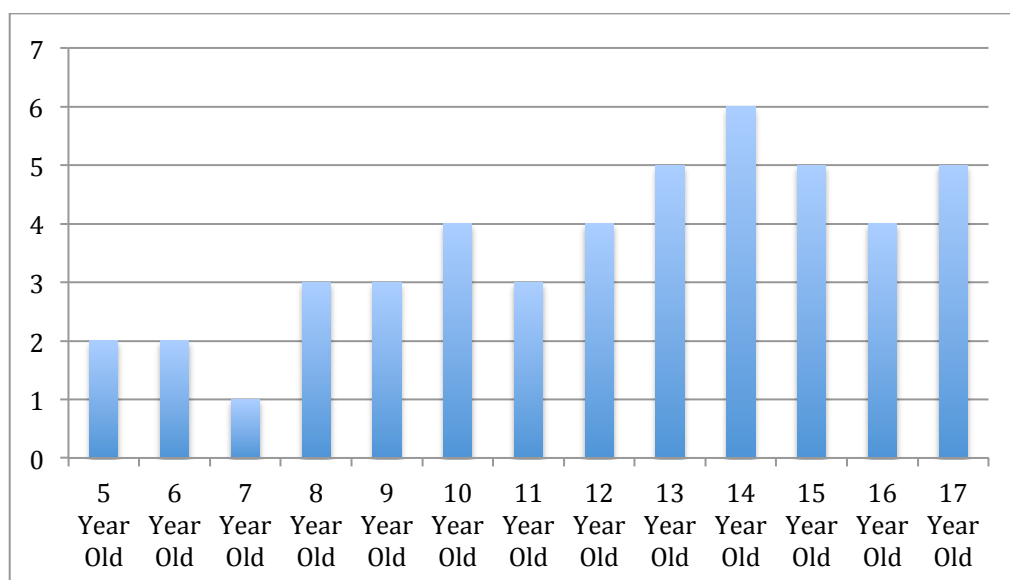


Figure 11: Ages of Home Schooled Children in ACHS Survey

The surveyed families also indicated something of their children’s experience after completing Year 12 by home schooling.

- 26 graduates entered tertiary study. Of these:
 - 15 entered TAFE courses and
 - 13 entered Bachelor courses.

Some home school families’ children had attended schools. Other families had students who had not attended school. Table 2 shows the frequency of these families’ children’s formal schooling experiences.

School	Families
State Schools	6
Catholic Schools	1
Christian Schools	6
Other Private Schools	5
No School Attended	10

Table 2: Previous School Experience of Home Schooled Students

(b) (vi) Comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education

Comparison With On-Campus Schooling

Home schooling parents stated that there are many benefits of home schooling which they juxtaposed to traditional on-campus schooling. These parents stated that home schooling offers the following benefits:

Flexibility of Time

- Much greater time flexibility. Children can spend as long or as brief a time as necessary on a topic of learning.
- The better time flexibilities of home schooling particularly suit children who are high performing or full time artists, musicians, actors, sports persons etc. as well as children with physical and mental disabilities and special educational needs.
- Children can spend time pursuing their interests, hobbies and vocations.
- Children can learn at their own literacy / numeracy / success level.
- Children are enabled to remediate their learning as necessary
- Children can learn at their own rate.

Real World Learning

- Children can learn in the context of their local community.
- Children can be active in their local communities e.g. one family provides music programs in the local detention centre.
- Children have the opportunity to develop their own businesses as part of their learning.

Spiritual Matters & Values

- The spiritual development of the child is a focus in their education.
- Home schooling limits the amount of undesirable, sexually explicit material, references to drugs in the curriculum.
- There is no culture, which contradicts the parents' values imposed upon the children.

The Environment

- The environment is free from disruptions.
- It provides an environment conducive to learning.
- It provides an environment of encouragement, praise and emotional support.

Socialisation

- There are no bullies.
- There are no teachers who may victimise the child.
- It provides the opportunity to grow up without the problems associated with constant comparisons occurring among class peers.
- It allows children to mature socially.
- My children are now confident and secure now that they are home schooling.
- My child is surrounded by people I know and trust.

- There is no unhealthy competition.

One mother whose child was bullied in traditional schooling, and who commenced home schooling wrote:

“Home schooling saved my son from savage bullying and has given him back his joy in living as well as helped him morally and spiritually.”

Comparison of Home Schooling with Distance Education

No families responding to the ACHS Survey compared home schooling with distance education. This may be because none had experienced distance education or perhaps, like many, uninitiated to either one, they confused them or viewed them as the same.

