



“Understanding the home education system in Tasmania”

October 2017 Edition

Welcome to the HEA’s “Understanding the home education system in Tasmania”. This document is arranged in Question and Answer format to help you find quick answers to frequently asked questions.



It explains the legal requirements for registering to home educate in Tasmania as well as providing an overview of Tasmania’s unique home education system and the opportunities available to home educated students in Tasmania. You will also find links and information about how to connect with HEA (TAS) and other Tasmanian-based home education groups.

Note: the following information about the registration process describes the situation at the time of writing (July - October 2017). Changes can occur over time and this document may need to be updated accordingly. Links to the Office of Education Registrar (OER) and to the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC) are included so that this information can be checked against their current procedures.

Acknowledgements

The creation of this document would not have been possible without the generous input and feedback from many home educators, past and present, including some who were involved at the dawning of the home education movement in Tasmania. Thank you.

To those who are newer to home education in Tasmania, I hope that the historical perspective shared at the end of this document will provide you with some context for understanding how the current home education system has evolved. It is clearly not a complete history of Tasmanian home education and is not intended as such - that would require a much longer period of research, including the tracking down and interviewing of many more early home educators as well as access to the archives of the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council. Perhaps someday, another home educator or researcher will take on such a project and share their work with the home educating community in Tasmania. Until then, I offer this brief overview, not as a researcher nor as a trained historian, but as a home educator who has been part of the home education community in Tasmania since 2008 and as a member of the Home Education Association (HEA), who was actively involved in lobbying for amendments to be made to the draft *Tasmanian Education Act 2016* during the period of legislative change in 2016.

As each generation of home educators comes and goes, it can be valuable to have a way of keeping in touch with our history as well as understanding the requirements for home education registration in our own day. Government personnel also come and go, political agendas and legislative requirements change, and each new generation will need to carry on the work of protecting the freedoms enjoyed by Tasmanian home educators. Among other things, it is in the interests of the home education community to ensure that there continues to be a strong contingent of home educators volunteering on the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council [THEAC] and contributing to the advocacy and support work of the Home Education Association [HEA].

Lynda Carlos, [member of HEA national committee 2017 and of the state group, HEA (TAS)].

Preface

The Home Education Association (HEA) www.hea.edu.au is a national non-profit association that aims to encourage and promote the practice of home education in Australia. The HEA has member families across all Australian states and territories. The Association is governed by a committee and managed by volunteers on behalf of the membership. The HEA has no affiliation with government education authorities and prioritises members’ confidentiality. The HEA does not record information about whether individual members are registered or not registered with the various state or territory government bodies responsible for overseeing home education.

The HEA provides a range of services to members, including providing support to families undergoing registration for home education in each jurisdiction. The HEA also facilitates access to resources and group discounts negotiated with educational service providers and publishes regular informative newsletters for its subscribers. HEA volunteers also field email and telephone inquiries from families and members of the general public, including non-member home educators, academic researchers, journalists and politicians. The HEA national volunteer-operated helpline can be reached on **1300 72 99 91**.

Since its founding in 2001, the HEA has made numerous submissions to state and territory governments on various issues impacting home educators, particularly during periods of legislative change. The HEA also responds to requests for help by local home education groups around the country.

The broader objectives of the HEA include:

- To uphold the principle that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children.
- To promote a broader awareness of home education and its benefits throughout Australia.
- To promote and encourage the development of home education networks.
- To provide services and resources to home education networks and individual home educators.
- To endeavour to procure any rights, privileges, concessions or benefits relating to home education for home educators and their families.
- To maintain a respect for the diversity of philosophies and methods used by home educators.
- To use our membership size to obtain discounts and benefits for our members.

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- To fund insurance cover for event organisers and work experience students.
- To support home education events and activities.

Our state group, **HEA (TAS)**, is made up of volunteer home educators and meets regularly by teleconference to plan events; to discuss ways we can support the home education community in Tasmania; and to consider how to best engage with the broader community, the media, the Office of Education Registrar (OER), the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC), and the Tasmanian government on matters to do with protecting and promoting home education. The HEA (TAS) subcommittee is always keen to hear from people wanting to volunteer for specific projects or events. (Such as helping to organise a state camp or conference, helping home educators prepare their annual home education program and summaries (HESPs) or being a support person for another home educator during a registration visit.)

You can connect with HEA (TAS) in a number of ways:

- Email us at tasmania@hea.edu.au
- Visit the HEA website www.hea.edu.au
- Visit our Facebook page, [Home Education Association - HEA in Tasmania](#)
- Ask to join our Facebook group, [Tasmanian Home Education Association Members & Friends](#)
- Subscribe to HEA Newsletters [here](#) - you will receive a National HEA newsletter as well as a State newsletter each month. Sign up is on the left hand side of this link.

To find out about other Tasmanian home education groups and local support, click: [here](#)

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1. The legalities and practicalities of home educating in TASMANIA

1.1 Is home education legal in Tasmania?

Yes! It is legal and Tasmania is a fantastic place to home educate. We have a wonderful home educating community and a generally supportive registration system. In fact, a higher proportion of Tasmania’s home educators choose to be legally registered for home education than anywhere else in Australia. To legally register, you need to submit your proposed home education program to the Education Registrar for approval.



The Office of the Education Registrar was established by the [Tasmanian Education Act 2016](#). The Registrar is a statutory officer and as such is independent of the Department of Education, and reports directly to the Tasmanian Minister for Education.

Prior to 10 July 2017, the registration process in Tasmania was managed by the [Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council \[THEAC\]](#). Although this role has now been taken over by the [Office of the Education Registrar](#), THEAC continues to have input into the registration process in Tasmania. (see below for more about THEAC)

The *Education Act 2016* and the *Tasmanian Education Regulations 2017* can be accessed by clicking the following links:

- [***Tasmanian Education Act 2016***](#) (effective 10 July 2017)
- [***Education Regulations 2017***](#)

1.2 Can my home educated child attend school part time?

Yes. You can combine part-time home education and part-time school enrolment (up to the equivalent of 2 full days per week). You can even apply for part-time school enrolment in schools outside your local school zone. Your child’s part-time school enrolment forms part of your home education program, which you will need to submit for approval to the Education Registrar.

Schools do have the discretion to refuse part-time enrolments if the school lacks the resources or capacity to accommodate your child. An application from a home educated

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student residing within the intake area of a school must be given priority over a student applying for full-time enrolment from outside of the home area.

School principals are required to assess applications for part-time enrolment according to the [GUIDELINES FOR PART-TIME ENROLMENT OF A HOME EDUCATED STUDENT](#). These Guidelines state that “as far as reasonably practical, applications MUST be made to the school by the end of Term 3, for enrolment in the following school year.”

The school will receive *pro rata* government funding for your part-time student if you enrol your part-timer by the February school census date (the 3rd Friday of first term). If you try to enrol later than this date, the school will not receive government funding for your child and ***might*** be less willing to accept your enrolment at that time.

If you experience resistance from a school when you enquire about part time enrolment, it would be worth contacting the Education Registrar (registrar@oer.tas.gov.au), who may be able to speak to a school principal on your behalf. Whilst the principal has the ultimate say in this, the Registrar may be able to exert some positive influence for you.

