

**Submission
No 155**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Organisation: Sydney Home Education Network (SHEN)

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL HOME SCHOOLING INQUIRY

Recommendations

1. That a new system with an independent body be established to oversee home education based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC).
2. That registration is managed by the above independent body. Registration not regulation.
3. That home educators have notification and equal access to educational support services which are currently available to those in the school system such as access to the hospital school, travel passes, TAFE, TVET courses, part-time schooling, school libraries etc.

Sydney Home Education Network: Background

The Sydney Home Education Network (SHEN) is a non-profit support group run by volunteers for home educators in the Sydney and greater Sydney region. The aim of SHEN is to facilitate communication and interaction amongst home educators in Sydney and surrounding areas, including Wollongong, the Blue Mountains and the Northern Beaches. The primary aim of SHEN is to raise awareness of educational and social events that have been organised by the volunteer management committee or by SHEN members that benefit the home educating community.

The SHEN committee organises many events including:

1. tickets for performances run by the House:Ed department of the Sydney Opera House at school rates
2. traditional swimming and athletics carnivals
3. workshops during Science Week at the Australian Museum Science Festival
4. tickets to performances by the Sydney Symphony School Concerts
5. annual Oz Opera performance

SHEN is often the first point of contact for those interested in home education or who have begun their home education journey. The SHEN calendar is always full of events that members could participate in and thereby enhance their home educating journey.

257 families are currently members of SHEN.

This submission is made by the SHEN committee and draws upon the very many informal discussions had and observations made through contact with SHEN members via telephone conversations, emails and contact at home education events.

SHEN would like to comment on the following terms of reference:

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

For centuries, home education was the only education option for most people. Home education today is a valid form of education and has a place in our society alongside a traditional school education. The need for home education has proven that a “one size fits all approach” doesn’t always work and the benefit is a diverse and smarter society.

There are many misconceptions about home education. Have a conversation, read the newspaper, listen to the radio or watch television about home education and you will hear a variety of opinions.

- Some people imagine home education is only undertaken by those living an alternative lifestyle.
- Some believe that home educated children and home educators are cloistered in their homes and rarely see another person outside of their family.
- Some think that only qualified teachers can deliver education.
- Some think that home educated children are “different” from children at school.
- Some believe that home educated children are disadvantaged by not having a traditional school education.
- Some say that home education is only undertaken by white middle class Australians.

Today, more and more families are turning to home education to meet the educational needs of their children. Home educating families take on a great responsibility and they do not do so lightly.

Home educators acknowledge that a traditional school education plays a very important part in the education of our society and that home education and home educating is not for everyone. In fact, some families have children in a traditional school as well as children being home educated.

Whilst the various motivations for home educating are the same across Australia, regulation of home education is not. NSW currently imposes a high degree of regulation and a large administrative burden whilst Tasmania offers a support role and Victoria takes a light touch approach. Part-time schooling is allowed in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

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

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

Outcomes of home education

Through informal conversations with our members, SHEN can say that our members experience many positive outcomes as a direct result of home education. These include:

- Children are able to study subjects that they are interested in and are therefore more engaged with their learning.
- Children are learning at their own pace. Children learn at different paces and home education allows this natural process to occur without any undue stress.
- For families that are required to move frequently, home education is less disruptive as there is continuity in their studies.
- Children with talents in sport, music or performing arts are able to develop a schedule that allows them to meet the demands of their training whilst still allowing for a quality education.
- Children with special needs or learning difficulties flourish both socially and academically in the home education environment as the constant assessment pressure of a traditional school is removed and a more appropriate education programme is implemented.
- Children who were subject to bullying in a traditional school and therefore had low self-esteem, confidence and other associated issues become confident and happy children as a result of entering the home education community.

Transition to further study and work

Many families home educate for only part of the child's overall years of education. Through informal discussions, SHEN can say that for a majority of those children who transition from home education to either a traditional school or to further study, the transition has been without concern to any of the parties involved. Home education has provided the children with social skills to cope in a variety of situations and the formal education programme delivered has meant that the child's academic level is appropriate.

In a recent study conducted by the Home Education Association it was found that 71% of home educated school leavers are currently studying at a Bachelor level or higher. Parents and students report that the transition was without any concern. For more information about this study, please refer to the submission by the Home Education Association to this Inquiry.