I will make a few comments, having (i) done both home schooling and distance education with my children, (ii) having been a leader and facilitator of both modalities and (iii) having lectured on and (iv) researched both pedagogies.

Contrasting home schooling and distance education

Home Schooling	Distance Education
Parent is responsible for child’s learning	School is responsible for child’s learning
Child is registered with a state body	Child is enrolled in a school
Some are not registered with the state	All are enrolled in the school
No government funding	Funded by governments
Usually no access to registered teachers	Access to their school’s teachers
Parents select curriculum resources	School selects curriculum resources
May or may not follow State & Australian Curriculum requirements	Follows State and Australian Curriculum requirements
Own time frame	Follows school time schedules
Provides own resources	Access to their school’s resources
Provides own extra curricular or social activities	Access to their school’s extra curricular or social activities
Some have fees others do not	School fees
No access to school-linked social security benefits	Access to school-linked social security benefits

Table 3: Contrasting Home Schooling and Distance Education

The similarities between home schooling and distance education are many. They include, but are not limited to:

- Learning in and around the home
- Learning in the local community
- Flexible time frames
- Learning at the student’s correct level
- Learning at the student’s correct rate
- Supportive learning environments
- Individualised and personalised educational programs
- The power of the Parent-to-child relationship is incorporated into the child’s education (See Harding, 2011, the Parental Educational Dynamic [PED])

- Much conversational learning
- Formal learning
- Informal learning in a real world context
- Free of 13 years of enforced age-peer segregation
- Free of bullying
- Free of peer pressure/dependency
- Allows child to mature without peer disapproval
- Allows child to choose friends rather than having a group of peers imposed over 13 years
- Freer to pursue personal interests
- Forced to develop independent study/research skills
- Require the family to be a single-income family
- Create close family bonds
- Forced to create and cultivate social developmental opportunities in the broader community
- Recognised by governments

The many and varied reasons why families choose home schooling reflect the many and varied needs of the children who participate in this pedagogy. These reasons reflect the fact that home schooled children may be:

- Advanced learners
- Slow learners
- Remedial learners
- Remotely located learners
- Disaffected teens who are re-engaging with learning
- Children who are recovering from bullying trauma
- Talented musicians, artists, sports people etc.
- Children with special educational needs
- Children with physical disabilities
- Children who have special health problems

This list of home schooled children's characteristics grows with every new family that embraces this pedagogy.

(c) Regulatory framework for home schooling including:

(c) (i) current registration processes and ways of reducing the number of unregistered home schoolers

Suggestions From Home Schooling Parents on the Registration Process

Parent respondents to the ACHS Survey were keen to offer their recommendations to the registration process.

- Make the registration process easier and pleasant.
- There must be better solutions than the current ones.
- One person (the AP) has too much power over our children's education.
- Do not be intolerant of our religious and spiritual values.
- Give automatic registration to those who have been registered for home schooling for four years.
- BOS should provide a home school package for beginners to avoid them over-preparing or under-preparing for registration.
- There is much fear among home schoolers about the current registration processes.
- It should not be as strongly scrutinised.
- It should be easy.
- Link the registration process to eligibility for social welfare benefits that are currently linked to a child's enrolment in school.
- Employ members on BOSTES who are experts in and empathetic towards home schooling.
- Remove some of the draconian registration criteria such as:
 - All activities must be conducted in the home
 - Children must be engaged in academic work at their chronological age level rather than their ability level
 - Children are not permitted to accelerate their learning beyond a year's worth of work
- Make the registration of a family that has passed compliance, valid for a substantial time such as two years. Currently there are many families who are registered for less than a year. This ties parents up with paperwork and stress and restricts their teaching.

There are no guarantees that if any of the above suggestions were implemented that all home schooling families would seek registration. However, the Queensland experience has shown that when registration criteria were softened, more families have registered their children for home schooling.

The data indicate that whilst some home schoolers are comfortable with the registration process, many are not. If this significant lack of patronage is truly important to the New South Wales Government, this review should bring significant change to the process. If this does not happen, then one must conclude that the government is not seeking genuine reform to assist home schoolers to register, in this state.

(c) (ii) Training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons

Marsden (1996), a proponent of distance education, pointed out that distance education is often viewed as an inferior form of education by many who are unfamiliar with it. Similarly, Black (1992), described the difference of opinions about distance education between its practitioners and those who have little experience with distance education.

"Within the community of distance educators there is a robust self-image based on the positive characteristics of access, student-centredness and quality course materials. There is, however, a lingering tendency, pervasive to the uninitiated, to regard distance education as 'second-best to classroom, face-to-face instruction' (Black, 1992, p.7)."