Home educated students who are planning to transition to full-time schooling in the next calendar year, can apply for more than 2 days per week of part-time school enrolment.

1.3 Does home educating mean that my kids have to be doing formal learning at home from 9am to 3pm every school day?

No. Home education is more flexible than school and each family sets their own schedule.

Home educated children and their parents are often out and about in the community during school hours. They may be involved in a range of group excursions or other out-of-home family or educational activities during this time. Children’s learning is not restricted to school times and your home education program can include activities that occur in the evenings, on weekends or during school holiday periods. As you embark on your home education journey, you will find rhythms that work for your family. You will also find that these rhythms are likely to change over time as you and your children grow and learn together.

The *Tasmanian Education Act 2016* recognizes that home education is not restricted to learning that happens only from the home address or within typical school hours. The home education program can include “*some education, such as mentoring, tuition, activities and excursions, by persons other than the parent who is to provide the home education but is to ensure that education is provided primarily by the parent*” (Section 67.7a)

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1.4 What about socialisation? How can I connect with other home educating families?

One of the biggest misconceptions about home educated children is that they are socially isolated and have little opportunity for interaction with other children. This idea may be a hangover from the days when home education was a very rare or fringe activity. In recent years there has been an explosion in the number of home educated children in Australia and there are now many active home education groups and informal co-ops throughout Australia, including many in Tasmania.

Whilst every home educating family is different, in most cases, home educated children are very actively involved in a wide range of activities in their community. In fact, home education provides the added advantage of facilitating vertical socialisation (that is socialisation across the age span from young children to adults of varying ages). Home educated children tend to be comfortable with people of all ages and are often very inclusive in their play.

Many home educators actually report that the challenge for them is not that they lack opportunities for social interaction, but that they have so many options available that they need to be selective in order to preserve enough time each week for restful home days and more formal home-based learning activities.

The Home Education Association can be a valuable point of contact for home educators seeking to connect with others in their local area or via the internet.

There are many online home education communities, websites and blogs that home educators can access. The HEA website (www.hea.edu.au) lists a number of [Tasmanian-based Facebook groups](#) which allow home educators to exchange information about one-off events or ongoing activities that local home educators have organised. If your favourite Facebook group is not yet listed on the HEA website, ask the administrator of your group to email contact@hea.edu.au requesting that your group be listed along with the other Tasmanian Facebook groups.

Depending on where you live, there may be a range of different types of local or regional meet-up groups available: some groups are open to all and operate on a casual ‘drop in or out when you like’ basis; others are private groups that operate by invitation only and may consist of just a few families meeting together for regular play or learning opportunities.

Some groups meet in public places like parks or museums; some hire a community hall and share the costs; other groups just meet in members’ homes. Different groups will have differing goals; there are groups which meet primarily for social interaction and there are groups which form to allow children to explore topics of mutual interest such as science,

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robotics, gardening, art-making, poetry-writing, sport or drama. Some groups may get together to facilitate learning experiences that accord with a specific philosophical approach to education - such as Steiner or Montessori groups. Often, families are involved in more than one group. Since all these groups are run by home educators on a voluntary basis they tend to continue for only as long as they satisfy a mutual need.

Sometimes new home educators find that it takes time to establish connections within the home education community. This can be more challenging for families with teenagers as the pool of home educated students in this age group is often smaller (or the teenagers are busy independently pursuing their own learning interests and might not attend the local meet-up group). Over the span of a home education journey, home educators may be involved in a progression of different groups, whilst also developing friendships that will extend beyond their group activities. You may find that your level of group involvement changes over time, depending on your style of home education and your children’s developmental needs. Families taking a more “school at home” approach, for example, may restrict the number of group activities they engage in each week in order to focus on their formal learning. Sometimes families with several children will be less available for play dates because their older children need more time at home to pursue their learning projects. Different families prioritise their time in different ways and it is helpful to understand and respect this and not to take it too personally if another family is busy home educating when you want to see more of them!

If it is difficult to locate a group, consider taking the initiative to start a new group yourself. Usually, there are many other home educators with a similar need to connect just waiting for someone to take a lead. However, it is worth remembering that it is easier to get something off the ground if you can find at least one other person with a similar interest in the outcome, to work with you. The most successful and sustainable groups tend to be those that begin with a small core group of families who are committed to getting something started and have a clear idea about their goals. It might be beneficial to start with a few one-off events, brainstorming sessions or excursions to get the word out and to further clarify your expectations. The HEA offers insurance cover to members who organise home education events and group activities. You can access the HEA event coordinators’ kit and insurance information on the [HEA website](#).

1.5 What are the different organisations associated with home education in Tasmania? What does each do?

You will come across three main home education organisations operating in Tasmania:

- [The Office of Education Registrar \(OER\)](#)
- [The Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council \(THEAC\)](#)

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- [The Home Education Association \(HEA\)](#)
- Note: some Tasmanian home educators are also members of the Victorian-based [Home Education Network \(HEN\)](#).

What are the different organisations associated with home education in Tasmania?

Home Education Association (HEA)

An independent, national, non-profit, volunteer-run association.

- Upholds the principle that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children
- encourages and promotes home education in Australia
- provides advocacy and support for families undergoing registration
- encourages and promotes home education networks
- respects the diversity of philosophies and methods used by home educators
- supports home education events and activities
- funds insurance cover for members who organise events and for work experience students
- organises subscription discounts
- responds to enquiries from media and academia
- lobbies government to protect the freedoms enjoyed by home educators

www.hea.edu.au

Official government bodies involved in the registration of home educators in Tasmania

Office of Education Registrar (OER)

- Government body responsible for registering home educators.
- Independent of the Department of Education. Reports to the Minister of Education rather than to the Secretary of the Department of Education.
- Also, responsible for registering non-government schools and overseeing the compulsory conferencing and mediation process for school truants.
- See www.oer.tas.gov.au

Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC)

- Advisory body appointed by the Minister of Education.
- Tasked with advising the Registrar and Minister on home education.
- Reviews home educators' applications to home educate and provides advice to the Registrar on these.
- Is a point of contact for other agencies and the public.
- THEAC's membership is drawn from the home education community and the broader community, with 1 representative from the Department of Education.
- See www.theac.tas.gov.au

2. Information about the registration process in TASMANIA

Here are some answers to common questions people ask about registering in Tasmania. Further information can be obtained from the [Office of the Education Registrar](#).

2.1 At what age is my child required to be registered for home education?

The registration requirement begins the year in which your child is 5 years old on 1st January of that year. This would be their prep year in a Tasmanian school. If you are planning to home educate a prep-aged child from the beginning of the next school year, you will need to submit your registration application in November of the current year. (Eg. for those planning to start in 2018, get your application in by the last week of November, 2017). Contact the Office of Education Registrar (Phone 03 6165 6135 or email registrar@oer.tas.gov.au) for more specific information about dates.

2.2 How do I register?

You have to put together a separate home education program for each child. Every year you will need to submit a new program to the Office of the Education Registrar for approval. The official name for your program is a “**H**ome **E**ducation **S**ummary and **P**rogram” or **HESP**. Templates and Guidelines for completing a HESP are available from the [Office of the Education Registrar](#).

