

**Submission
No 167**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Name: Ms Tamara Kidd

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Tamara Kidd

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

My name is Tamara Kidd. I have been Home Educating my children since 2006, although my eldest has attended Public and Private Schools at times. Prior to this I was employed by the Department of Education as a Casual Primary Teacher. I have been involved with the Home Educating community on an ongoing basis both as a fellow Home Educating parent and as a volunteer with the HEA. I often help other parents with Home Education registration preparation and advice. I'm currently enrolled in a Masters of Education (Comparative and International Education) through the University of Newcastle, NSW. This submission is my own private submission.

I would like to comment on the terms of reference, as outlined for this Inquiry. These are included throughout my submission:

Part of my experience with Home Education has been within a worldwide community of Home Educating parents and caregivers. The Internet has allowed me to connect with Home Educators across Australia and around the world. I'm fascinated by the history of Education in general, whether that is within the School context or Home Education and enjoy reading about different educational systems. This has directed me towards studying for a Masters in Education (Comparative and International Education).

One trend I have witnessed is Teachers becoming Home Educators, and why. We have a unique insight as people who have, more often than not, attended Schools as a student, crossed '*through the blackboard*' to become Teachers and then we've taken Education out of the classroom into the broader worldwide classroom to become Home Educators. The most frequent commentary revolves around opportunities to learn without the restrictions of the School system. As a '*group within a group*' we have been able to see how parents tackle not only the practical experiences of helping children learn but how parents interact with Syllabus and Curriculum, and in particular the various registration bodies operating where they live. It has been an absolute privilege to watch first hand the extent of '*parental responsibility*' regardless of the stress induced. I've also watched in frustration, in New South Wales in particular, when policy is so drastically misaligned with practice that well meaning Educationalists induces stress in committed parents. This Inquiry has been needed for several years now.

As a teacher, parent and citizen I'm committed to social justice, especially to do with the rights of the child. I've noticed that when registration of Home Education, anywhere in the world, turns into prescriptive regulation based on School practices problems are created; because Home Education is not '*School at Home*' regulation becomes inauthentic. What works for a School does not necessarily meet the needs of children who are educated outside of schools. Because this impacts on children's right to be provided with an education that meets their needs, this creates social injustice.

A beautiful local example of a positive response to this has been detailed in the 2003 Queensland study into Home Education¹ where those differences were noted and registration requirements changed accordingly. More than ten years after those changes were made the supportive tone is still evident, as demonstrated on the Home Education Unit for Queensland's Department of Education's website²:

¹ Education Queensland, (2003). Home Schooling Review (Research-Parliamentary report). Brisbane.
<http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/homeschooling.pdf>

² Education.qld.gov.au, (2014). *About home education - your rights and responsibilities*. [online] Available at:
<http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/home-education/about.html> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2014].

What's the difference between 'home schooling' and 'Home Education'?

The term 'home schooling' gives the perception of a 'school at home' and learning only in the home. The more modern term 'home education' encompasses a broader concept of educational experiences based in and beyond the home. Essentially there may be no difference in the two terms and they are often interchanged in current conversations and readings. Indeed, Home Education programs are enriched by accessing a wide range of community resources such as local libraries, museums, sporting clubs, Scouts and other facilities which offer learning opportunities.

One of the current errors in regard to NSW Home Education registration is the requirement to follow a Syllabus that was written for the School environment. References to the 'classroom' and 'school' are throughout the document and the sequence of learning is designed with a 'thirteen-year term, vertical and horizontally aligned' school system in mind, where paralleling children in every school is necessary at all stages. In addition children need to work through the Syllabus as they are working towards targets for Certification. Children who are Home Educating have no requirement to be kept parallel. They do not need to cover the Key Learning Areas in the same way or keep to the Stage as their schooled peers, and as they are ineligible to receive any BOSTES Certification, above a Statement of attainment that has addition requirements to the normal registration terms, there are further redundancies.

