

Recommendations For Those Undertaking Registration

Whilst we lobby the Minister for Education for the recent changes to home education to be removed, people are still having to go through the registration process. Some have asked the HEA for guidance on how to proceed. What follows are some suggestions for how to manage the registration process to minimise the impact upon yourself and your children and to support the continued lobbying process.

- Have an experienced home educator or two who are confident, not easily intimidated and who have a track history of two year registrations present at your registration visit. Having another home educator present will increase your own confidence and make it much less likely that the AP will give you a hard time.
- Focus on the quality of your educational program in describing your planning, assessing and reporting. The major change that has been instituted by the OBoS is that they are requiring many families to use the outcomes of the NSW Syllabus in the planning, assessing and reporting of their education programs. This is the change that is having the greatest impact upon home educators.

To understand what is happening a short history of the NSW Syllabus and home education may assist. Prior to 2004 home educators were required to teach their children the six key learning areas of English, mathematics, science, HSIE, PDHPE, creative arts and languages. There were very few requirements on what needed to be taught within each of these subjects. In 2004 the Education Act was changed and home educators (as well as private schools) were required to teach programs in each key learning area that were “Based on, and taught in accordance with, a syllabus developed or endorsed by the Board and approved by the Minister.” In practice this change in legislation made little to no difference to how home educators practiced because if families were providing a broad education program for their children they easily covered the NSW Syllabus. Furthermore, the OBoS provided easy to understand summaries of the NSW Syllabus called Foundation Statements. These Foundation Statements were used by many home educators to plan, assess and report on their programs. The APs assessing the programs could examine what families were doing and identify areas of weakness based on their understanding of the detail of the NSW Syllabus. There was no need for home educators to be able to interpret and then plan, assess and report using the detail contained within the Syllabus outcomes. There has not been a change in legislation, yet OBoS has now decided that home educators should no longer be able to use Syllabus summaries but should be required to use the outcomes of the NSW Syllabus in the planning, assessing and reporting of their educational programs. Given the complex language use in these outcomes and the large number of outcomes contained within each subject of the Syllabus this requirement has proved difficult or even impossible for some home educators.

Perhaps because the OBoS did not consult with home educators before making this change the OBoS has denied that there has been any change in the way in which home educators plan, assess and report on their programs. In a letter to the HEA the OBoS stated that, *“Home schooling families who were meeting the requirements for registration prior to the publication of the updated Information Package, the updated Information Package has not created a need to change the approach to home schooling nor is it any more difficult to be registered.”* Furthermore, the Q&A on the OBoS website states that, *“There are no additional requirements for record keeping. The updated Information Package does not require parents to keep any more records than were required previously.”*

Thus, the HEA is suggesting that home educators who have previously been registered not change how they put together their plans or reports for registration visits. If you have never used the outcomes of the Syllabus to plan, assess and report on your program, don't start using them now. If your AP insists that it is necessary for you to use them tell them 1) That it is their job to understand the detail of the outcomes of the Syllabus and consider how your program covers the Syllabus 2) Refer them to their own Q&A

<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/parents/home-schooling-info-qa.html> that says there have been no changes in the requirements for reporting (and you have previously registered without using the outcomes) 3) Insist that they focus on the quality of your education program and not on the quality of your paperwork, the Education Act requires your education program to be assessed not your paperwork.

Currently the OBoS and their APs appear to be attempting to pressure home educators into all conforming to a “school at home” approach to home education. They are also seeking to shift the focus of home educators from the quality of education being provided to the production of paperwork that allows them to most easily tick their boxes. Many home educators may be able to provide them with the paperwork that they want but many will not. We need to protect the right of families who are able to provide their children with a quality education to home educate regardless of their ability to understand and interpret the complex language of the Syllabus or to produce the extensive paperwork that some APs are demanding.

- If your child has a learning disability or other special need that influences the way that they learn, consider obtaining a letter from your doctor or other therapist explaining how this should be taken into account. For example, if a child has dyslexia a letter might explain that because of this disability it should be expected that this child would write less than average and that other forms of communication should predominate in their educational programs.
- If you are refused registration or advised to withdraw your home education application, enlist the assistance of other home educators in appealing the decision direct to OBoS. In a recent case a home educator initially received a three month registration for her child and was advised during her second registration visit that she should withdraw her application. After this visit she posted about her experience on a home education Facebook site and home educators contacted OBoS directly to protest against her treatment. This resulted in a third registration visit. An experienced home educator was present during this third registration visit and the home educator received the maximum 1 year registration for new home educators.
- If you are advised by your AP to withdraw your home education application, refuse to do so. If an application for registration is refused there is an external appeals process that APs are required to advise you of. If you withdraw your application you do not have access to this appeals process.

Please tell the HEA about your negative or strange registration experiences, they will assist greatly in us understanding what is happening in the community and also in our lobbying. We really need to hear what is happening! Your reports will remain confidential unless you specify otherwise. Send reports to lobby@hea.edu.au

Some notes for those registering a child who has been removed from school because of bullying or other trauma

The HEA has received numerous reports of difficulties with registration of children who have been newly removed from school because of bullying or other school trauma. It seems that it is common for home educators in this situation to be given very short registration periods (3 months) and for the registration visits to be very distressing for children. Some APs have told children in this circumstance that they must work very hard and children (and parents) have understood this direction as a threat that if they do not do what the AP has said that they will be forced to return to school. This has resulted in tremendous anxiety for children who are terrified of being forced to

return to school. One child was so pressured and scared that she required medical treatment in hospital for conditions related to anxiety and lack of eating that were a direct result of what was said to her and her mother during a registration visit.

New home educators in such circumstances might consider:

- Obtaining a letter from their doctor stating that because of the trauma the child has experienced at school, their home education program should initially focus primarily on PDHPE and their emotional recovery and slowly move into other subject areas. It should be stated that this is necessary in order to protect the mental health of the child. The doctor can recommend a lengthy registration period be granted in order to facilitate their recovery.
- Discussing the need for a gradual, non-pressurised entry into home education with the AP prior to the visit.
- Informing the AP prior to the visit that you expect that they will not tell the child anything about how hard they must work or say anything that could be interpreted as suggesting that the child might have to return to school.
- Not having the child present for the registration visit. Whilst the OBoS state that it is an “expectation” that children be present for registration visits, this is not something that can be enforced. The job of the OBoS is to evaluate the education programs of children, they are not child protection workers.
- Having an experienced home educator present for the visit. If it is possible, have an experienced home educator present whose child had also been removed from school because of trauma who can speak about how home education assisted their child to recover from their trauma and to learn.