

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1360
Submitted by: [REDACTED]
Publication: Making the submission public but withholding your name
Attachments: See attachment
Submitter Comments:

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed changes outlined in the ***Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024***.

As a home educating parent in Queensland, I **do not support** some of these changes that have been introduced and I am worried about the impact that they will have on my family and the larger home educating community.

I am particularly concerned about the following proposed changes:

- Guiding Principles (Clause 18, section 7);
- Inclusion of definition of a “high quality education” being limited to the Australian Curriculum (ACARA);
- Requirement to use / follow the national curriculum (ACARA);
- Requirement to report on national curriculum (ACARA) across all learning areas;
- Removal of provisional registration for home educators;
- Wording on bill seem to exclude Universities as an approved education option;

I **also** have **concerns** about some of the **explanatory notes** on the proposed bill AND some of the information that was given **during the Parliamentary briefing on 18 March 2024**. These include:

- Stakeholders during consulting period and lack of representative consultation.
- Misrepresentation of what is currently happening in other states in Australia.
- Possible misconceptions on the current registration, planning and reporting process in Queensland.

I am worried about the lack of transparency and public consultation surrounding these changes. Queensland has NO official state home educating (homeschooling) association and the two people representing the home educating parents directly, Amanda Bartle and Patricia Fitzgerald, were actively excluded, as was mentioned in the public briefing on 18 March 2024. Amanda Bartle and Patricia Fitzgerald are well known to the EGPA review team and directors. As a stakeholder in our education system, I believe it is imperative for the voices of home educating parents, students and community members to be heard and considered in any decision-making process that impacts our Home Education.

Introduction

I am a home educating parent living in Queensland. My husband and I immigrated to Australia over 16 years ago and are naturalised citizens of Australia since 2012. We are both educated skilled professionals (both with university degrees, my husband having multiple degrees including a masters degree from University of Southern Queensland).

My 11 year old daughter, born in Queensland, started her education journey in a private school (who follows ACARA). Eventhough she was considered a straight A student and received Academic Achievement Awards, the curriculum seldom engaged her capabilities and she was stifled and held back in her curiosity, capabilities and individual needs. She could not pursue her interests since it was beyond the scope of the curriculum. She was often left to her own devices while the teachers were busy teaching the rest of the class on the topics she already mastered. This lead to her constantly being bored, getting demotivated and frustrated and losing interest in learning. On other topics, when she wanted to slow down and take the time to learn more in depth, she was often interrupted and rushed through which also led to frustrations and losing interest in the work. She also found the school environment to be very stressful, distracting and noisy and was often anxious as a result, especially with regards to other children’s actions and behaviours in and outside of classrooms, and unwanted influences. Concerned for her wellbeing and wanting a better and higher standard of education for her, we started looking at alternative options like home education and distance education. After extensive research we decided to make the change and start home education. I decided to put my own business on hold in order to give my daughter the best high education opportunities that we can and to provide a tailored 1:1 education. This was the best decision we’ve ever made for her but also for our family.

During our first year of home education, we initially started using a home education curriculum which also followed / aligned with ACARA, but within a very short space of time we noticed this still didn’t meet her capabilities and didn’t engage or challenge her enough. So we started making changes to our home education plan by adding excellent high quality resources from various local and international curriculum and then tailored it to our daughter’s unique learning style and needs. Once we started making these changes, she flourished. Since then, I’ve seen my daughter grow and exceed both academically and personally in

ways that I could only imagine. She's shown a massive growth in her resilience and ability to manage and adapt to new or stressful situations or environments. She's shown a renewed joy and eagerness in her learning and takes own initiative in doing additional research on topics which spark her interests, furthering her skills and knowledge exponentially. She's excelling in her work and is able to work at her own pace without distractions and constant interruptions. Since we've been home educating, our daughter has also shown a great interest in game development and has gone way past the new national curriculum (ACARA 9.0) specifications for senior secondary students already, learning programming languages and making use of software that's used in professional gaming industries. She's also busy furthering her own studies with professional gaming development courses as part of our tailored curriculum.

The flexibility of home education and not being bound to a specific curriculum has also been invaluable to us as a family – being able to pause a particular schedule in order to really deep dive into interesting topics which we might not have originally planned for has led to some fantastic excursions and adventures, deep and interesting discussions and seeking to apply what we've learned into our daily lives.