Another issue for NSW Home Education registration involves the record keeping, which is different from other States and Territories. Record keeping requirements do not necessary document actual learning but must duplicate the language and references used in the Syllabus, according to the Information Package and Authorised Person's Handbook guidelines. This, therefore, prevents parents from engaging authentically with the registration process and linking documentation with actual Home Education practices. The current registration system also puts an unnecessary burden onto parents to show an understanding of the NSW Syllabus. Parents instead should write a plan that meets the educational needs of their children and leave APs with the duty to interpret those plans, and their compliance with the Syllabus. Most other States, Territories and Countries recognized that it is the roll of the Qualified Teacher evaluating the registration application to deduce compliance with the Minimum Curriculum requirements has occurred. Currently in NSW, the onus is on the parents to prove they have a full working knowledge of the Syllabus, which is not the same as '*creating a plan that both meets the educational needs of the child and the minimum curriculum requirements*'. The NSW Education Act 1990 and 2013 Information Package are not aligned.

Other States, Territories and Countries allow parents to meet the learning needs of each of their children, including designing their own learning plan, using work samples and parents own comments of observations to illustrate learning. Registration bodies that allow for this generally have lower rates of unregistered Home Educators. Tasmania has a very successful system through THEAC fundamentally because they meet the unique needs of Home Educating families with guidance, advocacy and support as well as authentically created registration requirements. This is due to engaging experienced Home Educators to assist in registration. Also they believe that "*Monitoring should be unobtrusive and sensitive to differing beliefs and practices, and be undertaken in a spirit of collaboration, support and assistance.*"³

From the time of my first registration visit in 2008 to my last this year the volume of documentation has increased *dramatically!* Originally, using the 2006 Information Package, a 2-6-page plan written in my own words that met the minimum curriculum requirements (covering the KLAS and the overall curriculum) sufficed, and I received a two-year registration. This meant that in effect I was permitted to write my own *authentic* plan. The onus was not on me to duplicate an already existing Syllabus but on the Authorised Person to recognize that learning was occurring. I was free to ask about concerns I had, including the registration process and during the visit in my home I had an enjoyable conversation with the AP about education, children, schools, as well as social justice issues.

³ Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC), (2013). *About THEAC*. [online] Available at: <http://www.theac.org.au/about-theac/> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2014].

I felt that the AP was well qualified to register me as he had an appreciation of Home Education as a valid educational option for children and he, like myself, was *professionally* engaged in the critical analysis of the School System and the profession of Teaching, which is required for ongoing Professional Development, through various networks⁴. The approach of this AP in particular is indispensable when parents are opting out of an educational system that doesn't work for their child, as it increases success with Home Education; identifying what works and doesn't work for each child educationally, after reflecting on their school experience critically, helps parents with direction and confidence. Because we did engage in dialogue and I was able to explain my background as a Teacher the AP supportively explained that Home Education was not like school, and that people who '*school at home*' will eventually realize that allowing learning to occur naturally, i.e. taking a '*natural learning*' approach, will provide us with more success for content learnt and enjoyment.

I do understand that having a Teaching Degree does not make registration redundant, although requiring ongoing registration for a qualified Teacher is a superfluous obligation I've often thought of; it is understandable that if I can teach in a school I'm capable of teaching two students, who I've observed since birth. I did greatly appreciate the advice of the AP though, as when they returned to register my other child I could concur that their prediction was accurate and that Home Education did not work when taking the school at home approach. Again the AP took time to talk with me. At one point I asked about the documentation and they remarked that if they '*couldn't work out that learning was happening by talking, listening and observing [they] weren't good enough for the job!*' On both occasions we discussed registration processes. They were there to answer my questions.

