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BoSTES NSW Consultation Brief - Review of the Homeschooling Information Package

In the coming weeks, BoSTES will consult with NSW home educators in relation to the *Registration for Home Schooling in NSW – Information Package*. This process includes meetings held in various locations in NSW as well as an online survey.

The Information Package (IP) is a guide to what BoSTES currently considers acceptable for registration, basically the 'rules' of registration. In 2013, the IP was changed dramatically, resulting in many home educators (even the very experienced) reporting difficulty with the registration process. Since 2013, HEA has recommended that all home educators have a support person to assist them with registration. This is not ideal and not always possible.

The new IP ideally would be a document that clearly explains the registration process, acknowledges the variety of learning and education styles of home educating families and creates a balance between compliance and support. This consultation process is our chance to have a say in shaping the new IP to suit the unique needs of home educators, needs which are quite different to school-based education.

HEA has collated some points to consider for consultation meetings and in the online survey. This is by no means an exhaustive list but rather reflects the common complaints that HEA has heard in the past few years since the 2013 IP has been in use.

Tone

The new IP should have an encouraging tone. The new IP also needs to be worded to reflect the flexible, individual nature of home education, rather than the compliance approach required for schools. The 2013 IP has an emphasis on compliance with some 15 references to it throughout the document. The new IP should strike a balance between BoSTES' needs for compliance and home educators' need for support in what can be quite a stressful and onerous process.

Flexibility

The individual needs of children and families should be fundamental to the registration process, in particular there needs to be a recognition that home educated children may not progress in lock-step with their schooled peers. The 2013 IP states that parents must advise BoSTES in writing if they "*wish to deliver an educational program in advance of the Years of schooling specified on the child's certificate of registration.*" and that an Authorised Person (AP) must assess this change. In practice, home educators are continually adapting their education offerings to meet the needs of their children. To reflect this, a more flexible and supportive IP would remove that sentence and instead state explicitly that children can be registered for Primary, Secondary or specific years of schooling.

The new IP should also describe flexible options for children with special needs, for families who travel extensively, and for children and young people who seek to register outside of the current registration age limits of 6 to 17 years of age.

Support

The new IP should state that APs may provide support. For many home educators, the AP is the first person with any knowledge of home education they encounter. As the AP's role currently does not include



support, it leaves many feeling very disheartened by the registration process. When families receive shorter than maximum registration periods, it would be helpful to have written, supportive information on how to improve for next time.

The new IP should contain as much useful information as possible about the available support for home educators – organisations like HEA and SHEN, accessing the AIC payment (Assistance for Isolated Children), child health support, travel concessions, etc.

Compliance

The new IP should explicitly state that parents can reference the BoSTES syllabuses in their plan by using either the stage statements or the content or the outcomes. Currently in the 2013 IP there is an emphasis on outcomes and content.

The Education Act states that: *'any syllabus developed or endorsed by the Board for a particular course of study may indicate generally the period of time that should be allocated to the teaching of the course, but is not to make a specific period of time mandatory'* however the 2013 IP states that parents must ensure: *"the time allocated to learning is sufficient to allow coverage of the curriculum and is comparable to the time allocated by schools"*. Home educators recognize that learning is a continuous process: the new IP should support this by asking parents simply to allocate sufficient time to allow coverage of the curriculum.

The definition of home education given in the 2013 IP is: "Home schooling is education delivered in a child's home by a parent or guardian." The 2013 IP makes several references to educational programs being delivered 'by the parent' and 'in the home'. In practice, home education occurs in many settings, frequently outside the home and with specialist instructors. The new IP should include a more holistic definition of home education and also explicitly support home educators using a variety of resources, including people and places external to the home environment.

In regards to record-keeping and assessment, APs need to be instructed that student progress may be out of step with the syllabus sequence and may be taught in a way that wouldn't work in regular classrooms. APs will need to know about the individual nature of the home education environments families create (in and outside of the home) and that the learning may be unlike what they are used to in a school setting. APs need to understand that not all evidence of learning will consist of written work and that evidence may not look similar to the work of schooled students, much of which is designed for efficiency and not necessarily because it is the 'best' way to learn that content i.e. worksheets or workbooks.

Clarity

The 2013 IP was so confusing to applicants that BoSTES released 'Information Package Questions and Answers'. These two documents contradict each other. For clarity, one document must be used – the new IP.

High School Years

The 2013 IP states that home educated students are not eligible for the HSC. An alternative should be offered, (including an alternative pattern of study) similar to the Completion of Year 10 Certificate, to mark the achievement of those who are registered beyond Year 10. For this and the current Completion of Year 10 Certificate, parents should not have to apply separately but rather be offered to be assessed for it as part of the registration process.

Regardless of content of the new IP, it will set the tone for the registration process and the manner that it is implemented. Families may wish to give feedback about this at meetings also.

Participants at these meetings will not be required to provide names. Unregistered home educators should feel free to participate and have their say.

It would be great to see as large a showing of home educators at these meetings as possible, not just to have your voices heard but to show BoSTES that home educators stand together.