By having the flexibility of Home Education and not being bound to a set curriculum, being able to use world class resources from around the world and creating a tailored curriculum to meet our daughter's needs, being able to go into depth with specific topics whenever she shows extra interest in the subject and then returning to our tailored curriculum when the extended work is done, we've been able to give her a far higher level of education than what would have been possible in mainstream schooling (public / private) and far outstrips what a set national curriculum like ACARA could ever provide. It's also been the best decision we've made for her and for us as a family.

Proposed bill changes and my concerns

I am deeply concerned with the proposals, particularly in regard to home education. I believe that, should these proposals go through, **it will have negative and long lasting ramifications to the education of Queensland home educated children and, specifically, my own child.** There is no way that I can, in good conscience, support these changes and so **I strongly oppose** them: I do NOT consent with them in any way.

I would like to touch on a few points below:

Proposed amendments to Guiding Principles

I **oppose** the proposed amendments to guiding principles (clause 18 section 7).

This is the most concerning aspect of the proposal. The current legislation says that parents have the responsibility of choosing a suitable education environment for their children. As a home educating parent, I oppose the changes in the guiding principles of the legislation that state that *"parents have the responsibility for choosing a suitable education environment for their children"* and that home education should be provided in a way that is *"in the best interests of the child"*. I believe the **bill doesn't address who decides what is in the child's best interests** or **how** this will be determined and is **open to interpretation**. The proposal takes parents almost completely out of the picture and essentially hands that authority to the State due to its wording.

As a parent, it is my right and obligation to choose and direct the best educational option for my child. A high level education which will meet her needs and capabilities and style of learning, provide for her safety and wellbeing and align with our family values and faith. I know her better than anyone else. I have a vested interest in her safety and wellbeing and want what is best for her. I am deeply concerned that the government wants to have an overriding right to dictate how and where my child receives her education. I believe government should never be in a position to be able to override the family structure and parental rights of choosing the best education for my child.

We are able to provide a safe and nurturing environment due to home education. No school is able to match what we can provide for our child. She is able to receive one on one tuition as required and, in subjects she is passionate about, the ability to let her imagination soar without interruption or being subjected to unwanted attention or interference. She is a bright and gifted child and we are able to nurture her natural talents while supporting her in all of her other subjects. We are able to equip her for lifelong learning, give her access to information, people, tools, equipment and environments that school-bound children can only dream of.

Proposed inclusion of the definition of a “high quality education” being limited to the Australian Curriculum (ACARA), requirements to use ACARA and report on ACARA on ALL learning areas

I **oppose** the proposed inclusion of the definition of a “high quality education” being limited to the national Australian curriculum (ACARA). I **oppose** the requirement to use / align with ACARA. I **oppose** the requirement to report on ACARA and all its learning areas.

The national Australian Curriculum (ACARA) was developed for teachers, to be implemented in a school classroom environment. It is not a purpose fit curriculum for home educating families.

I was disappointed listening to the Department of Education spokespersons addressing home education in Queensland during the public briefing on 18 March 2024. There appeared to be some concerning misrepresentations and lack of understanding on how the process currently works in Queensland, but also in other states. The proposed bill will not be bringing the Queensland processes in alignment with the other states either.

Currently in Queensland, we are required to submit our **annual home education plan** to HEU for the upcoming year demonstrating how and where we will be delivering a high quality and appropriate home education curriculum to our child. Each year, I spend a great deal of time researching, comparing curriculum and resources in preparation for this document, **leaning on both local and international sources to create an exceptional and engaging tailored curriculum for our daughter which far outstrips what ACARA offers**. In this plan, we also provide information on the education environment we’re providing for our child, learning resources available, our short and long term goals for the year and how we’re planning on achieving them.

As part of this process, we also submit our **annual review report to HEU** demonstrating progress throughout the past year. The requirement is to **report on English, Mathematics AND one other subject**. We have to provide **2 samples per subject** illustrating high quality education AND progress (in other words, 6 samples in total). The third subject is also on rotation, meaning if we reported one year on lets say History, then the next year we need to report on a different subject, example Design and Technology, and provide 2 samples on that subject. We also have to provide feedback on the year in review – if we made any changes to our planned curriculum and why, if we met the goals we set at the start or not, highlights and low-lights during the year, overall wellbeing and progress of our child, etc. HEU can then request further information if needed and either approve registration for another year or cancel registration if they feel we haven’t met the requirements for high quality education. If all the requirements have been met and HEU approves renewal, we receive a *letter of confirmation of registration for home education* for the next year. We DO NOT receive a new certificate. The original certificate, issued during our initial application to home educate, remains valid. We only receive a new certificate if any of our personal details has changed.