The data from the ACHS Survey, and other home schooling sources, posited anecdotally, indicate that there is a lingering tendency pervasive among those who are uninitiated to home schooling, that this mode of education is likewise to be derided and disdained.

When examining the concerns of home schoolers, two areas seem to be fraught with recurring protest. They are the overly harsh or unreasonable compliance criteria and the behaviour of some authorised persons.

Compliance Criteria

Unreasonable compliance criteria include but are not limited to requirements such as:

- Home schooling activities must be performed only at the home.
- Students must study at their chronological age level rather than their ability level.
- Students must study at the prescribed rate rather than at the rate their ability allows or limits them.

Such requirements are anti-educational, they do not allow the student to access the built-in advantages of home schooling, and these types of rigid requirements are not applied to traditional schooling. They should have no place in home schooling compliance requirements.

All policies applying to home schooling:

- should have a clear rationale justifying the existence of the policy
- they should be developed in conjunction with experienced home schoolers and t
- hey should be made available for comment by those who will be judged by them i.e. home schooling practitioners.

In short, the process of developing home schooling policies should be transparent, inclusive, fair and accountable. They should be educationally sustainable. They do not need to be reflective of schoolistic practices, as traditional schooling is a completely different process to home schooling, and it

is to be acknowledged that schooling is not the same as learning or educating, albeit one would hope that learning and educating would take place in schools.

Authorised Persons

Home school-specific employment criteria ought to apply to the appointment of APs so that BOSTES attracts employees who are more suited to understanding and evaluating home schooling. The following suggestions may assist in curbing the untoward behaviours displayed by some APs as indicated in other sections of this submission.

- Employ APs who are knowledgeable of and empathetic towards home schooling.
- Have a home school expert create courses and train APs in the key issues of home schooling.
- Train APs in the issues, which are reasons for families choosing home schooling, so that they can understand why home school parents develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for their children. This would include developing educational applications for the following issues:
 - Remedial literacy and numeracy
 - Special education
 - Learning difficulties
 - Anxiety
 - Depression etc.

The data indicate that there is not a consistency in the home schooling registration process, in New South Wales. The system needs significant review including the determining of fair and just registration criteria and the training of APs. This needs to be done in an inclusive, transparent, fair and accountable manner.

(c) (iii) Adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses

This issue brings into light the question of a government determining what the education of a child should be. John Stuart Mill, in his essay *On Liberty* argued that a government should never be allowed to control education as such power attracts vested political interests over the interests of exposing a child or a population to a true education. Mill stated:

A general state education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation.”

Whilst one would not envisage the state government divesting its authority over the schools of New South Wales, a point to be taken from Mill is that a great mind does not see government schooling as the sole pathway to learning and to an education.

The New South Wales syllabuses are devised for schooling. They are not devised for home schooling, which is characterised by several totally different pedagogical approaches, which are alien to traditional schooling.

Schooling is aimed at the education of large groups or what Friere (1976) labelled “massification”. Despite the rhetoric around terms like individualised and personalised education as applied to the schooling literature, schooling is still given to the education of groups. By way of contrast, home schooling is truly able to focus upon the individual needs of students in ways that schooling cannot by virtue of the numbers involved and the systems required to make it happen. Thus to apply inappropriate schoolistic criteria to home schooling pedagogies is an educational tragedy which can negatively impact home schooling.

Redress of this improper fit is long overdue. To expect it to be redressed by those who are steeped in schooling practices is an unreal expectation. Redress of this problem will only come when it is addressed by those who are aware of the differences between schooling and home schooling and when the process is inclusive of those who are experienced in the pedagogical approaches of home schooling.

(c)(iv) Potential benefits or impediments to children’s safety, welfare and wellbeing.

The respondents to the ACHS Survey cited many benefits of home schooling. These included benefits to children’s safety, welfare and wellbeing. Parents indicated that home schooling has benefited their children in many ways including:

- Avoidance of bullying
- Avoidance of negative peer pressure
- The return of confidence, and emotional and physical wellbeing after commencing home schooling
- The rekindling of a love of learning
- The redevelopment of a positive self-concept
- A return of general happiness

These and other similar benefits are listed elsewhere in this submission.

Impediments to children’s safety, welfare and wellbeing in traditional school settings have been highlighted in the literature and popular media in recent years. For example, bullying in schools has become such a contentious issue that in Queensland, the Honourable Justice Roslyn Atkinson, Judge of the Supreme Court of Queensland (Atkinson, 2002) stated that such school phenomena heralds a litigious future for education. Unfortunately, Justice Atkinson’s prediction has proven true, to the psychological and physical detriment of many Australian school students.