2.3 Do I have to follow the Australian curriculum?

No. In fact, under the Tasmanian *Education Regulations 2017*, you are not bound to any particular curriculum at all.

What you **do** need to show in your HESP, is how you will address the standards for approved home education programs that are outlined in *Schedule 1 of the [Education Regulations 2017](#)*

One of the great advantages of home education is the ability to tailor the education to the individual needs and interests of your child. Whilst this is important for all children, it is particularly necessary if your child has a learning difficulty, disability, medical or psychological condition or is gifted in particular areas. For this reason, the first standard you will see on the template for writing your Home Education Summary and Program (HESP), is about diverse learning needs. If your child has a diverse learning need, this is where you would discuss how you will tailor your home education program to accommodate their individual needs and say what, if any, special support services you have accessed or will access to help address these needs. When your program is assessed,

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your response to the other standards will be viewed in light of the diverse learning needs you have identified in your child.

(See below for more information on these standards and how to write about them in your program).

2.4 What is the maximum length of time for which registration can be granted?

You can be granted full or conditional registration for periods of **up to one year** at a time.

2.5 What standards will be used to assess my home education program?

There are ten standards that you need to address. When you are putting together your HESP make sure that these standards form **bold headings** in your document and make sure you address each one comprehensively. An easy way to do this is to type your responses to each standard directly into the Word or pdf templates provided on the website of the [Office of the Education Registrar](#).

The ten standards your program will be assessed against are:

- **Diverse Learning Needs:** this applies only to children who have learning difficulties, medical conditions, psychological conditions or giftedness and who, therefore, may require extra support or special consideration when the student’s program and progress is evaluated. If your child does not have diverse learning needs, you can just note that this standard is not relevant for your child.
- **Research / [Provision of education by a suitable person]:** this is to check that you are well-informed about home education and have a pretty good idea of the responsibility you are taking on in home educating your own children. The registration officers will want to know about educational resources you have looked into, what educational philosophies you have read about (some of these are listed under the Pedagogy Standard below) and where you have sourced information about home education. You can include websites accessed; books, blogs and articles you have read; conversations you have had with home educators; and home education groups or communities you have connected with, either in-person or online. You can even list your membership of the Home Education Association [here](#).
- **Pedagogy:** basically this refers to the method, philosophy or style of education you plan to follow and specific examples of how you will go about this. Different home educators follow different educational styles. *A few examples* of these different approaches are: natural learning, unschooling, Montessori, Steiner, Charlotte Mason, Accelerated Christian Education, classical education, unit or theme-based studies, curriculum-based learning or an eclectic mix of these. Some families choose a traditional “school at home” type model. You may even find yourself using a somewhat different approach for each child. There are lots of websites, blogs and books you can access to help you work out what educational style will best suit you and your family.

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- **Literacy:** show how your child’s literacy skills will be developed through their learning environment and through activities/resources. This is where you would discuss the types of literature, other texts and information technology you will be sharing with your child. List any curriculum materials or other resources you plan to use. If your child is going to be part of a book club, writing group, coding group, speech and drama class, or something similar, you could also note that here.
- **Numeracy:** explain how your child’s numeracy skills will be developed through their learning environment and through activities/resources. Discuss what you will do to ensure that their mathematical thinking skills will be stimulated and nurtured. List any curriculum materials you plan to use and say what resources your child will have available. This could include: private tutors, software packages, online programs, tape measures, weighing scales, measuring jugs, calculators, games, puzzles, graph paper, compass and protractor sets, base ten blocks, counters, beads, dice, spinners...
- **Range of Learning Areas:** outline any other learning areas your child will be engaged in. This includes other academic subject areas, practical learning and extracurricular activities. Some of these might be: science, robotics, computer coding, gardening/horticulture, ice-skating, hockey, horse-riding, martial arts, geography, history, psychology, a wildlife carer’s course, life-saving, art, music, dance, drama, circus skills,... List any resources your child will use and mention any relevant clubs, activities or excursions your child has, or will, participate in to support their learning in these subject areas.
- **Wellbeing/[Education relating to safety, health and wellbeing]:** the registration officers will want to see how your child will learn about safety, health and wellbeing. This can include conversations you have with your child about hygiene, fire safety, growth and development, what to do in an emergency, what constitutes safe touch, making healthy food choices, developing fitness routines, and so on. It can also include formal learning programs such as working through a health and wellbeing book, participating in nutrition or cooking classes, attending a self-defence/martial arts class, volunteering with St John’s ambulance... Just make sure you say how your child will learn about each of the elements in this standard - that is, safety, health AND wellbeing and check that you have considered the mental, emotional and physical aspects.
- **Interpersonal skills/[Providing for the development of interpersonal skills]:** you need to show how your child will: be provided with opportunities to form and maintain friendships; learn to communicate respectfully; and be connected to their community (not isolated). Include any home education groups you plan to attend as well as other regular social, sporting, hobby or community groups in which your child will be involved. Consider: scouts, guides, drama or dance classes, church or other religious groups, sailing clubs, horse riding groups, robotics clubs, martial arts dojos, extended family gatherings, volunteering opportunities, part time school enrolment, opportunities to talk with librarians, shop-keepers and so on.
- **Future Directions:** this refers to life pathways planning for children aged 13+. Show how you are supporting your teenager to prepare for life after home education. Consider work experience, careers expos, mentoring opportunities, attending TAFE and university open days, conversations your teenager has with various adults about their jobs or

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businesses, internet research.... Some older home educated students do Open University or TAFE subjects or the equivalent of school-based apprenticeships as part of their home education program and you could write about those under this heading, too. For teenagers with disabilities or other diverse needs, future directions planning will naturally need to take account of the individual’s specific needs. You could discuss how you are providing appropriate assistance to enable your teenager to live with increasing independence as they approach adulthood. In some cases, the focus might be more on developing basic care skills and researching future options for independent/assisted living arrangements in the community if desired.

- **Evaluation:** say how you will monitor and record your child’s progress. There are lots of easy ways to do this. For the early years, this might be as simple as recording and reflecting on your observations of your child’s learning and the conversations you have had with your child. In your reflections, you could discuss what you have discovered about your child’s learning and how you have helped your child to consolidate, reconceptualise or extend this learning over time. If your child is using work books or curriculum materials, you can say that you will note how they progress through these. Many home educators use online programs like ABC Reading Eggs or Mathsonline, which include regular quizzes. Some of these programs issue certificates for successful completion of each level. Some home educators organise for their child to sit the NAPLAN tests or to participate in other academic competitions for which they can receive certificates of achievement. You might even get older children to keep a learning journal or blog to reflect on their own educational progress. It is probably worth listing a *range of ways* that you will evaluate your child’s progress to show that you have really thought about this. In summarising a previous year’s home education, you might want to say how your evaluation of your child’s progress has led you to modify your program in specific ways (give examples).

When you write your HESP for your second or subsequent years of home education, you will need to include both a **summary section** and a **planning section** under the standards for Literacy, Numeracy, Range of Other Learning Areas, Wellbeing, Interpersonal Skills and Evaluation. Some home educators may also need to do this for the Diverse Learning Needs and Future Directions standards, where applicable.