(ii) financial costs,

Financial situation of home educating families

The financial situation of our members varies greatly. However, it can be said that by choosing to home educate their child or children the parents bear the full cost of that education. There is no government support or assistance available. This cost is the actual cost of resources, the time required to develop the educational programme and the cost of the foregone income of the parent who delivers the home education programme. Where a child was receiving additional support in a traditional school the cost of those services is now borne by the family.

SHEN observes that families choosing home education do so understanding the financial commitment they are undertaking and that their commitment to their children is such that they will make the necessary sacrifices, including foregone income, to educate their children.

Financial benefit to society as a result of home education

SHEN observes that there is a financial benefit to society through home education. SHEN observes children who were failing or suffering trauma in the school system now enjoying a successful education at home. Through the investment families are making, these children are significantly less likely to be a burden on the welfare system than had they stayed in a traditional school. This is borne out by the recent study undertaken by the Home Education Association which showed that despite the fact that the proportion of special needs children in the home educating community is significantly greater than that in the traditional school population, home educated children are less likely to be recipients of government assistance than the general population.

Cost of the actual education programme

The delivery of a home education programme does not necessarily require a significant monetary outlay. There are many resources and activities which cost very little or are free. With the Internet, a plethora of resources are at our fingertips. A few examples of free curricula and related resources are:

- SAS Curriculum Pathways: www.sascurriculumpathways.com
- Lesson Planet: www.lessonplanet.com
- Easy Peasy All-in-One Homeschool: www.allinonehomeschool.com
- Peter Blake Maths: www.peterblakemaths.com
- Khan Academy: www.khanacademy.org
- ABC Splash: www.splash.abc.net.au

Libraries, of course, are free and quite often host free workshops. Some museums and galleries are also free and provide free tours. Most galleries and museums provide free education resources to complement their exhibitions. Theatres and theatre companies provide free education resources to complement their productions. For example:

- The Art Gallery of NSW : www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education

- Sculpture By The Sea: <http://www.sculpturebythesea.com/education/Bondi/resources>
- House:Ed at the Sydney Opera House: www.sydneyoperahouse.com/visit/education/teachers_resources

Home education social/support groups mostly meet in parks around Sydney and attendance is free of charge.

Some examples of home education events held in 2014 and their cost to attend are:

- SHEN athletics carnival: \$15 per first child in the family, \$10 per child thereafter
- Sydney Symphony Schools Concerts: \$9 to \$13 depending on performance
- Oz Opera: \$5 per person
- drama classes: \$18 to \$21 per 2 hour class

Education events are also organised by home educators who are qualified teachers or experts in their field. Examples are philosophy classes and science classes.

There are also free events offered to home educated children. For example:

- weekly fitness classes at Meadowbank TAFE
- audiences for Bell Shakespeare dress rehearsals

There are myriads of good quality documentaries/programmes available on Free-To-Air Television suitable for using for education. BTN (Behind the News) on ABC is one such programme which coincidentally also provides excellent teacher resources for some of the news segments.

(iii) demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children,

The demographics of home educating families are extremely varied as is the motivation to home educate.

Whilst SHEN does not collect data from members, we can see from various events that our members are very culturally and religiously diverse as well as financially diverse and include single parents and grandparents. It has also been observed that an increasing number of professional families are choosing home education.

From informal discussions with parents we feel that the main reasons that parents choose to home educate are (and in no particular order):

- Lifestyle choice. Many families value the lifestyle that is afforded by the flexibility of home education. Home education allows a child to experience a holistic and comprehensive education taking advantage of the community around them.
- To provide an environment whereby it is possible to include personal beliefs and values in the education of the child.

- The child has special needs which can be on either side of the spectrum and the traditional school system is failing to meet those needs.
- The child has been bullied in a traditional school and despite the efforts of the parents this problem has not been resolved.
- The child spends a lot of time in sport or the performing arts and as such home education provides the flexibility to deliver an education programme that can be adapted to the external demands of the child's interests.
- For families who are required to relocate frequently (such as those in the armed forces), home education avoids the disruption of changing schools and the subsequent adjustment to a programme which could be completely different from the one they have come from.

(iv) extent of and reasons for unregistered home schoolers

It is not SHEN's policy to ask for the registration status of its members and as such SHEN is unable to comment on the extent of unregistered home educators.

From informal discussions with our members, we believe that parents choose to not register for the following reasons:

- The registration process places more emphasis on paperwork than learning and is cumbersome.
- Not all Authorised Persons are supportive of home education with some being derogatory towards home educators.
- The current regulations do not accommodate alternative methodologies.
- There is no advantage in being registered ie no support.

