

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Submission No: 1490
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Submitter Comments:

Dear Minister Farmer and Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed changes in homeschooling legislation, in particular the requirement to follow a specific curriculum. I am referring specifically to clauses 18, 64, and 68. As a homeschooling parent, I believe that these changes would undermine the freedom and flexibility that homeschooling offers to families.

Homeschooling provides an opportunity for children to learn in a manner that aligns with their individual interests, abilities, and learning styles. Three of my children have completed their 12 years of learning and are progressing very well in society. Each of them has gone onto further study, one into a trade and the other two into university.

The reference to a 'high quality education' in the legislation is unhelpful and presents a challenge in terms of definition. It is a vague and subjective benchmark that is difficult to measure. Simply following the Australian Curriculum does not guarantee a high-quality education. The real key to an effective education lies in the delivery of a responsive, needs-based, and interest-driven approach that meets the unique needs of each child.

Enforcing ACARA creates a volume of content that is overwhelming and arbitrary, making it difficult for children to see the relevance and meaning behind what they are learning. This will lead to a loss of motivation and hinder academic progress.

Imposing a standardized curriculum fails to recognize the diverse interests and talents of homeschooling students. Each child is unique and may thrive in different subject areas or learning environments. By enforcing rigid educational requirements, we risk depriving our children of the opportunity to pursue their passions and develop their full potential. Additionally, if there are learning challenges, as is the case with my daughter, an enforced curriculum does not allow for supported and paced learning.

These proposed changes would undermine the fundamental principles of homeschooling and limit my children's ability to learn and grow in a way that honours their individuality and creativity. As a homeschooling parent invested in my children's education, I urge the committee to reconsider these restrictive measures and focus on supporting families in providing a rich and diverse educational experience tailored to the needs of each child.

I am also concerned that this bill has been formed without representative consultation regarding changes to home education in QLD. I am concerned about the selection of participants and the adequacy of the consultation process.

Firstly, I would like to know how your department identified those involved in the consultation and whether a broader call for possible participants was sent to registered home educators. I am also curious as to why businesses were included as possible participants while a roundtable discussion with home educating parents was not.

I would like to note that Queensland has no official homeschooling association, and the homeschool community has had extremely limited representation in the consultation process relating to this bill. The two individuals representing 'the people' directly, Amanda Bartle and Patricia Fitzgerald, were actively excluded from the second round of consultation. This has resulted in my voice not being heard.

Regarding the first round of consultation, can you please advise me on how many home educating parents agreed with the suggestion to connect the definition of High-Quality Education to ACARA? Additionally, further contextual details are needed regarding the 20% of parents who use the Australian Curriculum. I am interested in knowing what percentage of these early home educators utilize a third party to help design.

Home educating parents currently meet a standard that involves setting annual work plans and providing an annual report. I would appreciate any evidence your department has that suggests this existing system is not leading to a high-quality education for home-educated children and that changing it will lead to better outcomes.

Finally, I am concerned about the implications of the proposed changes for home educators who wish to incorporate university courses or alternative curriculums like those used in Steiner, Montessori, or Pine Community School. Would this legislation prevent university-level study for registered home educators? Will this legislation provide home educating families with the same level of choice as other QLD families?

Promoting a supportive and collaborative approach to regulation leads to better and increased compliance, resulting in a positive experience for both home educating families and regulators. The Home Education Network has put forward several recommendations for the legislation review, including the removal of reference to the Australian Curriculum from the draft legislation and replacing it with coverage of the eight key learning areas to bring it in line with other Australian jurisdictions. Additionally, the reference to 'high quality education' should be removed. Provisional registration should be maintained, and time frames should remain unchanged from the current regulations. The reference to the 'best interests of the child' should also be removed. Finally, to allow for collaboration between Queensland home educators and the HEU and Department of Education, it is recommended that a parent representative body like VHEAC in Victoria be established to create a workable and realistic legislative and regulatory framework.

Thank you for considering my concerns.

Sincerely,

Sarah Biggs