Ongoing home educators still need to address the Research and Pedagogy Standards every year. Think about this as a way of tracking your own “professional development” as a home educator. Your approach to home education is likely to develop and change with experience. Most home educators become more relaxed and less formal in their approach as they gain experience and confidence.

These standards for the assessment of home education programs were developed in 2016 by THEAC in consultation with the home education community. The standards form the part of the [Education Regulations 2017](#). They are used by the registration officers, THEAC and the Registrar to help assess whether your home education program should be

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approved for registration. By assessing your program against these standards, the registration officers and THEAC are effectively assessing your capacity as a parent to provide an appropriate education. Whilst the registration officers are interested in what your children are learning and doing, the primary emphasis of Tasmania’s registration system is to make sure that you have the capacity to take full responsibility for your child’s education.

2.6 What happens after I submit my program to the Registrar’s office?

A registration officer from the Office of the Education Registrar will review your proposed home education program and will confer with two members of the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council [THEAC] before granting you **provisional registration** to commence home educating. Sometimes, a registration officer may ask you for additional information or clarification about your proposed program or about your child, before provisional registration can be granted.

2.7 When can I start home educating?

You can legally commence home educating as soon as you receive notification that you have been granted **provisional registration**. You can expect to wait up to 3 weeks from the time you submit your HESP to when you get your provisional registration.

2.8 My child is having a really tough time at school. What if I need to pull them out right NOW?

You are not alone. This is a fairly common situation.

From a legal perspective, home education can only commence from the date that provisional registration is approved. However, situations can arise that lead us, as parents, to believe that it is in the **best interests of our child** to remove them from school immediately. When a child has experienced severe or repeated bullying at school or has received inadequate support for a disability or other special need, or simply disengaged from learning, you may feel that it is imperative to take immediate action rather than waiting for the provisional registration required to legally commence home education.

If you are in this situation, it is important to understand that schools are required to follow up any unexplained non-attendance of students and are empowered to contact Child Safety Services to notify of suspected educational neglect if students are repeatedly absent without explanation.

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Some families have found that obtaining a medical certificate explaining their child’s absence will satisfy a school and relieve parents of the burden of daily phone calls from the school office whilst awaiting provisional registration of their home education program.

If you are worried about keeping your child at school until provisional registration is granted, the best course of action is to **seek advice and assistance from the Education Registrar**. The Registrar has indicated that, in many urgent cases, the application process could be expedited. Once you have submitted your Home Education Summary and Program, the Registrar or a registration officer, may be able to ask your child’s school to hold off on calling you about your child’s non-attendance whilst your application is in progress. Then, after your provisional registration is approved, the registration officer will organise a time to meet with you to see how you are going with your program and to progress the registration further (this is the “registration visit”).

2.9 Will the registration officers want to see me or my child in person?

Yes.

You can start home educating as soon as your provisional registration is granted. However, you won’t be fully registered until after you have met with a registration officer. The registration officer will talk to you and your child(ren) about how your home education program is working for you. They will look at the resources you are using, and want to see what each child has been making/doing. (Read more about what to expect from your registration visit below).

2.10 What recordkeeping am I required to do?

There are many acceptable ways of recording what your child is learning. Keeping samples of work, a diary, photos of activities, library borrowing records, lists of documentaries watched or books read, tickets to events, theatre programs etc are all ways of keeping records. Many families do a combination of these.

Some families write blogs and use this as part of their record keeping. Other home educators keep daily journals or weekly overviews of what they do. Journals may be in hard copy or digital form. One way to create a portable digital record is to use an app such as Evernote, which allows you to make entries into a single account from multiple devices such as a smartphone, tablet or computer. This has several advantages: you can create updates “on the go” wherever you are and can include both photos and notes. The premium version can annotate PDF files, search Office docs and attachments such as Word or Excel and allows you to forward emails into Evernote.

You can also keep portfolios of the children’s art, writing, nature projects and so on. If you are following a curriculum-based approach, the registration officer may also want to see any work books your children have completed work in.

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Keep any certificates, ribbons, medals or statements of achievement that your child has received.

It is important to choose an approach that works for you and that also provides sufficient evidence to satisfy the registration officer that you are doing what you set out to do in your program (with appropriate accommodations to your children’s individual learning needs).

Your record keeping can be a way of celebrating your child’s achievements and identifying their strengths as well as revealing areas that may require more development. If you create a system that is easy for you to keep up to date, it will make writing your next Home Education Summary and Program (HESP) much easier. Not only that; but as you look back through the history you keep of your child’s learning, new pathways of enquiry may occur to you and help to inform the future direction of your program.

2.11 How do I go about planning?

There are probably as many answers to this question as there are home educators. A lot depends on your educational philosophy. Natural learners or unschoolers may not do much detailed forward planning at all, apart from considering a range of experiences to which they would like to expose their children. The children’s interests and passions would be their guide. Some home educators plan around themes or units of work, which may last days or weeks. Others may simply allow their child to work through curriculum materials at their own developmental level and pace.

There are a variety of planning aids available on home education websites, which you may find useful. Some popular Australian home education websites include:

- Beverley Paine’s [The Educating Parent](#)
- Michelle Morrow’s [Homeschooling Downunder](#)
- To find links to a range of other Australian home education websites, go to [Aussie Educator](#)

Remember, whatever planning method you choose, make sure it works for you. Adapt it for your own family. Be flexible. Consider whether the program that you are planning in your HESP is realistically sustainable and mostly enjoyable for you and your child. Even home educators who generally like a very structured schedule, can find that life as a home educator is more sane and balanced if they allocate one day or part of a day each week, for more relaxed activities, independent projects, or just catching up on a week’s house work and other tasks.

You can learn a lot from other home educators’ experiences in this area. A bit of research in the form of reading books or blogs on home education and talking to your registration officer or to more experienced home educators in your local network or online forum, may save you time and money that you might otherwise waste on trying out resources that are not suitable and that you won’t end up using.

2.12 What are the registration officers like? Should I be nervous about my registration visit?

Relax! Most Tasmanian home educators report feeling very encouraged and reassured by their registration visit. The current registration officers in Tasmania have a good understanding of home education and all come from a home education background themselves. Historically, Tasmania’s monitoring/registration officers have been highly regarded by home educators and children alike.¹

Although the registration officer’s job is to assess the implementation of your home education program, they are also there to offer support. Make the most of your time with your registration officer by asking them any questions you have about home education. Your registration officer is likely to be able to share a wealth of information with you about useful resources, local home education groups, styles of learning and educating, and how to access specialized education opportunities (such as school-based apprenticeships).

You may notice that the registration officer looks through your records and your child’s portfolio of work very thoroughly, and may engage your child in conversation about their learning projects and hobbies. This is done to give the registration officer a better picture of how your program works in reality. Information gathered this way can further support your application, particularly if your HESP doesn’t do full justice to what your family does in practice.

2.13 Do I have to let the registration officers come into my home?

No. The registration officers can only come into your house if you give them permission. The *Tasmanian Education Act 2016* enables the registration officer, if permitted entry by the home education applicant, to view the part of your premises and any equipment or resources that will be used for home education purposes.