(v) characteristics and educational needs of home schooled children,

In many respects the characteristics of home educated children are similar to those who attend a traditional school system. Equally, their educational needs are also similar. Just as in the traditional system there are children with strengths and weaknesses, so too in the home educating community.

There is a misconception in the wider community that home educated children are somehow different to children who attend a traditional school. In reality, home educated children are like all children and come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

As event and workshop organisers, SHEN can say that home educated children are enthusiastic, enjoy learning, are respectful and very social.

Having said the above, it is true that there are a greater proportion of special needs children in the home educating community. This is a reflection of the reality that a traditional school structure often fails children with special needs. These children often need one to one attention and/or a specialised educational programme. This is not

possible in a traditional school with its current class size numbers and the financial constraints.

Many parents of special needs children come to home education having tried a variety of traditional schools. They realise that for their child to achieve their potential a different approach is required. These parents were already providing additional resources and learning opportunities whilst their child was in a traditional school. Home education allows them to use their time more productively.

At the other end of the spectrum are children who are gifted and talented. These children are academically significantly ahead of their peers. A traditional school is frequently stifling and boring to them. Whilst extension classes are available in some schools, they generally do not meet the needs of these children due to their range of skills and interests and an individual home education programme can meet their needs more effectively.

The home educating community also has a high proportion of children involved in sport and the performing arts. Home education allows the parents to deliver a high quality educational programme that takes into account the external demands of the child's talents.

Many SHEN members have expressed the desire for the ability to combine home education and a traditional school such as that allowed in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. The subjects to be taught by the parent and the school will be clearly defined so both parties understand their responsibilities. For example, a child could be taught at home in the subjects of literacy and numeracy, but then be able to participate in classes at school such as music, art, sport etc.

(vi) comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education

Structure of the education programme

Home education differs significantly from a traditional school education and distance education. Both a traditional school and distance education require the majority of time to be spent in the one room working at a desk.

The delivery of the educational programme in a home education environment is not limited to a room and a desk. This forms just one component of the programme. Our members are involved in many learning opportunities that are outside the home. They are involved in workshops run by museums, at book clubs run by their local library, sporting clinics, art classes, drama classes to name just a few. Theatre productions and sports carnivals are annual events for the home educating community.

The SHEN calendar is always full of events, both one off and regular, that our members attend. In addition to these events, numerous support groups meet that allow children

to interact in an unstructured environment and for parents to be able to share their home educating journey. Many of these groups then organise events within the group which do not appear on the SHEN calendar. Hence the real opportunities available to home educated children are greater than they appear.

All this provides very rich and varied educational and social experiences for the children.

2013 Information Package

It should be noted that the 2013 Information Package for Home Schooling from BoSTES has sought to take away these valuable experiences from the home educating community. Specifically, the Handbook for Authorised Persons states, "Registration for home schooling requires that the educational programme be delivered in the registered child's home". This shows a lack of understanding of what constitutes education. It is immaterial where the learning takes place. What is important is that learning is occurring.

This was a significant departure from the previous Information Package and has caused a lot of anger in the home educating community.

Learning at their own pace

Home education allows children to work at their own pace and accommodates different levels of learning for an individual child. For example, a child can be working at an age appropriate level for maths but a higher level in humanities at the same time. This is not possible with a traditional school education nor in distance education.

Talented students

Academically talented children

- For children who are academically ahead of their peers, school can become boring and monotonous as the majority of their time is spent on completing tasks that have no learning value in them. Distance education does not solve this issue.
- Home education allows these children to thrive in their learning environment as they are able to access topics ahead of their chronological age.

Talented in the performing arts or sports

- Many students are talented in non-academic areas such as art, music and sport. Traditional schools and distance education are centred on academics. Whilst this is appropriate, it means that for some children the development of their talents needs to occur outside traditional school hours. Furthermore, during competitions the children are required to take time off their schooling to compete.

- In a home education environment, it is easier to balance the academics with the demands of the talent that is being developed.

Children with special needs

For children with learning difficulties a traditional school or distance education may fail the child. Funding is generally only available for specific diagnoses and even that funding is often insufficient to meet the needs of the child. This is well documented by numerous studies and supported by the Minister of Education's recent comments that due to the Federal Government's decision to reduce funding to the states, the children who are in low social-economic areas will feel the effects most as will children with special needs. In the Minister's words, "We are not going to be able to fill that gap." (Daily Telegraph, 21 June, 2014).

