

## Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2025

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## HEAQ Submission Re: Education (General Provisions) Amendment Bill 2025

### About the Home Education Association

The Home Education Association (HEA) is Australia's peak homeschooling association, advocating for home education rights in all States & Territories since 2001. The HEA is run by a committee that voluntarily comes together to lead the association.

The HEA upholds the principle that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children and respects the diversity of philosophies and methods used by home educators. Our vision is to move towards an Australia where parents can freely choose home education, and where the HEA as the peak body has input into government policy.

The mission of the HEA is to promote the practice of home education across Australia, support and empower home educators and advance educational equity for members. As such, we advocate in the interests of home education and it is with this in mind that the HEA makes its submission to the Committee.

The HEA (Qld chapter) meets quarterly with the Home Education Unit (HEU) management team for discussions around the practices of the HEU and concerns and questions that have arisen within the home education community. The HEA values the productive relationship we have with the regulatory body.

### Summary Position

The HEA has advocated for many years to increase the age until which young people can be registered for home education in Queensland. We applaud the government for addressing this current inequity.

Increasing the age limit to 18 will improve the situation for approximately 50% of Queensland students completing their senior schooling through home education. Some benefits that result from increasing the age limit are:

- Access to additional education opportunities such as traineeships, apprenticeships, Vocational Education and Training with RTOs or TAFE at School, and Uni at School. These courses are provided at a significantly reduced price or free if the student can prove that they are registered for home education.
- Ability to participate in school-based competitions and challenges as home-educating students, such as arts, STEM and geography competitions. These extension activities develop students, provide recognition of abilities and add to resumes.
- Ability to participate in District and Regional Sports. Many talented athletes are just hitting their peak in their final year of schooling and it is sad that many of them are denied that opportunity for further competition due to the inability to be registered with the HEU.
- Access to needed financial support. The choice to home educate generally includes the loss of a substantial portion of parental income. Increasing the age of registration enables families to continue receiving assistance in the form of eligible Centrelink payments and, for some, the Assistance for Isolated Children allowance (AIC). Registered HEU secondary students are also eligible for the Textbook and Resource Allowance (TRA) which helps cover the costs of curriculum.
- Access to concession transport cards. These are only available to students with a photo identification card from a school or the HEU.
- Access to discounted access to some educational or entertainment activities and venues. Some providers will only offer discounts to students with a student ID card, and this is not available to home educated students who are still completing year 12 but are unable to be registered with the HEU.

## Potential oversights in the proposed amendment re age increase for home education

During the committee process into the Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, the home education community was vocal in its support of one proposed amendment - that of increasing the age of registration to 18. However, since that time, the home education community has become aware of circumstances in which an increase to age 18 may be inadequate for some students.

Some students require more than 13 years to complete their primary and secondary education. This may be due to learning difficulties, disability, health issues or trauma - what the Bill's Explanatory Notes refer to as "complex learning needs" (p.3). Students and families should not be penalised and unable to receive the benefits listed above if a home-educated student requires longer to complete a satisfactory education and be ready to embark on further study or work.

Students at traditional schools can take more than 13 years if they repeat a year due to social immaturity, significant academic challenges or sometimes simply the change of transferring from another state or country. While such "repeating a year" occurs much less

frequently than in times past, it is technically possible and can mean that students are older than 18 when graduating from school.

In the home education sector, disability and health issues appear to be more predominant than in the general school population, as many families opt for home education to better cater for their child's needs. The Queensland Government's own research into home education in 2022 stated, "Overall, 2 in 3 families indicate their child has a health issue or disability."

(<https://education.qld.gov.au/schools-and-educators/other-education/Documents/research-in-sight-report.pdf>, page 2.) If this data is accurate, home-educated students are more likely than their schooled peers to benefit from an extension to their schooling years in order to match their schooled peers' educational outcomes.

In stating that, we wish to clarify that we do not anticipate there to be *many* students who would take up this opportunity for an additional period of registration. Most families find that home educating enables their child to make sufficient progress to embark on the next phase of life, even if they should have experienced learning difficulties, disability, health issues or trauma. However, the relatively small percentage of students who may benefit from an additional year of schooling must be able to access that via home education registration.

## Proposed solutions

We would encourage the government to examine the requirements for registration in NSW and craft legislation in Queensland that caters as well for students in special situations as the NSW guidelines do.

<https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/nesa/home-schooling/registration-guidelines/requirements-for-registration>

The NSW requirements for registration state, "Children may be registered up to the age of 18 years and for a continued period, up to 2 years, in order to complete the planned educational program". Wording similar to this would provide ongoing educational access (such as to TAFE at School programs) and financial assistance to students and families in those situations.

Another solution would be to simply increase the age to 19 instead of 18. This would ensure that home educated students are on a par with the small percentage of students in mainstream schools who find themselves, for a variety of reasons, graduating later than their peers.

## Conclusion

The HEAQ champions the concept of an age increase for home education registration. We know that increasing the age to 18 will benefit the vast majority of students. However, to best care for the unique needs of those with additional challenges, the HEAQ requests the government to consider one of our proposed solutions in order to cater sufficiently for those with complex learning needs.