In some cases, the registration visit can be conducted away from the family home – for example, at the Hobart or Launceston office of the Education Registrar, or by

¹ The three registration officers employed at the time of writing this document (Oct. 2017) all have home education backgrounds. They have recently increased their hours of work so that two are now working full-time and one is working four days per week. A new part-time registration officer is likely to be employed for the south, but there is no definite time frame for this at present. If the positive ethos demonstrated by the new Office of Education Registrar is any indication, home educators have good grounds for cautious optimism about the selection of registration officers in the foreseeable future. However, should any difficulties with registration officers arise, the Home Education Association (HEA) is here to help. Please contact tasmania@hea.edu.au if you need assistance in relation to your registration visit.

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teleconference if your family is travelling for an extended period. (However, the teleconference option cannot be repeated in the subsequent year and the Registrar can ask you for proof of Tasmanian residency).

2.14 When can I expect a visit from a registration officer?

You will receive a phone call from the registration officer to arrange a time for your registration visit. The registration officer will confirm this appointment by email and will provide you with information about the visit. The time-frame between the granting of provisional registration and the actual registration visit, may vary depending on your family’s situation, the ages of your children and your previous home education experience (for example, with another child). New families may be given 2 to 3 months to establish a rhythm before the registration officer makes their first visit, but the visit can be sooner if the family requires extra support or if they indicate a preference for an earlier visit.

2.15 What does the registration officer put in their report and who gets to see it?

After your registration visit, the registration officer makes a report to the Registrar which includes:

- a summary of the visit,
- an assessment of the application and proposed home education program against the standards prescribed by the regulations for approved home education programs
- any other information the registration officer considers relevant
- recommendations relating to whether the application be granted, whether the proposed home education program be amended and then be granted, and whether any grant of the application be subject to conditions.

You will get a copy of the registration report when you receive a letter approving your registration. The Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council, THEAC, will also be sent a copy of the report if it relates to a first-time application for a given child, or if the Registrar has any concerns about your program and would like THEAC to provide some feedback on it.

The Registrar will also choose a random sampling of already-approved HESPs and reports for THEAC to audit on a monthly basis.

2.16 What role does THEAC play in assessing my application?

From 1993 until July 2017, THEAC managed home education registration on behalf of the Minister. Under the *Tasmanian Education Act 2016*, the registration process is now overseen by the Office of the Education Registrar, but THEAC retains the power to check

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and advise on all applications for home education registration or renewal. THEAC can also read and comment on the registration officers’ reports to the Registrar.

In practice, it appears at this stage that THEAC will *mainly* focus its time on looking over first-time applications. Additionally, all HESPs which registration officers assess as not satisfying the required standards, will be referred to THEAC for further deliberation and comment. It is likely that THEAC will also request to see a 10% sampling of other (already approved) HESPs for quick review. This will ensure that THEAC members have the opportunity to see the full range of HESPs - not just the “weaker” ones or those submitted by new home educators. It will give council members a better context for decision-making.

The presence of home educators on THEAC ensures that a home education perspective is valued and included in the appraisal process. In consideration of home educators’ right to privacy, care is taken to distribute the workload of reading HESPs in such a way as to *minimize* the chance that your HESP will be read by a home educator that you know on THEAC. However, some HESPs will still need to be seen and discussed by the whole of the Council.

2.17 How can I get help with my application?

The Home Education Association (HEA) is here to help. You can also ask your registration officer to help you by clarifying what is expected, suggesting resources which may be useful to you or providing other information. The registration officer may also be able to put you in touch with members of the Home Education Association (HEA) or with other experienced home educators who they believe will be able to help you.

Local home educators from the HEA (TAS) group may be able to connect with you via phone, email or teleconference to give you pointers on writing a Home Education Summary and Program (HESP) or on other aspects of the registration process.

If you would like a support person to be present during your registration visit, contact tasmania@hea.edu.au to see if there is an HEA volunteer supporter available in your area. Home educators in other states where this service has been available for longer, have found that having a support person present helped them feel more relaxed, gave them someone to debrief with after the registration visit, and also helped clarify what the registration officer wanted to hear from the home educator.

You can connect with the HEA by:

- visiting our website: www.hea.edu.au
- Visiting our Facebook page: [Home Education Association - HEA in Tasmania](#).

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- Emailing the HEA (TAS) committee at tasmania@hea.edu.au
- Emailing the national administration at: contact@hea.edu.au

You will also find that the home education community in Tasmania is very willing to offer you encouragement and to share their own experience of navigating the registration process. There are many local meet-up groups and Facebook groups where home educators can ask questions and exchange information. Some of these are listed on the Tasmanian section of the HEA website. See: [here](#).

2.18 How can I be sure that the registration process is fair?

The process used to assess your program is very thorough and includes several checks and balances. The decision is not simply in the hands of one person. Input is sought from THEAC and from at least one registration officer before the Registrar makes their determination.

Sometimes, before a registration officer writes their report, they might ask you to send them more information so that they can get a clearer picture of your proposed home education program. They will also visit you to see how the home education program you have described in your HESP is working in practice. Registration officers will take their time, ask questions, listen and get to know your children and their interests. They also usually give *you* the opportunity to ask them questions. Due consideration is meant to be given for any special needs your child may have. Only after this extensive effort to understand and flesh out how your home education program is working, will the registration officer make their written report to the Registrar.

If the registration officer has reservations about recommending that your program be registered, they will send your HESP and their report to THEAC for further consideration. If the Registrar can see from the reports received from both THEAC and the registration officer, that there are still significant gaps in your home education program, the Registrar is likely to send a ***second registration officer*** to visit your family to obtain another perspective.

After considering all the reports from the registration officers and THEAC, the Registrar has the discretion to:

1. approve registration
2. refuse registration
3. amend a program and then approve it, or
4. grant conditional registration for a limited period of time, during which the applicant needs to make efforts to address the gaps or weaknesses that have been identified in their program.

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Discussions between the Registrar and HEA representatives in May 2017 indicated that the Registrar intends to take an enabling and supportive approach to the registration process with the emphasis on helping families to reach the required standard, rather than rejecting outright those applications which do not initially meet the standards.

2.19 What can I do if registration is not granted?

Sometimes home educators misunderstand a request for more information and assume that their application has been rejected when in fact, the registration officer may simply be seeking a more complete understanding of the proposed home education program before they can make a valid appraisal of the application.

However, if the Registrar really has determined that your application to home educate should be denied, the ***Registrar is required to provide you with all the reports*** associated with this decision and to give you ***28 days to show reason why your application should not be rejected.***

The Registrar told HEA representatives in May 2017 that the decision to deny registration would only be taken after seeking advice from THEAC and obtaining an additional report from a second registration officer. The Registrar also seemed open to the possibility of utilising independent conciliation and mediation conferencing as a way of resolving conflict or misunderstandings about a registration decision made by the Registrar.

All decisions made by the Education Registrar can be appealed in the Magistrate’s Court, (Administrative Appeals Division).

If you believe that you might be refused registration, you can approach the HEA for support. To request assistance please email the Tasmanian HEA group (tasmania@hea.edu.au) and copy the email to the national HEA administration team (contact@hea.edu.au).

The HEA may be able to help in a range of ways. This may include:

- answering your questions via email, phone or teleconference
- contacting the Registrar to make requests or clarify information on your behalf, if you give us permission to do so
- possibly providing a volunteer support person to attend your registration visit if you think this would help
- possibly providing a volunteer HEA representative to accompany you to meetings or conciliation conferences with the Registrar or registration officer.