In contrast, registration for 2014 required 4 thick folders of evidence to meet the criteria outlined in the 2013 IP. The AP, a different and more senior AP, spent 2 hours going over every single page. There was no friendly conversation about my family at all. When I mentioned I had concerns about registration processes I was told by the AP "*I'm not here to discuss that*". There was no discussion about my children and there was only attention given to my paperwork. The acknowledgement that learning had occurred came through BOSTES and ACARA documentation. Registration was reduced to my ability to reproduce Syllabus in documents.

I had prepared a small document, twenty-one mostly brief pages in length, which summarized all the sections of the four folders and to help answer all the questions in the IP providing instructions on '*where to find what information*'. It also contained sections of the IP and Education Act that contradicted each other. I was told that if I had concerns I should write a letter to the BOS in '*non-threatening language*' and I may receive an answer. I informed the AP that I had already tried that several times and only received the same correspondence that '*nothing had changed except the inclusion of the new English Curriculum and that I could not object to having to teach that*'. As I expressed to the AP I'm yet to find *anyone* who is upset about the new IP who says that his or her annoyance is based on the new English Syllabus. I don't believe the AP referred to our exchange as threatening as they left their card with me at the conclusion and commented that they had enjoyed the visit, saying it was lovely, and complemented my home and records.

Before the AP left, towards the end of the two hours in my home, I did raise the issue of the need for Home Educators to be part of the training and selection process of APs and also to be represented on the board. As a Senior AP this was a unique opportunity for some form of *consultation*, albeit representing myself and not as part of a meaningful consultation with representatives across the whole Home Education community, or with all Home Educators, which is the preference. The AP only repeated that she would not discuss registration. I pressed on mentioning that having a house inspection and an increasing volume of paperwork to present every two years seemed redundant in many cases, and for families who had been successfully Home Educating for many years registration through documentation seemed more appropriate. For at least two years I have not heard of anyone registering through documentation. I believe registration through documentation to be a more affordable option for a Government body funded through the tax system as it reduces redundancies, beside the fact that '*home*

⁴ Ptc.nsw.edu.au, (2014). *PTC NSW - About the Professional Teachers' Council NSW*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ptc.nsw.edu.au/ptcnsw/about-ptcnsw> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2014].

education' is not limited to *'the home'*, and once child safety has been assured inspecting the house for educational purposes would imply that the other venues would also require inspections; beach, library, sport venue, friend's houses, park, Shopping Centre etc.

Instead of a conversation the response I received was that there was *'no difference between my registration experience and getting a driver's license.'* I would challenge the Committee to explain to anyone how the process of Home Education registration in NSW is the same as obtaining a driver's license, which is a process I have not had to *'reapply for'* since I was granted my driver's license in 1991. If any analogy were appropriate with a driver's license surely that would be with my teaching degree and teaching approval letter in 1999, which required 20 weeks total of supervised Practicum and Internship and a final Teacher Approval Interview? Wouldn't that analogy also therefore imply that I don't need to *'prove my ability to educate children'* again just as I don't have to *'prove my driving ability every two years'*? I was confused and insulted, to be frank, although I maintained my manners. It was inappropriate and demonstrates how incongruous the process of registration in NSW currently is. It is an uncomfortable process to undergo every two years; essentially asking permission to do something I'm legally permitted to do, both as a teacher and as a parent, all for a name on a register. I know my legal duties and would prefer to sign a legal document instead.

The AP also told me that they are responsible for training APs, naming one local AP that I had had just prior to this year's visit. I found that information disturbing also. The AP named to me had questioned my ability to teach Year 7 History even though I had mentioned that my background included a degree in Primary Teaching and a Bachelor of Arts in History. At that time the AP had also expressed doubts on my ability to cover Mathematics because they had *'taught Maths for High School and didn't always understand it'*. Why would someone who confesses to not understanding a subject be employed by the Department of Education to teach that subject? Of course professionally I know this has been a practice for decades due to a lack of qualified teaching staff being available at all times. However, if that AP could be employed to teach a subject he didn't have confidence in, and be paid for it, why assume that a parent couldn't help their child learn? I showed the AP the Khan Academy website that we use for learning maths that was listed in the resources and they thought it was *'marvelous'* and *'wished it was around'* when they had been teaching. An experienced and well-trained AP would already be aware that parents seek out resources to assist in teaching their children learn in all areas. They would also be aware of the various resources used, otherwise viewing my list of resources necessary for registration would not be giving them any information. We need APs to be selected and trained with appropriate Home Educators involvement.

