

**Submission
No 158**

INQUIRY INTO HOME SCHOOLING

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Inquiry into home schooling

Background and Reasons for Making a Submission

I have been an academic since 1988. During that time I have held several roles including department head and associate head of school at UTS. My current role is associate professor and head of program. As an academic I have had over twenty five years' experience dealing with the product of the NSW educational system.

Partly as a result of my understanding of the quality of school education, I chose to homeschool my children from about 1993 to 2001 and intermittently since then. I currently homeschool two children.

Comments with respect to specific terms of reference of the Inquiry:

1b: the current context of homeschooling in NSW:

- i. **Outcomes:** in the early 1990s I was aware that HSC graduates in the top 15% of the state obtaining entry into my discipline area (property economics) generally displayed inferior literacy and numeracy. At that time the degree programme I was associated with explicitly dealt with these problems with first year subjects that my colleagues generally were "remedial year nine" level mathematics and English expression. At that time it was recognised that including even basic trigonometry was beyond the ability of the majority of first year university students. Other issues relevant to outcomes of homeschooling relative to conventional schooling include:
 - a. In 1992 I took a sabbatical that involved taking my daughter out of school (year one) for about three months. During that time my wife and I spent no more than half an hour per day with her on school work. When she returned to school she had progressed faster than the rest of the class. We shortly after decided to homeschool her permanently with very successful results.
 - b. At that time I undertook a study of the literature covering research into the comparison between homeschooled children and conventional schooling. While I do not have that study currently at hand I do recall that on all measures, academic, social and psychological, homeschooling outperformed conventional schooling.

- c. Since that time I have had students who had been homeschooled. In all cases they have displayed superior social skills and tend to be superior academically.
 - d. I have anecdotal evidence from other academics who have told me that they appreciate having homeschooled students in their classes because of their superior maturity and class leadership. This has been my experience as well.
 - e. From 2002 and till 2013 when any of our children were underperforming at school we would take them out for a term. This has been very effective at correcting the deficiencies of regular school. They attended a private school with a HSC performance record well above average.
 - f. My wife taught our youngest daughter to read in the six months before she started kindergarten. She is now in year three and most of her class is still over a year behind her reading ability. My wife has no formal education training but apparently has outperformed career teachers.
- ii. **Financial costs:** Homeshooling is zero cost to the community, but a significant cost to the homeschooling family. Homeshooling is considerably more cost effective than conventional schooling at a community level as no teachers or school infrastructure is required. Attention is required to provide some equity for homeschooling families. This could be in terms of financial rebates proportioned to state expenditure directed at non-government schools.
 - iii. **Demographics and motivation of parents to home school their children:** Our family chose homeschooling primarily in order to provide our children with superior educational and social outcomes.
 - iv. **Extent and reasons for unregistered home schoolers:** We know a number of unregistered homeschooling families. I have no data on their prevalence, but in the circles our family moves in it would appear that unregistered homeschoolers could easily outnumber the registered ones. We once discovered a homeschooling family in a country town in inner NSW and befriended them. They had previously had absolutely no contact with any homeschooling network and at that time were afraid what they were doing was illegal. Generally the reasons for avoiding registration appear to include:

- a. Fear that by being registered future limitations to homeschooling might render them vulnerable to being forced to stop.
 - b. Strong beliefs that their children were their own and not the property of the state, hence registration was irrelevant
 - c. Dislike for the state curriculum and preferring the flexibility to design more rigorous and relevant programs from their children.
 - d. Recognition that much of the administration and curriculum design in current use is not applicable to homeschooling situations
- v. **Comparison of home schooling to school education including distance education:** See (i) above.
- a. Current text books are generally inferior to older texts covering the same content due to the recent inclusion of considerable distractions from the actual educational content.
 - b. High school curricula for English are no longer focused on genuine literature, and many homeschoolers prefer a more classical approach
 - c. PDHPE curricula is perceived as weak and ideologically driven. Children find it boring and repetitive.
 - d. Mathematics curricula are distorted by a positivist underpinning, an over-emphasis on statistics and use of calculators. Calculators are a useful tool that can be easily mastered quite independent of mathematics education. By basing mathematics education at school level on calculator use students become highly dependent on them and fail to master the underlying mathematical processes that the calculators perform. That is, calculators make learning algebra very difficult, as well as many other mathematical topics.
 - e. The conventional school curricula are overly dependent on computer use, without actually teaching much of depth regarding computer programming. Student fail to learn how to research apart from the internet and fail to learn how to do more than 'cut and paste'. This has created a massive problem when they find themselves at university when these practices are not acceptable.

1c Regulatory framework for home schooling including:

- i) **Current registration processes:** The current registration system is moving towards a more prescriptive and administratively demanding requirements that are not suitable for homeschooling. It might be necessary to have lesson and subject planning for inexperienced teachers responsible for large classes. This is unnecessarily burdensome for homeschoolers. I have been included to drop registration even though I consider myself expert at course design. It simply does not suit the personal tuition environment of the homeschool. Other related issues include:
- a. The move to exhaustive outcome mapping is tedious and, from a common sense point of view, silly.
 - b. Several subject areas are limiting and suboptimal. English, mathematics, PDHPE, technology, history are currently limited in the emerging national curriculum.
 - c. The threat of future limitations on freedom to homeschool is a major deterrent. There is absolutely no evidence that trained teachers outperform homeschool educators and considerable evidence of the opposite, yet several jurisdictions limit homeschooling to persons holding teaching qualifications. Some guarantees in this regard would see many unregistered homeschoolers accept registration.
- ii) **Training, qualifications and experience of authorised persons:** My experience has been that they are generally sufficiently open and experienced to respond to the actual demands of ensuring reasonable quality. Some exposure to the benefits of homeschooling and the dynamics of homeschooling delivery would be important, though I expect much of this could be learned on the job for a generally open person.
- iii) **Adherence to delivery of the New South Wales Syllabuses:** The NSW Syllabuses and the emerging National Curriculum need to be recognised as limited. The appropriate question is not whether homeschoolers follow the syllabus, but whether their education is inferior to it. It is not necessary to follow these curricula in order to outperform them in terms of ultimate outcomes. For example, it is possible to limit computer and calculator use almost all through school but end up with considerably superior outcomes by only introducing them either near the end or related to real need (say

calculators to be used only for science or in technology subject). This would appear to violate the current inclusion of computer use in almost every part of the curriculum, but the result is educationally superior.

- iv) **Potential benefits or impediments to children's safety, welfare and wellbeing:** no one cares for children better than their biological parents. Without recourse to research literature I find it absurd to suggest that overall children's safety, welfare and wellbeing are not considerably better in the home environment than in an institutional school. I have in the past read considerable literature all concluding that social wellbeing indicators all suggest homeschooling the better alternative.

- v) **Appropriateness of the current regulatory regime and ways in which it could be improved:** see above.

1d: **Support issues for home schooling families and barriers to accessing support:** Financial support approaching the levels given to non-governmental schools would be just and a considerable support.

1e: **Representation of home schoolers within Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BoSTES):** This is a wise initiative.