There are also many medical issues which would make it difficult for a child in a classroom. For example, a child with dysgraphia would find it difficult to participate in a traditional classroom due to the writing requirements whereas, with home education, the child/parent could use tools to avoid excessive writing such as speech to text software.

Constant assessment

A feature of a traditional school and distance education is constant assessment and a predetermined timetable for learning outcomes. This does not bring out the best in many children. The constant assessment may be detrimental to the wellbeing of a child with special needs or some learning difficulty because it is unable to grasp the concept in the limited time available between the teaching and the assessment. Whilst traditional schools acknowledge learning difficulties and try to help these children, the reality is that the assessments are based on stage related outcomes. This means that in a traditional school setting or distance education such children suffer.

Home education in contrast, allows more time for concepts to be grasped. Furthermore, assessment does not need to be obvious and a formal report written up. This allows the child to learn at their own pace without the pressure of competing against their peers which can have many detrimental effects such as low self-esteem and a loss of confidence.

School hours

Starting and finishing hours of a traditional school are rigid. This can have a number of impacts:

- If a child's extracurricular activities finish late, then the child might receive less sleep and is therefore not able to concentrate at an optimal level the following day.

- Studies have shown that changes to the circadian rhythm occur during adolescence. This means that the sleeping cycle of an adolescent is different to that of a younger child. Specifically, their natural inclination is to go to sleep later in the evening and rise later in the morning. However, as most high schools begin before 9.00 this is not possible. Consequently, the concentration of these children is not at its best as they are often sleep deprived having gone to bed late but risen early. Home education allows for a later start time and, of course, a later finishing time.

Teaching methods

There are many different approaches to delivering a quality education, all of which will reach the same end goal of an educated child. One of the great benefits of home education is that parents can choose to deliver the educational programme using a teaching method that suits their child. For example, a parent can follow a Charlotte Mason, Montessori, Steiner, Classical or eclectic approach, amongst others. In a traditional school environment and in distance education, the only teaching style available to the child is that chosen by the teacher and is usually a literacy based style. For many children this is not their strength as they may require a predominately kinetic, visual or auditory approach.

Parents as teachers

Some argue that a parent is not qualified to educate their child. This comment is usually made in light of the many challenges experienced by classroom teachers. We note, however, that the role of a teacher in the classroom is beyond that of just teaching. First of all, with approximately 30 children in each class, there is a challenge in just maintaining order in the room, especially as many classes include children with special needs. This is not an issue in home education. Furthermore, a teacher is trying to meet a variety of needs in the one lesson. For example, one child may not be able to read well, another reads very well, another cannot write well, one has a kinetic learning style, another child is auditory, and another child struggles to sit in a chair for more than 10 minutes. All this and more the teacher needs to contend with and this has nothing to do with the actual teaching of a lesson. Finally, having delivered the lesson, assessment needs to occur and reports written up.

When the parent is the “teacher” in a home educating environment, most of these issues are not encountered. Class sizes and the associated discipline problems do not exist, the teaching style matches the learning style of the child and the pace of teaching is in line with the child’s learning pace. Assessment occurs, however, it does not need to be so formalised. Thus, a home educating parent only needs to teach or facilitate learning which is significantly different to what a teacher in a classroom needs to do.

It is not appropriate to compare the skills set required of a teacher in a classroom to those required by a parent to successfully home educate simply because the composition of their “class” and the learning environment is so different.

It is also noteworthy that teachers are increasingly expecting parents to take on the actual teaching of their child after school when a child struggles with a particular concept or subject. It is not unusual for parents to sit with their child in the afternoon to help with the homework or to take their child to a private tuition class so that the child can learn. This is often called a “home-school” partnership. The irony of that term is not lost on us.

(c) regulatory framework for home schooling including:

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

Home educators are not frightened of registration and most do not desire to be unregistered. Most home educators, however, would welcome more appropriate regulation and support and would insist that the administering of such be delivered by personnel who understand home education.

The Sydney Home Education Network continuously receives requests from parents for advice on how to prepare for the visit of the Authorised Person and assistance in preparing the paperwork for registration. Many parents find the process daunting and discouraging. Feedback tells us that the attitude of and requirements set by Authorised Persons vary greatly, from positive and supportive through to negative and unsupportive, even derogatory.

SHEN would like to see more appropriate regulation that includes a support function. For example, in Tasmania, THEAC (body responsible for registering home educators) has a support role. SHEN would also like to see appropriate regulation delivered by personnel who are supportive of home education.