As mentioned above I had already written several times to the BOSTES since the release of the 2013 IP, prior to my 2014 re-registration inspection. The responses I had received each time were almost identical to that which other people received; that no changes had occurred, only the inclusion of the new English syllabus and that I had to follow the new Syllabus. They presumed time and time again that my concern was with the new English Syllabus. My outlined concerns were in fact with many new additions in the 2013 IP, including the change of reference of *'Home Education'* to *'Homeschooling'*, the prescriptive nature of the IP, the demand to deliver the plan in the home only, to restrict children to a Stage level and that moving between Stages would require another registration visit and permission, that *'spot checks'* would occur at any time to ensure we are following the plan written for the projected two year period, in which we had matched outcomes to activities, and that if we are not keeping to that plan and if we refuse those spot checks it could result in a removal of registration status. These inclusions did not exist prior, in the 2011 IP. In addition the list of support contacts between the 2006 IP to the 2013 has gone from 2 pages of listings to one listing only, the HEA. No consultation occurred despite 18 months of attempted consultation by many Home Educators, including the HEA. Further the HEA had called the then Board of Studies (BOS) for those 18 months asking about changes to registration practices that many Home Educators were experiencing and they denied there was any change. Asking about changes to the IP the HEA, and other Home Educators, were told repeatedly that only the new Syllabus would be included. The Senior AP who inspected me this year had mentioned one person who had phoned to ask about the changes claiming that constituted consultation. Again, I found that statement *'extremely*

insulting' and dismissive of the stress that has been induced through refusal to engage in meaningful consultation with one of the main Stakeholders; Home Educating parents. The BOSTES has issued a Q/A document that contradicts the IP. As the IP is the enforceable registration document APs are still using the IP for registration purposes, often without consideration of the Q/A. This too has caused unnecessary stress for parents.

Because the BOSTES has for the first time issued a document to '*clear up misunderstandings*' about the IP, yet one that contradicts the IP, it does beg the question; why have they not removed the IP and re-written it?

The changes contained in the 2013 IP create a '*school at home*' environment that would be more restrictive than a classroom, given that plans can and do change throughout a school year, and plans for a classroom are written for one year only. Also, as teachers are represented on the BoSTES and involved in the development of new Registration guidelines and Curriculum the plans contained in the Syllabus are already written with the classroom in mind, as stated previously. Home Education is a distinct and different form of education, which meets the needs of students who often cannot have their needs met by the school system; so duplicating that model of planning will not meet the children's educational needs. Put into general terms, if mimicking school was the goal for Home Educators most would put their children into schools. What most of these children require is an '*alternative*' approach to that which is offered by schools.

When I first read the 2013 Information Package on the 26th August 2013 I immediately recognized parallels with the Non-Government School Registration guidelines and wondered if the person/people who had re-written the IP had accidentally '*copy and pasted*' sections without understanding what Home Education actually is. This is easy to do as it is my understanding that all staff members of BOSTES, including contracted APs (bar one person) have never had experience as a Home Educator themselves.

