

Education (General Provisions) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

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Committee Secretary
Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Committee Members

I am writing to express my opposition to some of the proposed changes to Queensland's education legislation. As a home educating parent of four children, aged between 7 and 18, I am concerned about the impact that the changes to The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (EGPA) would have on my family, and on other families, those already home educating and those considering home education as an option.

My concerns are as follows:

1. Changes to the wording of the EGPA Guiding Principles –

- a) The proposed changes to Clause 18, Section 7(a) seem to me to change the focus from it being parents' right to choose the education environment for their children, to parents potentially needing to prove that home education is in the best interest of their child, and being held accountable for their choice. Is that the intention?;
- b) The word "suitable" (Clause 18, Section 7(a)) is also of concern, as it is subjective, and there is no clarification of who determines if the educational environment is deemed suitable. What does this mean for home educators?;
- c) In Section 7 (da) chapter 9, the terms "in the best interests of the child" and "high-quality education" are open to interpretation and, again, who evaluates "best interests" and "high-quality" is not made clear. Would there be collaboration with and support given to home educating parents to help achieve these markers?

I ask that the intended interpretation of the Guiding Principles be made explicit, the word "suitable" be more clearly defined, and the term "high-quality education" be explained. I ask that the opportunity for consultation and debate be made available, based on clear understanding of the meaning of the Guiding Principles, before the changes are put to the vote.

2. Timeframes:

- a) Removal of the allowance of a 60-day provisional registration period could have a detrimental impact on families who need to remove their child from school quickly, due to things such as mental health issues or bullying. Parents need time to talk to other home schoolers, do research and put their plan together. No

allowance for a provisional period means that a child may need to continue attending school for a period for a longer time, which may not be in their best interests, while parents develop their plan. Having to create a plan urgently, under what are already difficult circumstances in many cases, adds extra pressure and stress, which can be eased through allowing 60 days for the registration and plan to be submitted.

Sometimes in the 60 day period, a family might decide not to home educate after all, rather choosing to return to the same school after making a plan with the school, or switching schools. Having to put time into full registration in these circumstances is a waste of the parents' time and also a waste of time for the Home Education Unit (HEU).

- b) Reduction of the show clause timeframe is problematic for similar reasons as removal of the provisional registration period.
3. Change from providing a certificate to issuing of only a notice that includes conditions would mean that parents utilising the notice as evidence of home educating to Centrelink, are forced to also provide details of any conditions imposed on them to Centrelink too.
 4. Imposition of the National Curriculum, reporting on all subjects, and what constitutes an approved education and training program:
 - a) I do not believe that home educators need to work with the National Curriculum in order to provide a high-quality education, and I want parents to have the freedom to choose to educate according to the needs of the child (maybe due to needing to take into account disability or giftedness), or according to religious or philosophical values.
 - b) I am concerned about the time that compliance with the National Curriculum and reporting on all subject areas will take for both parents and children, not allowing time for flexibility of taking learning opportunities that arise, working with multiple-aged children on the same subject area at the same time, time for children to dig deeply into their own interest learning areas.

The time involved for the HEU in assessing reports which include evidence in all subject areas also seems to be an unnecessary overstep, a waste of time and tax payers' money.

- c) For teens, needing to do Maths and English at all grade levels means that those in grades 11 and 12, who would like to be putting time into subject areas related to their intended career path have less time for that.
- d) I would like to see clarified the term "be consistent with" in the proposed insertion in Clause 68, Section 217(1)(b)(ii) - "be consistent with an approved education and training program. How will this be interpreted and will there be some flexibility?"

- e) In Section 217 3(c) “a vocational education and training course at level 1 or above under the AQF” is allowed as an approved education and training program. Why isn’t uni included?

Many homeschool kids begin university subjects while in the high school years, and have a head start in their chosen career because of this. I believe that including university enrolment in the “approved education and training program” provisions is important.

My husband and my eldest daughter, now 18, went from a learning environment that was very much tailored to her interests, and she commenced university subjects in her chosen career through discussion and enrolment via Open University. Not needing to be tied strictly to a structured “school” program allowed her time to find and pursue her own interests and then start studies in her chosen career while still of school age. She is loving her uni course and thriving.

After reading the legislation changes, I am left with many questions, including:

- Would consultation and support be provided to home educating families to help them comply with working with the National Curriculum and other obligations?
- Would there be opportunity for collaboration with schools, eg ability to participate in sports activities, or attend school part-time on some days / for some subjects?
- Would “graduates” of this regulated system be provided with a Queensland Certificate of Education and ATAR at the end of their schooling?
- Would there be likelihood of the possibility of ongoing consultation, as happens in Victoria between the Department of Education and a stakeholder committee, like the Victorian Home Education Advisory Committee (VHEAC)?

I do not believe there has been adequate consultation with stakeholders on the proposed EGPA legislative changes, and I understand that there was a focus on consultation with business which would seem to be a conflict of interest to me.

I have read the Home Education Network’s (HEN’s) submission to these proposed legislation changes and I am in agreement with the points outlined in their submission, the examples they have outlined in relation to the Victorian system, and particularly their conclusions and recommendations. I hope that, as a body that is experienced and knowledgeable in this area, that the recommendations by the HEN will be seriously considered and taken onboard in relation to legislation changes.

Thank you for reading and considering my submission.

Yours faithfully