Given the phenomenon of bullying in schools it is little wonder that many parents choose home education. However, the suggestion arises among some critics of home schooling, that it lends itself to child abuse. This can never be ruled out of the realm of possibility. Nonetheless, the same suggestion can be

directed to any situation where a child lives under the same roof with an adult, which, of course applies to virtually all children in Australia.

In this sense, all children are potentially open to such abuse, however, thankfully only a particular type of person engages in such behaviour.

There is no simple solution to the growing problem of child abuse in our society. To suggest that it could occur in a home school setting merely brings attention to the obvious, undeniable possibility that this could happen. Those who highlight this possibility and use it, as a reason to bring greater regulation to home schooling must also concede that such regulation ought be required of any circumstance where children reside with adults for a protracted period. This would include all Australian families, irrespective of their children's schooling. It is not practicable to regulate all Australian families and to believe that this would eliminate the shocking trauma of child abuse in our society.

To suggest that home schooling is a form of child abuse does great disservice to home schoolers and also to those who have suffered child abuse. Such an extreme and offensive suggestion demonstrates an ignorance of, and a lack of regard for, the welfare of both groups of children.

(c) (vi) Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved

As mentioned above, some facets of the current regime are counter-productive to a child's education as a home schooled student. These include but are not limited to requirements such as the following criteria, which have been reported by various home schoolers as being required of home school families in New South Wales:

- Home schooling activities must be performed only at the home.
- Students must study at their chronological age level rather than their ability level.
- Students must study at the prescribed rate rather than at the rate their ability allows or limits them.

It is important to note that no other Australian government requires these criteria of home schoolers. It seems that the New South Wales Government is out of step with the rest of the nation, when it comes to home school compliance. Indeed, such criteria are entirely inappropriate, anti-educational and are set to nullify some of the key factors, which produce the strengths of home schooling.

The best way to improve the current regulatory regime would be to have it reviewed with a view to having it re-engineered so that it is less onerous and less open to subjective interpretation. The whole regime needs to be developed in a transparent manner that is inclusive of the suggestions and the critique of experienced home schooling practitioners.

Consultation with experienced home schooling representatives who are practitioners of the three modes of home schooling, that of (i) the structured approach, (ii) the eclectic approach and (iii) the unschooling approach would be essential to this reengineering process, as would consultation with other states as to their regulatory regimes.

Once the new regime is established it needs to be regularly reviewed, as is the case of any public policy. This review must be inclusive of experienced home schooling practitioners and must be a transparent, fair and accountable process.

(c) (d) Support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support.

Some home schooling families want to have support from their state governments in the form of advisory services, resource centres etc. These are sometimes useful to some beginning home schoolers.

Others seek a connection with local schools to access extra curricular activities for their children in conjunction with the schools.

Other home schooling families do not want governmental or institutional services and the possibility of bureaucratic interference. They want to be independent.

If government bodies do provide services to home schoolers, they need to guard against the temptation to grow their regulatory powers, as has been the case with BOSTES, such that they ultimately alienate the people they were originally meant to serve. This bureaucratic power-creep tends to find a life of its own if left unchecked by policies that limit the spheres of influence of such bodies.

(c) (e) Representation of home schoolers within the BOSTES

As indicated earlier, if BOSTES is to retain the regulatory regime it would be wise to have experienced home schoolers as members of the relevant BOSTES section.

However, in line with the old adage – *The mind that made the problem can't fix the problem*, it would be far more appropriate to have a home schooling regulatory body independent of BOSTES, and create a fresh home school-friendly organisation that could creatively deal not only with regulatory matters but also with issues which will benefit the home schooling movement in New South Wales.

Whilst home schooling responsibilities remain under the control of the state's schooling authority, it is doubtful that the movement will flourish and develop as a publicly recognised alternative on the Australian educational landscape.

The pre-school early childhood learning movement and the TAFE college movement have successfully developed in all states and territories, independent of Australia's schooling departments. They have developed as dedicated, distinct movements, which have flourished, adding valuable contributions to the Australian educational landscape in their own rights. A similar independent entity for home schooling may be the answer to the concerns that BOSTES has about the non-registration of home schoolers and the concerns home schoolers have with BOSTES. Such an entity, given the right circumstances, could allow for the positive development of home schooling in New South Wales.

In terms of change, from a minimalist position, experienced home schoolers should be included within BOSTES. However, real change, which is conducive to the practice of home schooling would see the establishment of a home school body, independent of BOSTES. This would ensure a more dedicated focus to the needs of home schooled children, separated from the state's major administrative body whose greatest concern is, as it should be, the operation of the schools of New South Wales.

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