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(The Registrar has commented that an independent advocate from the HEA would be welcome at visits and meetings in these instances.)

Please remember that the HEA is a **volunteer** organisation made up of home educators balancing the needs of their own children with their commitment to serving the broader home education community. Whilst every effort will be made to respond to members’ requests, there may be times when the HEA is unable to provide local volunteers to attend meetings or registration visits.

2.20 When should registered home educators lodge their next HESP?

The Education Act says that a new HESP should be submitted to the Registrar’s office in the 15 to 12 week window **before** the existing registration period has expired. Advice from the Registrar’s Office says that the 15/12 week time frame will be gradually phased in over the second half of 2017. Home educators whose period of registration ends prior to February 2018 can expect a letter from the Registrar’s Office letting them know when their HESP is due; the 12/15 window will not apply to them.

When the 15/12 week notification system has been fully set up, home educators can expect to receive an email prompt and a letter in the mail to alert them 15 weeks prior to the expiration of their registration period that their new HESPs will be shortly due. A further reminder will be issued at 12 weeks. (It is anticipated that this will apply to home educators whose current registration period expires in or after February 2018. Be patient. The system is new and the details are still being worked out)

2.21 Can I alter my home education program part way through a registration period?

Yes, you can alter your home education program during your registration period. However, major amendments need to be approved by the Registrar. Major amendments include:

- a change in which parent is delivering the program
- a change in pedagogy (for example, from a curriculum-based approach to an unschooling approach)
- a change to or from part-time school enrolment.

Minor changes, like a change in maths text book or a change from one phonics curriculum to another, do not need prior approval by the Registrar, but you should make mention of this in your next HESP.

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If you are uncertain about whether your proposed amendment would be considered minor or major, contact your registration officer.

3. Programs, certificates, tests and other opportunities available to home educated children in Tasmania

3.1 Will my children have to do NAPLAN or other tests?

No! Home educated students in Tasmania are **not** required to sit the NAPLAN tests. However, if you would like your children to do NAPLAN, you should talk to your registration officer or contact the Registrar.

Some home educated students also opt to participate in other academic competitions such as the [Australian Mathematics Competition](#) or the ICAS exams run by the UNSW. To find out about other competitions in Australia go to [Aussie Educator](#).

The Registrar’s office may be able to provide venues and supervision for home educated children sitting NAPLAN and other tests.

3.2 Can my home educated child participate in work experience?

Yes. Home educated teens and young people are encouraged to participate in work experience and can obtain insurance cover for this either through the Office of the Education Registrar, or as one of the membership benefits of joining the HEA. Home educated students and their families are responsible for organizing their own work experience placements. The HEA’s volunteer workers’ insurance covers children from the age of 10 years.

3.3 Can my home educated teenager participate in an apprenticeship or workplace training as part of their home education program?

Yes. Home educated teenagers in Tasmania have access to the equivalent of school-based apprenticeships and should discuss this option with their registration officer if interested. The traineeship would need to be written into your home education program and approved by the Registrar.

3.4 Can my child get a Year 10 or 12 Certificate when they graduate from home education?

Yes, but these are different to the certificates issued by the Department of Education.

The Registrar of Education can issue home educated students with a certificate showing that they have been home educated to Year 10 or Year 12. These are not certificates of

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merit or attainment, but are a legal construct that can be useful to demonstrate to other government departments (such as Centrelink) that students have legally completed a certain phase of secondary education.

3.5 Will my child be able to get into college, university or TAFE after home educating?

Many Tasmanian home educated children have gone on to successfully complete Year 11 and 12 at a secondary college and/or proceeded to university, TAFE, apprenticeships, work or other training options. Some have started their own businesses.

University entrance can be achieved in a range of ways - including for students who are home educated right through until the end of Year 12. Home educated students have been accepted into all major universities around Australia.

Whilst most states have a central university admissions centre, the University of Tasmania (UTAS) handles its own admissions. According to the [UTAS website](#), “Applicants who have followed the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum, other non-standard curriculum and home schooled students will be individually assessed and may meet GER [General Entry Requirements]” for undergraduate degree programs.

Tasmanian home educated students wishing to apply for entrance to universities in other states should explore the non-Year 12 application pathways which are usually targeted at mature age students. Younger applicants with a home education background can sometimes gain access to degree courses via this route despite the minimum age requirements that might be listed. What it takes is being proactive - researching and comparing courses, contacting university staff, attending open days, finding out about prerequisite learning areas to cover, and persistently asking universities about alternative entry pathways for home education graduates.

Whether applying to enter UTAS or another university via a non-standard route, home educated students will need to be able to find ways of demonstrating their aptitude and preparedness for academic study in the relevant discipline area. There are many creative ways that home educated students can do this ranging from:

- completing Open University or TAFE units (possibly as part of their home education program. Open University subjects have no minimum age requirement and students as young as 11 have studied them)
- achieving merit awards in reputable academic competitions (eg. the [Australian National Chemistry Quiz](#) or the [Australian Mathematics Competition](#). For information about a range of other individual and team competitions go to [Aussie Educator](#))
- putting together a portfolio of their created works (eg. poetry, essays, stories, software apps, robotics and science projects)

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- providing an account of any experiences that demonstrate maturity, independence, leadership or other character attributes that favour successful transition to university life (this has been a significant swaying factor in some home education graduates’ successful applications to enter university)
- attending auditions or interviews where these apply
- completing a bridging course
- sitting the [Special Entry Admissions Test \(STAT\)](#) administered by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) - ACER also creates a number of other assessment instruments that home educators may wish to investigate
- sitting for the [The American Scholastic Aptitude Tests \(SAT\)](#)

Home education generally fosters self-motivation, the ability to learn independently and self-awareness (being in touch with one’s passions and being aware of one’s strengths and weaknesses). These attributes are essential for successful university study and can be used as selling points on your home educated student’s entrance application.

The University of Tasmania offers a [Bachelor of General Studies](#) for students who either haven’t met the general entry requirements or want a more supported entry to tertiary study. This program includes preparatory units and faculty-based foundation units in various disciplines. Depending on their results and units completed, students are able to articulate into other Bachelor degrees at the end of each semester. As of 2018, this course may instead be offered as a Diploma of University Studies.

For adult learners who do not feel sufficiently prepared to go straight into a degree program UTAS offers a 1-year [University Preparation Program \(UPP\)](#) which can also be completed part time. There are no formal entry requirements for the UPP and, potentially, home educated students could access this program as a stepping stone to undergraduate study. Study units successfully completed in the University Preparation Program may be eligible for credit into the Bachelor of General Studies Foundation Year Pathway at UTAS.

For more information about university entry check out this post by the [Home Education Network](#).

Of course, university study is not the only measure of a successful life. There are many other equally valid and exciting options for home education graduates. Home education offers children the time and freedom to creatively pursue their gifts and dreams before committing years of study towards a career. Also, home educators become very adept at accessing all sorts of opportunities for their children. For example, at the 2015 Hobart Bo\$\$ Camp (a two-day intensive entrepreneur program designed for budding business champions, which brings together young people, schools, teachers and entrepreneurs to showcase alternative paths of employment) **more than half the participants were home educated students**. Some home educated students have used their participation in armed services cadet programs as a springboard to future work or training options. (Sometimes they may even receive financial assistance or have their student fees paid by the military).