2013 Information Package

SHEN objects to the content and intent of the 2013 Information Package and associated procedural changes. These have the effect of placing multiple obstacles in the way of parents who choose to home educate their children, rather than helping and supporting them. The changes do not demonstrate an understanding of home education, but seek to impose an inflexible, cumbersome, prescribed ‘school-at-home’ model. This model is inappropriate and unworkable for most families.

SHEN has received a high volume of feedback from home educators about the negative impact on their home education practice and expressions of concern regarding the detrimental and disruptive effect this will have on their children’s education.

The 2013 Information Package was introduced without any consultation with the home educating community. The 2013 Information Package clearly shows that the Board of Studies does not understand the true nature of home education.

Specifically, SHEN objects to:

- the introduction of the 2013 Information Package without consultation;
- the content of the 2013 Information Package as it significantly changed the registration requirements;
- the tone of the 2013 Information Package;
- constant references to the education programme being delivered in the home by the parent. Learning is not limited to a home and a person;
- the emphasis of appropriate paperwork at the expense of education;
- the onerous amount of documentation now required; and
- the requirement that the NSW Syllabuses be the only acceptable courses of learning. This is inconsistent with the Education Act. The Act provides for courses of study in Key Learning Areas and allows for such programmes to be endorsed by the Board of Studies. For example, many schools offer the International Baccalaureate which is not based on the NSW Syllabus or National Curriculum.

The 2013 Information Package does not reflect the specifics or the intention of the Education Act 1990. The Act states that “the education of a child is primarily the responsibility of the child’s parents”, while “it is the duty of the State to ensure that every child receives an education of the highest quality”. Therefore, the Board of Studies role is with regard to ensuring the quality of the education, without stipulating how the education programme must be delivered.

The amendments are a violation of the objects of the Act 5(d) “to allow children to be educated at home” and 6(1)(a) “assisting each child to achieve his or her educational potential.” The information pack appears to assume that the Board of Studies Syllabus “one size fits all” approach is the best way for each child to achieve his or her educational potential.

As home educators, we believe that the education of our children is our responsibility. We can tailor the right learning programme for each individual child so that they can excel in their strengths and get focussed help in their weaker areas.

Removal of SHEN as a support contact

In the 2013 Information Package, SHEN was removed as a support contact for home educators with no notification or consultation. New home educators rely heavily on organisations such as SHEN for support and assistance. Removing SHEN has the effect of isolating new home educators. This is not beneficial to the family or in the best interests of the children.

Denying educational opportunities to home educated children

BoSTES and the Department of Education appear to be acting in a punitive way towards home educated children to the detriment of their education. Home educated children are denied access to:

- TVET courses
- Open High School
- School Sports Programme
- Hospital Schools Programme

These educational opportunities are available to children attending private schools.

Appeals

An appeal to a decision made by an Authorised Person is possible only if the application is rejected outright. If the Authorised Person grants a three month or greater registration, there is no appeal process. Furthermore, written reasons are not provided to explain why a registration period of less than two years was granted. This is unjust and goes against the principles of transparency.

SHEN believes that the Authorised Person should provide a written report to the parent following a registration visit. Where the registration granted is less than two years, reasons need to be provided. Furthermore, applicants should be able to appeal any decision.

Appropriate registration

The decision to home educate a child or children is not taken lightly. The traditional school system offers many benefits to a parent, usually the mother. If her children are in a traditional school she has the option of full or part time paid work and its associated benefits, or, to stay at home with its benefits. By choosing to home educate the mother gives up both these options and benefits. Furthermore, a mother truly loves her child and wants the best for that child. This is different to the duty that is owed by a teacher to a child. In a practical sense this means that a child will be well cared for, educated and also taught social skills when in a home education environment. A more appropriate regulatory framework would be the framework that is used in Tasmania. The Victorian model is also acceptable.

Reducing the Number of Unregistered Home Schoolers

The issues outlined above contribute to the number of unregistered home educators. More appropriate registration together with a more transparent registration process would encourage more families to register.

(ii) training, qualifications and experience of Authorised Persons,

Experiences with Authorised Persons

SHEN has received a significant number of complaints from its members about the manner by which Authorised Persons are conducting the registration. Some Authorised Persons have demonstrated that they are not in favour of home education and discourage it. Some Authorised Persons have been openly critical of work done by a child without considering the background of that child. In one instance, a child with fine motor skills delays was criticised for their handwriting. In another instance, registration was given for a mere six months as the parent had not documented the outcomes in the specific format demanded by that AP (for example ST2-8ES, ACSSU075). The parent offered to show the Authorised Person the child's work as proof that the work was completed, however, the Authorised Person refused to look at the work.