Frustrated and genuinely concerned by the BOSTES responses, I wrote to the NSW Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli specifically on the issue of the BOSTES's inability to answer my questions, even after multiple letters were sent. I received a response from the BOSTES on the Minister's behalf repeating the need to teach the new English Syllabus and that nothing had changed in the Home Education registration process. I felt that it was inappropriate of the BOSTES to reply to a concern I had about the BOSTES that I had directed to the Minister. I had obviously written a letter to the person responsible to oversee the BoSTES and BOSTES. As a parent of two NSW Students, and as a NSW trained Teacher, I feel disappointed and unsupported by the NSW Education Minister and believe he has failed in his duty. He cannot claim ignorance about the issues I and many other parents have raised. I was also deeply upset that he had expressed during a brief meeting with HEA representatives that he '*cared for our children's education more than we did*'. I have, as a consequence, sought the assistance of my local member for Newcastle, Tim Owen AM MP, who is supportive of our need for further representation in this matter.

I personally have introduced all four new Syllabuses into our program, as I'm not restricted by the necessary staggered introduction of them that schools must undertake. I'm therefore certainly not concerned with a need to introduce the new English, or any other new Syllabus. In addition to the NSW Syllabus I use the ACARA approved Montessori National Curriculum.⁵ The content and outcomes are far broader and deeper than both the ACARA approved sections of the Australian National Curriculum and the BOSTES's translation of them into their Syllabus, because of the Pedagogical principles on which the Curriculum is based. Other registration systems throughout the world recognize that the use of other curriculums is a valid option. It is disappointing that the BOSTES does not recognize an ACARA approved National curriculum for registration purposes.

Montessori covers all of History from the Big Bang to present day. All countries and cultures, including all religions, are studied in depth. The Scope and Sequence is designed on the Montessori Method, a method that has had over

⁵ Montessori.org.au, (2014). *Montessori National Curriculum*. [online] Available at: <http://montessori.org.au/quality/curriculum.htm> [Accessed 8 Aug. 2014].

100 years of in the field Pedagogical evidence of high quality outcomes which has been well documented and peer reviewed. It is an educational approach that covers all disciplines and is child centered and child directed. It is not only an ideal curriculum for Home Education use, and specifically for our family, but also it is a far more comprehensive curriculum than what State schools currently must use. Therefore I include it in my registration documents to *supplement* the NSW Syllabus, as I would not deliberately *lower* the quality of my children's learning by only using NSW Syllabus. I certainly mean no disrespect to parents who choose to use schools for their children; however, in the Home Education context it is *'unnecessarily restrictive to only use the State Syllabus'*. Parents will always be teaching their children more than what schools cover, whether that's before and after school hours for their schooled children, or throughout the day as is the case for Home Educators.

Most families who Home Educate will cover more than what is contained in NSW Syllabus naturally, by the very nature of being able to support children in their various interests and having more time and opportunity for experiential learning in a community context. Indeed the Montessori mottos of *'Follow The Child'* and *'Teach Me To Teach Myself'* echo the experience of Home Educating families, regardless of their use or knowledge of Montessori.

I've asked to use only the ACARA Montessori National Curriculum, as it states in the Recognition Recommendation for an Alternative National Curriculum Framework to be included on ACARA's Recognition Register⁶, that as *"different approaches to learning are involved, the Recognition Committee considers that the Montessori National Curriculum Framework allows for broadly comparable educational outcomes in English, mathematics, science and history by the end of Year 10"* and all other KLA's are covered in the Curriculum. ACARA acknowledge that the *"Montessori National Curriculum Framework does not always address all of the content and achievement standards in exactly the same order or detail"* however when activities are fully delivered *"there would be general comparability with Australian Curriculum."* It is not ideal to align the sequence of NSW Syllabus with the Montessori National Curriculum as *"the content of the Montessori curriculum is addressed at different stages and in different contexts in comparison to the Australian Curriculum, a depth of understanding is built over time."* Hence using them concurrently, as I must, requires me to document learning from different Stages from the NSW Syllabus for my two children. I therefore register them for *'Primary'* and *'Secondary'* instead of a specific Stage and have produced some additional documentation to *translate* the difference between the two curriculums for the APs. If I were able to register using just the ACARA Montessori National Curriculum this would be unnecessary.

