

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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I am writing to highlight the problems with the proposed changes, in particular the requirement to use the Australian Curriculum, the proposed alterations to provisional registration and the requirement to show that homeschooling is in the best interests of the child. I am also concerned about reports that there has been a lack of meaningful consultation. I urge the Government to meet with home educators and hear from them how these proposed changes will affect their children, and lead to a lack of engagement with the regulatory system.

I have been home educating my five children with my husband since they reached compulsory school age, and none ever attended school. Our children have been successful in transitioning to further education studies at TAFE and University, and work. The youngest is still home educated while undertaking TAFE studies.

As a volunteer for more than 10 years, with the HEA (Home Education Association) of which I am a Lifetime Member, including on their Helpline between 2014 and 2022, (SHEN) Sydney Home Education Network and in other homeschooling organisations, I have had extensive experience with regulatory processes affecting homeschool students. I have provided registration support for parents in NSW and in other states, and I have participated in consultation in proposed changes to legislation in states including NSW, Victoria, and ACT.

I am writing to express my concerns about the proposed changes to legislation regarding homeschooling in Queensland.

The proposed requirement to follow Australian Curriculum or other approved ACARA curricula, excluding university courses.

This proposal concerns me because it reduces the flexibility of families to provide the best quality education to their child. In conjunction with the proposed requirements for reporting on 8 KLAs, this would be onerous and restrictive. In NSW we do not need to submit a plan. We need to show that we have provided the minimum curriculum of learning opportunities in the six KLAs of the NSW Syllabus when developing a plan, but it is recognised that the plan is just a plan. We are not required to demonstrate that we followed the plan, or show measurable progress, we simply demonstrate to the Authorised person from NESA that we have kept records of learning opportunities provided in the six KLAs with resources that suit our child, know how our child is going and adjusted accordingly, and therefore have met the requirements. The work we have to do for registration purposes is quite significant, however, and often simply a matter of ticking the boxes, which doesn't add to our children's education. Queensland home educators should not be restricted in how they provide a rich, high-quality education for their children.

Home educators facilitate learning in rich and varied ways, to suit the needs and interests of their children. In our family experience at primary levels our children followed maths curricula from Singapore - which was getting the best results amongst countries teaching in English. As teenagers they did a combination of resources, including maths resources from the US 'Thinkwell.com'.

Our children have been able to follow their interests, drawing on a rich variety of resources available in our community. As our eldest daughter became more interested in dressmaking, she was able to learn tailoring techniques from another home educating mother who had been previously employed in training students in tailoring methods at TAFE. As an adult, she continues to make clothing for herself, her sisters and friends, including her wedding dress.

All our children have also been able participate in weekly drawing classes run by a local artist, as well as swimming, gymnastics and martial arts classes offered in classes for home schooled students. They have also accessed drama classes, dance, music lessons and other classes. In addition, all my children have been able to participate in weekly Creative Writing classes taught by another home educator in our network who is passionate about teaching children good writing techniques, through studying a variety of literature, people and places, thus also providing education in the area of HSIE. They also participate in yearly first aid training, delivered by an accredited first aid provider. They have attended many many excursions, locally and further afield, including Zoos, museums, science museums and observatories, and places of interest from Sovereign Hill to Fitzroy Island, and a wide variety of other external excursions, classes and activities.

All of our children have started TAFE courses of interest between the ages of 15 and 17, and used these as pathways to University.

Our son is now 29. From the age of 15 he completed TAFE certificates 3, 4 and Diploma in IT, studied B IT at Newcastle University, completing his degree at the age of 18. He has since worked in a private Christian school, for Google Maps, and for a patient support company while completing further studies. He completed an Associate Degree in Theology at Moore College, and is currently undertaking a Master of Digital Humanities and Public Culture at ANU.

Our eldest daughter, 28, is very artistic and creative. At 16 she studied Cert 4 Lab Techniques at TAFE and then enrolled in B Science, majoring in Chemistry and Cognitive Brain Science at Macquarie University. She was diagnosed when at University as gifted, with a specific learning disability (Dyslexia). Home education allowed her to learn and develop in an encouraging environment in ways that suited her interests and needs, even though her specific learning needs were not yet diagnosed. She is now working for the NT government. She wrote this reflection a few years ago as a home educated graduate -

“One of the best things about homeschooling is that we could follow our interests, so I could focus on sewing - I sewed my first shorts aged 9, designed my first bag at 15, and made a variety of quilts, my curtains, and lots of dresses. I designed my own curriculum, so I wasn't restricted in what I could learn. My siblings could also follow their interests - one of my sisters could focus on reading, and another one on cooking.