4. Information about THEAC - [Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council]

4.1 What is THEAC?

THEAC is an **advisory body** consisting of members appointed by the Minister for Education. Its membership includes home educators as well as other ministerial appointees. Whilst THEAC has historically provided support to the home education community, and will continue to speak in support of individuals whose home education programs THEAC believes should be registered as a part of the application process, THEAC’s prime function is not advocacy. It is part of the government’s regulatory apparatus, advises the Office of the Education Registrar, and reports to the Minister for Education. From 1993 until July 2017, THEAC managed home education registrations on behalf of the Minister. Under the *Tasmanian Education Act 2016*, which came into effect on 10 July 2017, the management of registrations became the responsibility of the Office of the Education Registrar. However, THEAC still exists and is still involved in the registration process.

4.2 What does THEAC do?

According to the advice on the Registrar’s website, THEAC continues to be responsible for:

- Providing advice to the Registrar in relation to applications for approval of a home education program;
- Providing the Minister and the Registrar with advice in relation to home education generally;
- THEAC still provides a reference point for queries, responds to community concerns and maintains liaison with other agencies about home education.

4.3 Who can serve on THEAC? Is there a role for me on THEAC?

THEAC is always going to need home educators who are willing to volunteer their time to serve on council. THEAC plays an important role in ensuring that a home education perspective is included in the registration process and in advice given to the Registrar and the Minister of Education.

Under the *Education Act 2016*, THEAC is required to have a minimum of five and a maximum of seven members, with a majority of these members having skills in, or

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experience in or related to, home education. The Minister must also ensure that there is at least one member who is an employee or officer of the Department of Education. Before appointing a person as a member of the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council, the Minister is required to call for expressions of interest in the appointment by advertising in at least 3 Tasmanian daily newspapers. The Minister is also required to consider “the desirability of having a Council that has representatives of both sexes”.

THEAC members serve on the council in a voluntary capacity. The council’s Chair is traditionally chosen from one of the home education representatives on THEAC. Experience in recent years has shown that THEAC has more vitality and a better relationship with the home education community when the role of Chair is filled by someone knowledgeable and passionate about home education, preferably a home educator.

Any home educator who feels that they have a good understanding of home education and is willing to volunteer their time can apply for a position on THEAC as vacancies arise. Generally, THEAC members each read several HESPs per week and meet together as a whole council approximately once every five weeks. The exact time commitment is variable, depending on the intake of new HESPs and reports for review and on any other projects and priorities THEAC has at the time.

The home education community relies on having home educators willing to volunteer in this way, so, if you think you can do it - GO FOR IT.

See more on THEAC here: [Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council \(THEAC\)](#).

5. Historical perspective on the unique Tasmanian home education system

5.1 Why include a historical perspective in this document?

Insight into our history can provide a valuable context for understanding how the current home education system has evolved to be the way it is today. Registration systems are not static; there will always be changes ahead as government personnel come and go and political and popular agendas shift. Each new generation of home educators will need to carry on the work of protecting the freedoms they enjoy. It is easier to do this from a position of knowledge, including a knowledge of earlier research and lobbying efforts. It can be very valuable to talk to those who have gone before us about their historic

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contributions to home education, but it is difficult to do this without any written history. Home educators move on and knowledge is easily lost with them.

This document makes no claim to being a comprehensive history of home education in Tasmania; it offers a brief overview in the hope that it will be a useful starting place for home educators who are interested in the topic. The main purpose here is to attempt to identify the general trajectory of changes that have occurred in the Tasmanian home education system and to invite reflection on some of the factors that have played into those changes. As the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council (THEAC) has been the central player in Tasmania’s registration system throughout most of this historic period, a major focus of this discussion relates to the evolution of THEAC over the years since it was established in 1993. Whilst several former members of THEAC have contributed their reflections and/or provided constructive feedback during the creation of this document, it is an HEA document and is neither commissioned by nor endorsed by THEAC.

This historical section also includes a short outline of how the Home Education Association (HEA) supported local home educators during their lobbying efforts aimed at protecting the best of the Tasmanian registration system during 2016. The document concludes with a summary of the outcomes of home educators’ combined lobbying efforts.

Tasmania has developed a regulatory model for home education that is both more rigorous and yet, more home education friendly, than the registration systems found in most other Australian jurisdictions.

The uniqueness of the Tasmanian system exists because home educators have actively contributed to the evolution of the regulatory framework in Tasmania. Pioneer home educators like John and Camille Barratt-Peacock and Kathleen Carins, were influential in raising the profile and gaining government recognition for home education in Tasmania during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Subsequently, many home educators have influenced the development of Tasmania’s home education model both through the ongoing work of THEAC and, more recently, through the robust lobbying efforts of HEA representatives and other members of the home education community during the final stages of the Education Review in 2016.

These days most Tasmanian home educators choose to register in compliance with state government legal requirements. In fact, the compliance rate in Tasmania is significantly higher than it is in other states. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that in the early days of home education in Tasmania, even after the establishment of THEAC, there was a significant population of home educators who did not register and did not trust the government or the Department of Education. Nevertheless, these families received informal support through the dedicated efforts of home educators like John

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Barratt-Peacock. John made monthly trips to different parts of the state visiting families and exchanging information. He also produced a series of magazines and study packs for older students living in remote areas. John went on to complete the first Ph.D. on Australian Home Education at La Trobe University.

Another researcher who studied home educating families in Tasmania was the UK academic, Dr Alan Thomas. Dr Thomas’ initial focus was on child-directed learning, but he developed an interest in home education and went on to study around 100 home educating families in Tasmania and the United Kingdom. His research in Tasmania occurred between 1994 and 1996 and formed the basis for his book, “Educating Children at Home”². Dr Thomas was a guest speaker at the national home education conference which toured Australian capital and regional cities in 2007. In September 2016, one of the (now adult) children from among Dr Thomas’ case study families, formed part of the lobby team of contemporary home educators that briefed a group of MLCs at Parliament House on behalf of the home education community.

5.2 What are some of the changes THEAC has experienced during its 25 year history?

i) The creation of THEAC:

THEAC was established in 1993, as an outworking of the research and recommendations contained in the [Report of the Ministerial Working Party “Home Education in Tasmania”](#) released in October 1991. The working party was made up of:

- The Chair, Miss Alison Jacob, (Senior Superintendent, Special and Distance Education)
- Mr John Barratt-Peacock, Home educator and Facilitator of the (historic) Tasmanian Home Education Movement [THEM]
- Mrs Kathleen Carins, Home educator and Coordinator of the Australian Christian Academy (Kathleen later served on THEAC as Chairperson)
- Mrs Georgie Holderness-Roddam, Representative of a non-aligned support group for families interested in home education. Georgie went on to be one of the earliest members of THEAC
- Mr Alistair Home, Principal of the School of Distance Education
- Ms Kate Shipway, Lecturer in Special Education at the Centre for Education, University of Tasmania.

² Dr Alan Thomas’ books on home education include: “*Educating Children at Home*” (Continuum, First Published in 1998) and “*How Children Learn at Home*” (with Harriet Pattison, 2008).

