

## INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 19/07/2014

---

Partially Confidential

The Director  
Select Committee on Home Schooling  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

### **Submission on home schooling – A family experience.**

In this submission I specifically want to address the terms of reference (1b) The current context of home schooling in New South Wales and (1c) regulatory framework for home schooling, from the perspective of a family that first participated in the public school system and independent schooling prior to home-schooling 7 children since 1997. My family are still home-schooling the two youngest children.

I take the position that Australia's signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) while not binding in law, sets the benchmark for the rights and regulation in which home-schooling is possible. Compliance with the spirit of the UDHR reflects the civility of the society in which we live. In particular, Article 26 (3), 'parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children', but also, Article 18 'the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance'.

My impression is that these rights were eroded in 2010 when the NSW school leaving age was raised to 17, when at the same time the then Board of Studies sought to register home-schooling students against a stage appropriate syllabus, and the Commonwealth made it impossible for home-schooling students to receive Youth Allowance in the same manner as students attending TAFE or school in years equivalent to Y11-12.

Our family was advised by the authorized person that registration might be unobtainable for an appropriate Year (Y11-12). That repeated or extended registration at Y10 would be possible, however I perceived this as a threat, one that could reflect adversely on prospective employer evaluations of a son or daughter so described. Given that my third son could also no longer comply with the Commonwealth requirements to receive Youth Allowance, there was a high degree of coercion to attend school in Y11 from these influences together with that of a Job Network contractor, when he withdrew from an online VET course. He chose to attend school for the first time, as a result. It was clear that the benefit of this was largely social and of dubious moral worth. While he received wide acceptance in school and even a real job offer from one of the various work-experience placements he attended through the school, he chose instead after half a year to take up

employment is a more specialised industry in Sydney. In contrast, our older children were able to continue their educational paths, free from coercion. Two found traineeships at about the end of home-schooling (Y11). One entered university via a STAT test at Y11, and another entered AQF level 5 studies at Y11 and is now completing an AQF7 Bachelor level award.

This year our family attempted placing our remaining younger children into the public school system, in Y5 and Y10. As with our Y11 child it was clear after a day or two that the daily school routine (or confusion), slow pace, lack of dynamic content, atomised study periods and erratic staffing in their schools did not inspire meaningful learning for my children. So the decision was made to continue home-schooling, although on my assessment I do not feel the family is as well-placed to construct our own education environment as we once were.

It is possible to conclude that both the raising of the school leaving age and attempts at coercion into a more regulated NSW Syllabus, or return to schooling was not of advantage to home-educated students in our family.

Having watched our other children learn over the last 16 years and go on to interesting employment or to become young dynamic innovators with their own businesses in international marine industries, I want to make the following observations to the committee:

1. As parents, when we began home-schooling, we were not especially qualified to teach. Even though I now work in the education sector, I still do not feel qualified or eligible to teach. Teaching is not really a significant feature of our children's learning.
2. My family was graced with excellent understanding by authorized persons (former principals) who understood our approach, and I suspect knew we were not going to follow a State syllabus or Australian curriculum very closely. We once indicated we would not accept a visit from authorized person who had gained a reputation for misunderstanding home-schoolers.
3. The Internet became a major information source in the learning of our children, but it was also the real-life opportunities of experiencing the real world and engaging with adults, who were not teachers, rather than school attendance, that set the stage for authentic learning.
4. The State education system could benefit from a more flexible approach, borrowed from home-schooling. Public and independent schooling should be able to offer partial or multiple enrolments (subjects/programs from different providers) and study at home. Programs of learning (rather than institution attendance) should become the bases of registration for both schools and students. Students should be able to attend school when there is something of worth learning, but should also be able to work at home when it is more fitting and productive.
5. Culturally relevant curricula should be negotiated between parents and program providers, with limited oversight of state authority. The state has a conflict of interest when it is both a provider and regulator of education.
6. The basis of evaluation should be whether or not there is evidence of personal development and a clear educational path for the student(s), not adherence to a prescribed syllabus.
7. Without examining the figures, students in independent and public schools cost the Commonwealth and state governments well over \$10,000 per head. Home schooling

families neither receive support nor tax relief. They should be able to off-set educational costs against income. I realise that is a Commonwealth responsibility.

8. Our family demonstrates home-schooled citizens can quickly contribute to production and innovation in emergent niche industries. A focus on compliance and standards in schools is not relevant to self-directed home educated students and their innovative and reflexive projects. A flexible, dynamic and adaptable Australia needs an education system, that has both resilience and adaptability. A fixed schooling system modelled on 19<sup>th</sup> Century industrial workplaces is no longer relevant. Homeschooling provides an important model for future education in terms of flexibility and de-regulation. Conversely home-educating families could benefit from access to subject and program expertise currently locked up in the closed environment of the school system.
9. Overall there should be a change in emphasis in the education system away from assessment of attendance and outcome criteria, to evaluation of student use of time, and engagement in learning, wellbeing of students, and the apparent trajectory for meaningful roles in society as young adults.

This completes my submission I am prepared to answer further questions for the committee, if this would be helpful.

19th July 2014