Registration in NSW can be improved in many ways; options to register through documentation, to create a plan that meets the minimum curriculum requirements and that meet the educational needs of each child (as is required by the Education Act 1990) rather than following a *'school'* design of sequencing, to sign a declaration that makes it clear that parents understand their obligations to meet these requirements instead of intrusive home visit repeatedly. A separate body assembled that is similar to THEAC to oversee registration and provide assistance and support. Provisional registration granted for families who need to leave schools quickly due to bullying or persecution from school staff. Further that all schools, through the Principals, are educated about the legal rights of parents to Home Educate, and perhaps a caution against harassment which could incur legal prosecution. Harassment from schools continues to plague new Home Educators, especially for the 3 months prior to Census date.

Home visits are not required in many States and were abandoned in New Zealand as they were deemed *'unnecessary'*. If the Minister of Education deems contact with a registration body necessary, then surely we should have people with Home Education training and/or experience to support parents with creating their plan as Tasmania provides through THEAC? Currently the training and AP visits are based around *'non-government school'* registration processes that do not meet the requirements of Home Education registration. If parents had a successful history of meeting registration requirements an annual signed declaration, such as Victoria uses for registration, would significantly reduce the cost of NSW registration.

⁶ Acara.edu.au, (2014). *Recognition Register* | ACARA. [online] Available at: http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/recognition_register.html [Accessed 8 Aug. 2014]

My children and I have been involved with our local community and have made literally hundreds of friends who are Home Educating. We've also watched '*graduates*' of Home Education go on to tertiary study and work. We know a family who now has 2 adult children who both attend University. Entry into University was obtained through OTEN at TAFE. Already independently study, due to Home Educating, this brother and sister could undertake units for OTEN at home while still pursuing their interest and friendships, with other Home Educators and schooled children. They moved onto study Computer Science and Speech Pathology, respectfully. We still maintain connections with them and it's been wonderful to see them grow from young children to independent adults.

I've watched many more students continue with Home Education while working casually in various fields and positions such as childcare, cashier and waiter in stores and cafés, tutors in a wide variety of subjects, music and dance teachers, and setting up their own online shops to sell crafts, handmade toys and clothing.

I've also watched students go on to University, TAFE, and Apprenticeships' after work experience, and also become self-employed after starting a small business.

I describe Home Education as the '*most expensive bespoke education*' you can provide a child. It is almost entirely unfunded by the Government, less the School Kids Bonus and for some parents, though not myself, the Isolated Child Payment. Although all other students in NSW receive thousands of dollars of taxpayers' dollars towards their education, Home Educating students do not. It is true that this money essentially is given to a School that has electricity bills and so on, however, some of that money also goes towards Educational Supplies. Home Educating students do not receive a proportion of that funding from the Government specifically towards their Educational Supplies, in addition to the School Kids Bonus, or other educational costs. Home Educating parents pay for these expenses themselves.

Another cost that is not at first apparent is a long-term cost to the parents during the Home Education years and then after that responsibility is completed. While a child is being Home Educating one of the parents must dedicate themselves to that task and their capacity to earn an income is significantly reduced, as is their ability to contribute towards Superannuation savings and other family assets. I'm personally in that position and therefore have undertaken further study at a Postgraduate level, to improve both capacity and remuneration potential after I have completed this commitment. This will be necessary so that I can save more than the average person to make up for the deficit in Super that I currently have. I will retire with less savings than if I had used the school system to educate my children and employ myself.

Financial and career considerations weighed heavily on my decision to Home Educate. It was not a decision taken lightly by any means. Of course as a parent I would do anything required for my children, to meet *their* needs, no matter the sacrifice personally. That is without question. Professionally as a teacher I have a '*duty of care*' and that also had a significant role to play in my evaluation of my children's needs.

My daughter was already 3 years ahead in reading when she started Kindergarten in a local Public school, as she had attended a Montessori Preschool where she essentially taught her self to read. After three schools over three years, with Home Educating between them, we knew she was always going to have issue with the sequence of the NSW Syllabus, necessary to school delivery. Home Education allows her to learn to her level across all KLAs.