I’ve already explained how, for us, we found that the Australian Curriculum (ACARA) was not suited and restrictive and limiting. I think it is safe to say, based on the high number of registered home educators who’s plans and reviews are being approved and renewed every year, that we are already providing a high quality tailored education to our children and providing for our children’s safety and wellbeing without being limited to using / following the national curriculum (ACARA). Limiting home educating parents to only using ACARA will be detrimental to our children’s education, progress and wellbeing.

I also fail to see how or even why changes are being proposed to a home educating process that clearly already works well. Furthermore, by adding additional reporting requirements (on ALL learning areas instead of the current 3), will not only increase parents workload but it will have a **negative effect on our children’s education** since it will take away valuable time that parents could have spent with their children teaching them. It will also **increase the workload of HEU substantially**. And from my understanding, HEU is already under staffed and struggling to cope with the current increased volumes as is. So by adding the requirement for reporting on ALL learning areas, instead of the current 3 areas, will increase HEU’s workload substantially, causing further delays in processing times, not to mention the **cost implication** this will have to implement these changes and appointing more staff, training etc.

Proposed removal of provisional registration

I **oppose** the removal of provisional registration in the legislation.

I believe that provisional registration (a short term, 60 day registration) is a measure to protect children leaving the school in an emergency situation. Removing this option and forcing children to remain in that

potentially dangerous or damaging situation at mainstream school (public / private) can ultimately be detrimental to the child's safety and wellbeing. Provisional registrations allows parents to have their child's best interest at heart, keeping them safe and looking after their wellbeing by being able to remove their child immediately from those environments and commencing a high level education at home WHILE they prepare the plan and apply for full registration. The child is also then not forced to remain in the potentially dangerous situation while waiting for a response from HEU.

IF their application for full registration has been successful, then they'll receive the confirmation letter from HEU along with their registration certificate. The normal process requirements for full registration then applies, i.e. submitting annual curriculum plan and year in review to HEU etc (already explained above)

I'd also like to add, in my opinion, if the proposed bill requirement of increased reporting on ALL learning areas were to be implemented AND the provisional registrations be removed, the increased workload on HEU (from the increased reporting requirement) might cause delays in processing of new home education registrations which can also have negative ramifications in forcing children to remain in unsafe school environment. So this will have a knock-on effect – potentially endangering the child in an unsafe school environment or situation.

Wording in bill seem to exclude Universities as an approved education option.

Please include universities as an approved education option. Many home educating children enroll in university courses from age 15+ to further their skills, especially when they've already surpassed the scope and requirements of the national curriculum.

Conclusion

I want to prepare my child for a successful life, one where she has a love for lifelong learning, an ability to think for herself, to create, to be passionate, to contribute to her society both locally and globally. The tailored high quality education we are able to provide at home far exceeds any that a formalised school structure or national curriculum like ACARA can provide.

We spend a great deal of time and effort to ensure that my daughter has an amazing education filled with new insights, new social networks, new ideas, new opportunities. Being forced to follow a school classroom focused curriculum will dampen her enthusiasm, wiping out all her advanced studies in a blink of an eye and will most certainly have a negative impact on her wellbeing. The additional burden on us as parents to align and report on a curriculum like ACARA and on all learning areas, will take valuable education time away from my daughter. It will add no value to her education and, worse, will negatively impact her as she is already exceeding in many areas well out of scope of the national curriculum.

I DO NOT consent to the proposed changes to home education. Queensland is already considered to have one of the most onerous structures of all the states. It would appear that the Department is trying to undermine the positive educational outcomes that are evidence based in the home education community.

Our daughter is thriving in ways that she could never have achieved in a school setting. I want the best for my daughter and the proposals will create a structure which will create far worse outcomes for her.

Please do not allow this bill to proceed in its current form. It will have a negative impact on both the home educating community as well as the broader student community.

Sincerely

Home educating parent in Qld.