Many of the complaints received by SHEN relate to the Authorised Person's lack of understanding of the unique nature of home education. In some cases, intimidation was reported as well.

Training of Authorised Persons

SHEN would like to see a change in the way that Authorised Persons are trained. SHEN would like to see input from the home educating community in the training process. We feel that either representatives from the Home Education Association or SHEN should be invited to the training sessions to give an overview of home education and to explain its unique nature. Furthermore, members of the home educating community should be part of the interview panel for appointments of new Authorised Persons.

(iii) adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses,

Sections 7 and 9 of the Education Act provide the Key Learning Areas for a primary and high school education. Sections 8 and 10 allow the Minister to endorse a programme that meets this curriculum. The NSW Board of Studies Syllabuses or the National Curriculum can be used as the basis of an education programme but that is not essential. Authorised Persons should evaluate each programme in light of the above section.

SHEN notes that alternative syllabuses are available to traditional schools, for example, the International Baccalaureate. If private schools are not required to adhere to the NSW Syllabus it is unfair to place that requirement on home educators.

(iv) potential benefits or impediments to children's safety, welfare and wellbeing,

From discussions with our members, SHEN can confidently say that home education has significantly improved the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a large proportion of children.

Many children enter home education as a result of unresolved bullying issues at a traditional school. Some of these children had been subjected to years of bullying which despite the efforts of the parents were not resolved. These children are finally in a safe environment.

Children who have learning difficulties often suffer, physically or emotionally, in a traditional school system. Again, we see these children's wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem improve tremendously once they are in a safe environment.

Comments have been made that home educated children are vulnerable to being abused because they are not being seen in school every day. SHEN feels that such concerns are unwarranted. Home educated children are a part of the community. They are regularly seen by the general public, health professionals, teachers of extracurricular activities such as sport and dance and their extended family. Many families are an active part of community groups such as Scouts and churches. With the exception of the general public, the people mentioned above have mandatory reporting requirements if they suspect that abuse is occurring. SHEN feels that the risk of abuse occurring and not being reported is no greater than the risk of a child attending a traditional school.

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

SHEN believes that the current regulatory regime is inflexible and cumbersome and places excessive focus on paperwork at the expense of learning. It is cumbersome and time consuming to maintain all the records required. SHEN feels that regulations should be such that the Authorised Person can assess the applicant on the Key Learning Areas, as stated in the Education Act. Parents will continue to develop programmes and keep work samples, however, the quantity of documentation should be less. SHEN supports more appropriate regulation such as that in Tasmania.

(d) support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support,

It is inherently unfair that home educated children do not have access to the same opportunities as children in the public and private education systems. Specifically, home educated children should be allowed to access the following:

- TVET courses
- Open High school
- School Sports Programme
- Hospital School Programme

Part-time schooling should also be an option, as it is in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

(e) representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES), and

SHEN believes that BoSTES is not the appropriate registration body for home educators. An independent body needs to be established to oversee home education which reports directly to the Minister of Education.

Until such time as an independent body is established, the home educating community must be represented on BoSTES as BoSTES is currently responsible for regulating home education.

(f) any other related matter.

Establishment of an independent body to oversee home education

SHEN recommends that a new system with an independent body be established to oversee home education based on the proven Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC). This body will consist of members of the home educating community and other educational professionals. This body will be directly responsible to the Minister of Education.

Consultation

It is imperative that the home education community is actively involved when regulations relating to home education are amended or introduced. A transparent process needs to be developed so that consultation occurs. Many of the recent issues that have caused such angst in the community might have been avoided if consultation had occurred.

Registration between 17 years of age and the end of a year 12 equivalent

Compulsory education ends at the age of 17 and as such BoSTES is unable to register children beyond this age as full time students. This is causing significant levels of distress in the home educating community because full time students are entitled to concession travel fares and their families to Centrelink payments. These are denied to home educated children because they cannot show that they are full time students despite the fact they are studying a full time Year 11 and Year 12 course. This is unjust and inequitable.

SHEN requests that BoSTES, or some other regulatory organisation, be able to provide to children over the age of 17 and still studying full time at home a form of recognition so the children and their families can access benefits that are available to all other children.

This submission has been approved by the Volunteer SHEN Management Committee.

Carla Ferguson
SHEN President