My son is primarily a kinesthetic learner and at the age of 5 required movement to concentrate fully. He does not have ADD or ADHD however I'm aware that in a classroom he would present as though he did. I had genuine concerns that he would be misdiagnosed in the school system. He physically was not built to sit still all day in a classroom environment however he can maintain composure when required now he is 10. In addition his septum was flattened in utero and although corrected shortly after birth it has compromised his

mouth cavity and with his preference for gross motor skill development this has meant that his language acquisition was delayed. After hearing tests and speech assessments his comprehension is higher than average however his output was below at the age of 5. Therefore, he needed more time to learn pronunciation, reading and writing. My son did learn to read late, at 8. Now he reads at a 13 year old level. Spelling is his last 'struggle', and he has gone from not spelling at the start of the year to spelling to a year 1 level. I predict he will be at year 3 or 4 level by the end of this year and will continue until he is beyond his age level, to match his ability in reading.

I will *never* regret the decision to Home Educate these two students. It has allowed them to learn '*in confidence*' and '*without unnecessary frustrations*'. They have positive, strong, deep and meaningful relationships with peers and they have a positive, strong, deep and meaningful sibling relationship. These are things '*money can't buy*', however they have come with significant financial costs both presently and also for my long-term future, after they have become independent adults and have left home. I hope the Committee can appreciate the level of thought and commitment necessary. My story is one of thousands across Australia and one of millions from around the world. We've been very fortunate to have this choice.

If there are Governmental registration requirements that hinder the learning of Home Educating students, that cause undue stress on families, and that require parents who are working as Home Educators, without pay, to work harder in order to translate Home Education practices into '*School friendly jargon*' so that APs with only School experience can recognize the learning, surely common sense dictates that those families be compensated? Financial compensation or support would also, I believe, increase registration rates.

The primary reason why I Home Educate is that this is the only method of education available to me whereby I can meet my children's educational, emotional, social and physical needs. I've worked in the Public school system and in Montessori schools as a teacher. There are no Montessori schools local to me and for personal reasons of commitment to the care of other family members, I cannot move to where those schools are. Although my daughter would have thrived in a Montessori Classroom, my son would still have his needs met better through Home Education. Eight years on we are all very happy with Home Education and will continue with it, until my children begin University, which they both have decided is their goal, starting with Open University Australia courses, externally.

There are many reasons why people choose to not register with BOSTES. All of those reasons come down to a simple '*argument*': Who is legally responsible for the education of the child? Parents who do not register for Home Education recognize they are in all ways responsible for their children's education and do not require anyone to '*oversee*' or '*grant them permission*'. If the BOSTES were to be removed from the process, as they are essentially responsible for schools and not for Home Education i.e. it is not listed as a '*function of the Board*' in Section 102 of the NSW Education Act 1990, and a registration body that included experienced Home Educators were instead employed to in the true sense '*register*' or '*list*' Home Educators, including either a signed declaration of parent's understanding of their duties (to meet minimum curriculum standards) and to engaged in planning with Home Educating families who requested support, registration would most definitely increase. While ever we have a hostile BOSTES who refuse to acknowledge the concerns of Home Educators I can only see an increase in unregistered Home Educators, who often do so as a sign of protest with the current system. I have always chosen to register however I do not agree with the registration process in NSW.

As mentioned above, Home Education has allowed me to meet my children's educational needs. In addition, as my children have schooled friends, who live locally, Home Education has allowed us to be available for when they have days off school to meet up for extra play dates. We're also free to visit their schools when there are dance, drama and music performances. We're also free to attend special fetes and ceremonies at their schools. We are not permitted to join in with their activities or events though. Home Educators hold their own local events and carnivals instead. It is a shame that part-time school isn't available, or that Home Educated children are ineligible from participating in sporting competitions or hospital school.