I didn't discover that I had dyslexia until my second year at Uni. This is because it didn't conflict with my homeschool learning styles. I could learn in ways that suited me. I had access to literature because people could read and discuss it with me. I listened to audiobooks, we watched videos, we could access learning in a variety of ways, and had a lot of interactive classes and excursions.

Did I have friends in homeschool? Yes, I did. In the homeschool community, there were a number of people my age, and more importantly, I learned to interact well with the whole community no matter the age. I did not just grow up with my peer group.

One of the most helpful things I got out of homeschool was the ability to work out what I need to learn, and find the answers. Before I went to TAFE my family hadn't done much in the way of chemistry, but I did a TAFE course in it, as a pathway to Uni, and was not set back at all. I had the skills to find the answers, ask the questions, and gain the knowledge I require.

Kids in school are put under major pressure that they need to know what they're doing after school. And there's this stigma that if kids aren't in the system they won't end up pointed in the right direction. But no one has their life planned out when they graduate so why not follow your interests early? “

Our second daughter, 22, is a voracious reader and a very focused student. She loves writing and performing in plays. At the age of 15 she was considering teaching as a career and undertook a course in Educational Theory through Open Universities. She said that she learned through her studies that “teachers have to disregard what they learned at Uni - that extrinsic motivation kills intrinsic motivation. When students are constantly provided with external achievement standards - exam grades, prizes, gold stars etc, they lose the desire to learn because of their interest.” She passed the course, but became discouraged about working in schools, which led her to change direction. She went on to complete a TAFE Cert 4 in Accounting and Bookkeeping while registered for homeschooling, which gave her work places skills for her part-time office job and also entry into a Bachelor of Media and Communications (Screen Practice and Production), which she recently graduated from with a high credit average. She completed her first university subject at the age of 16, through Open universities, did a TAFE Certificate 4 in Bookkeeping and Accounting, and then B Media and Communications, majoring in screen practice and production, at Macquarie University. Home education allowed her to thrive and learn at her own pace, while engaging her interests and learning styles.

Our third daughter 20, experienced an anxiety disorder as a teenager, however, she has been able to recover and develop her confidence. She has a keen interest in dance, and also in baking and recipe creation, particularly catering to specific dietary requirements. She was interested in one day running

a cafe and catering business and completed a Certificate 3 and 4 in Business Administration and a Diploma of Hospitality Management. She was able to work in Hospitality while studying. Home education allowed her to follow her passions, while in a safe and encouraging learning environment. At the age of 20 she decided to change direction and work towards a career in turtle conservation. She completed a Cert 2 in Animal Studies in 2023 while volunteering one day per week at Sealife Aquarium, Darling Harbour. She was accepted into Bachelor of Marine Biology and Climate Change at UTS, based on her Diploma Hospitality Management, and has found it enjoyable and interesting.

Our youngest daughter, just turned 17. She is currently registered for Stage 6 in NSW and has been able to develop performing her arts skills, particularly drama, while completing her studies. She was able to complete a school based TAFE course as a homeschooled student via 'Virtual Launchpad', Cert 3 Events (Virtual Events) and has now enrolled in a Diploma Screen and Media (Specialist Makeup Services). She is beginning to chart a pathway to further education and work, while still home educated, and hopes to study a B Performing Arts next year.

I hope these stories demonstrate that home educated children can be well prepared for further education without strict adherence to or the requirement to demonstrate progress against the the Australian Curriculum.

I urge you to reconsider and make the effort to develop appropriate legislation through consultation with Queensland home educating families, that allows for the tailored, rich and varied education that is common to home education, without limiting them to an ACARA approved curriculum.