We also attend many Home Education camps and have now acquired friends across Australia. Because my children are not enrolled in a school we are free to travel to our friend's homes, both interstate and within NSW, during school term. This has allowed us to avoid expensive peak holiday seasons and maintain meaningful social friendships with children they otherwise only talk with via Skype, which they also do in-between visits. The 2013 IP require us to only teach in the home however we are learning all the time, wherever we are.

Because my daughter is not restricted she is free to attend the Younger Writers Festival each year and also attend workshops at the Hunter Writer's Centre. She has a good relationship with the Director and has been encouraged to write a book. She was also commissioned to make a logo design for one of our Home Educating friends for her new business. She has had ongoing sales through our Home Education network selling a handmade bag and toys. She has recently opened an Etsy store to further this interest. My daughter is currently thirteen.

Home Education and Distance Education are two separate educational choices, however they share many characteristics. Home Education allows far more flexibility however families, especially new families, would benefit greatly if Distance Education was more accessible while confidence builds in those early years. Distance Education certainly has a significant roll in children's education and could be more available, and there is no plausible justification for not freeing up this option.

School education has little resemblance to either Home or Distance Education as School Education takes place in an institution and not within the wider community. Replicating and reproducing '*the world*' in the classroom has definite limitations. There is no replicating or reproducing necessary outside of schools and '*the world*' really does become '*the classroom*'. Whether you've created your own learning plan or have assigned work via Distance Education these students are not confined to home. They take leave of the need to sit all day at a desk and instead learn first hand, mostly experientially, in the community interacting with people known and unknown in a variety of settings. Often children with work they must complete for Distance Education will take those workbooks etc. on excursion, on holiday, to the library or what have you. Families who both Home Educate or use distance education, will often say, '*we're craving a home day*' because they are '*always out*' of the home. An excursion in a school is a rare, complicated and expensive endeavor planned for months in advance. I've been involved in many school excursions and '*crowd control*' and '*behavior modification*' of a hoard of children is nothing like being with my own children as they learn social rules and conventions naturally from interactions in society.

As I've already stated, I've experienced a change in the registration process. Registering to Home Educate is a stressful experience, even for a qualified teacher. Most of us are not given a house inspection before we become parents. We've educated our children from birth until they are school age and for the most part we've done so as it's the natural duty of parents to prepare their children for adulthood. There are children who are born with disabilities and in those cases parents are still educating their children to '*reach their potential*'. Around the age of 5 years our mainstream cultural belief is that all children should be sent away from their parents and given to a teacher with 20-30 same aged children for 30 hours per week, minimum. Education could still be provided by the parents before and

after school hours however it's now the commonly accepted practice to send those children away during the hours of the *'average working week'*.

Not only do home educating parents undergo a stressful registration experience they also engage in a somewhat socially unacceptable practice. However, there is a natural bias towards wanting best for your own children, regardless of the discomfort afforded to the parent. That's what makes you get up 3 times a night to feed a hungry baby, or watch your child play Soccer on a cold wet day. Registration is *less* painful elsewhere in the world, and it could be greatly improved here. Why maintain an uncomfortable system in order to *be placed on an official list*?

I would sincerely like to thank each and every one of the Committee members for coming forward to be involved in this Inquiry. It is not an easy topic as the choice of how to educate one's own children is highly personal and there may have been some challenging aspects of the submissions that you are required to read. I'm of the view that children need to have an education that meets their needs, and that does not infer that *'Home Education'* is superior to *'School Education'* or vice versa. I'm still very passionate about public education and believe that too can be improved. I believe that Home Education does have a place in the conversations necessary for that to occur, as an important 4th sector. We are requiring a registration process that respects the validity of Home Education and of parents who become Home Educators.

Thank you again,

Tamara Kidd, BTeach(Primary)/BA(Hist), AssocDipFA, CertIVSmallBusMgt.