Provisional registration in Qld

In my experience providing support to parents, the regulatory system in Queensland is easy to access. This is important for families who have determined that school is not an appropriate setting for their child, and need to quickly pivot to homeschooling. The current reporting system in Qld is amongst the most rigorous in Australia, providing regulators with confidence that high quality education is being provided. The current system requires parents to make an appropriate plan, and then to provide yearly evidence that measurable progress has been made in Maths, English and another KLA - this kind of measurable progress is not required in other states including NSW, Victoria, ACT, SA. The proposed changes will discourage parents from registering by removing quick access to provisional registration and imposing requirements to report on all 8 KLAs of the Australian Curriculum.

I am concerned that the proposed legislation will return the Queensland regulatory system to one which parents avoid - as the 2003 Queensland Homeschooling Review observed "...parents, in the absence of a supportive environment, are choosing in increasing numbers to operate outside of the law. This they do with great reluctance as for all intents and purposes, they are otherwise law-abiding citizens." The Review writers noted that the legislative and regulatory framework was creating "hostility...poor communication, suspicion and alienation...an absence of

trust” leading parents to homeschool without registering. Developing legislation without broad consultation, providing proper time and information to allow all home educating parents, as well as other stakeholders to have their say is contrary to the principles of good governance.

Part Time School Enrolment with Homeschooling Registration

I have spoken with many parents who have wanted part time school enrolment, or have been able to access part time school enrolment. This option can contribute to a high quality education for some children. I have been supporting a friend who has been advocating for her son to access Russian Language through Open High School or the NSW School of Languages, a public distance education school that offers a range of Languages, which is available to students enrolled in government and non-government schools in NSW, and also to students in countries such as PNG, but is not available to home educated students due to Department of Education and NESA policy. When the case was heard at NCAT, the judicial member considered that this interpretation of the legislation was unnecessarily narrow, and paved the way for this option to be available in the future.

It is important to recognise that part time schooling may be an important way to facilitate flexibility in education, as recommended in recommendation 5 of the Senate Inquiry into *The national trend of school refusal and related matters*. In that inquiry, recommendation 6.37 stated “The committee recommends that state and territory education authorities and the non-government school sector investigate ways to increase the flexibility of education delivery, including by:

- identifying ways to enhance flexibility in mainstream school settings for children going through school refusal;
- facilitating easier access to distance education and home schooling for students experiencing school refusal;”.

I recommend that part time school enrolment with homeschooling registration not be excluded by the legislation.

Proposal to require that parents demonstrate that home education is in the best interests of the child.

For our family, home education was a lifestyle choice - we enjoyed being with our children and facilitating learning for them. As they grew older it became more and more apparent how beneficial this choice had been. I may have struggled to provide evidence that may have suited a regulator that home education was in the best interests of each of my children from the beginning. Education is a matter of parental responsibility and the choice of how to provide that education should remain with the parent.

I urge you to retain the option for parents in Queensland to choose the form of education for their children.

Meaningful Consultation

Appropriate legislation and regulatory systems cannot be developed without meaningful consultation with stakeholders. In NSW we have had many struggles with NESA regarding failure to consult. This has resulted in a hostile environment. In 2013 home educators obtained 10000 signatures on a paper petition presented to parliament because the regulator had made changes to home education registration policy without consultation. This led to the 2014 Parliamentary Inquiry into Homeschooling. Following that Inquiry the Home School Consultative Group (HSCG) was set up, consisting of home educators and NESA appointees, however all members of this body are appointed by NESA, and their consultative powers are very limited. The model set up in Victoria, however, is more successful in contributing to a positive collaboration between regulator and home educators. VHEAC - Victorian Home Education Advisory Committee, which has a meaningful role, participates in the approval of home education plans, and provides input to staff appointments. Members are elected by the home educating community, not appointed by the regulator. An article about how this body works, written by an outgoing member is here - <https://home-ed.vic.edu.au/the-victorian-home-education-advisory-committee/>.

I urge the committee to engage in a collaborative dialogue with homeschooling stakeholders to identify and address the real issues driving this educational choice. By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and responsive educational system that respects the choices and concerns of all families, and develop legislation that encourages engagement, and properly supports home educated students and their families.

I have provided my experience in many contexts, providing voluntary free help to parents in every state with registration, writing submissions, meeting with legislators and regulators of home education in NSW and the ACT, and engaging with TAFE NSW to develop helpful policies with regard to home educated students, and I am willing to participate in any further opportunities to assist in the development of good home education legislation in Queensland. I may be contacted through my email at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your attention to these matters.