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Many recommendations made in that 1991 report are still relevant today, particularly the importance of including home educators in the regulatory process. For most of its existence, the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council has included a strong representation of home educators. (At first, THEAC was made up of a total of six members all appointed by the Minister for Education: three home educators nominated from within the home education community and three representatives from the wider community. The latter typically included a Department of Education representative and, until the early 2000s, a representative from the university sector)

ii) THEAC’s initial role:

THEAC’s main role initially was to advise the Minister for Education and other agencies, as well as the general public, on matters to do with home education, which was still a new and not well understood phenomenon at that time. The initial monitoring requirements were extremely minimal and informal and mostly focussed on ensuring that families provided their children with sufficient grounding in literacy and numeracy.

iii) THEAC’s original reporting requirements:

Over the years, THEAC went through various evolutions in its operating model. In the early days, families were not required to submit a written home education program for assessment. Families would be visited by members of the Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council or by the executive officer then employed by THEAC, who would have an informal conversation with the parents about what they were doing. THEAC would then write a recommendation to the Minister for Education about whether the family should be registered.

iv) THEAC’s monitoring officers:

In 2004, the executive officer’s job was split into two: an administrative position and a part-time monitoring officer position. In 2005, a second part-time monitoring officer was employed. One monitoring officer covered the north of the state and the other covered the south. For some time, it continued to be the monitoring officers, not individual home educators, who wrote a report on how each family facilitated its children’s education.

During the early years of THEAC, the monitoring officer(s) had quite a degree of direct input into THEAC council meetings and council members themselves continued to be involved in visiting families. Over time the roles of monitoring officers and council members became more distinct from each other. By mid-2015, the number of home educating families had grown significantly and a third part-time monitoring officer was employed to visit families in the north-west region of the state.

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v) THEAC’s historic engagement with home educators and the broader community:

For a number of years, THEAC received funding for twice-yearly workshops, one in the North of the State and one in the South. Council and Staff had the opportunity to go away to a catered meeting place for 2 nights at a time to brainstorm and work together. Council members from this period report that this had great benefits in terms of team-building and facilitating harmonious communication. These extended face-to-face meetings allowed THEAC to achieve more for the home education community, too. For example, THEAC would sometimes set aside part of their 2-day retreat to host an afternoon tea inviting home educators to come and meet the council members. Sometimes THEAC even ran workshops on home education for the broader community. Dr Alan Thomas was a guest speaker at one such workshop. One home educator reminiscing about the late 1990s, spoke of the pivotal role THEAC’s community education events played in her decision to home educate; she remembers attending a one-day public forum THEAC organised. It was advertised in *The Mercury* newspaper and featured speakers representing a range of different philosophical approaches to education discussing how they home educated their own children. Such forums made home education seem an accessible, creditable and inspiring option for people considering an alternative to school education. Another way that THEAC outreached to the general community was through having stalls at events like AgFest. Until 2015, THEAC also ran information sessions for new home educators every year. For a number of years, THEAC organised a state picnic, usually held in the town of Ross.

These events allowed the home education community to get to know their council members and also helped THEAC stay connected with the community. Unfortunately, due to a combination of factors, including THEAC’s excessive workload and increased expenses, some of these events were discontinued. Low attendance rates also played a part in the demise of the state picnic.

vi) Introduction of the Family Report:

As the number of home educators grew year by year, THEAC’s workload increased and more formalised systems of accountability were required. THEAC, possibly in response to a Ministerial request, introduced the requirement for each family to write a biennial Family Report and send it to THEAC for assessment. The Family Report was to include:

- A general overview of the family’s educational philosophy, addressing:
 - the aims and purpose of the the home education program
 - a general outline of the education program, including a rough weekly schedule
 - planning and research done in preparation for home education

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(This part of the report was only required for new applicants, or where the family’s philosophy had changed since the last report.

- A discussion of:
 - the opportunities provided for:
 - the development of literacy skills
 - the development of numeracy skills
 - social interaction
 - career planning for your older children (14+)
 - strategies for evaluating your child/ren’s progress and adapting your program to meet their changing needs
- Other relevant information such as:
 - the range of other learning areas that would be part of the child/ren’s program
 - medical issues which might impact on the home education program

Once a majority of members of THEAC had read and approved the Family Report, the monitoring officer’s job was to visit the family and check that the family was doing what their Family Report said they were planning to do. Monitoring officers also provided encouragement and support to home educating families, often suggesting resources or groups that the home educator might find beneficial. After visiting a family, monitoring officers wrote a report to THEAC and THEAC would then make a recommendation to the Minister about whether the family should be granted registration to home educate. Once approved, the family would receive a letter from the Minister for Education to say that the parent’s registration as a home educator for a given child had been formally recognised.

vii) Changes to the membership makeup of THEAC:

In 2013 THEAC petitioned the then Education Minister, the Hon. Nick McKim, (part of the Labor-Green government of the day), to appoint an additional home education representative to Council to assist with the ever-increasing workload of reading Family Reports. The Minister agreed to appoint a seventh person to THEAC, but stipulated that the position should be filled by Ministerial nomination, rather than by adding another home education representative. This changed the makeup of THEAC to: 3 home education representatives nominated by the home education community and 4 ministerial nominees from the broader community. At that time, 2 of the Ministerial nominees worked for the Department of Education and a third had a background as a home educator. Around that time the number of face-to-face THEAC meetings decreased, with some of THEAC’s meetings occurring via Skype, and the involvement of monitoring officers in Council meetings was significantly minimized.

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viii) THEAC replaces the Family Report with an early version of the “HESP”:

In June 2014, THEAC made some changes to the reporting requirements; the Family Report was replaced by the *Home education summary and plan* (the original “HESP”). One of the limitations of the old Family Report system, was that home educators often wrote generically about the whole family’s program and THEAC had no easy way of assessing how the program was going to support each individual child. However, when HESPs were introduced in 2014, families were required to clearly set out how they were going to cater for each individual child. Families could either do this on one HESP or they could write a separate HESP for each child. Home Education Summary and Plans had to address:

- Pedagogy
- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Interpersonal Skills
- Future Directions (for children 13+)
- Monitoring Progress
- Research (this had to be completed for all new applications)
- Additional needs of the child (where appropriate; for example, if a child had a disability or medical issue that would impact the home education)

ix) THEAC’s involvement in the state government’s Education Review process:

When the (Liberal) state government began its Education Act Review process in 2014, around 40% of submissions to the first phase of that review (in December 2014), came from home educators, with the majority of these saying that they favoured the existing model of regulation for home education.

In early 2015, the Secretary of the Department of Education established a Stakeholder Reference Group to inform and give feedback to the process of reviewing the *Education Act, 1994*. The THEAC Chair attended all of these meetings to represent the concerns of home educators. Out of these meetings a series of Background Papers were written to take to the public to facilitate further discussion.

During the middle phase of the Education Act Review in 2015, the government organised for a number of public forums around the state. These forums provided opportunity for public discussion in response to the Background Papers relating to various aspects of the (school) education system. Topics included: “Responsibilities of Principals and Teachers”, “Starting and Leaving Ages”, “Early Entry to School”, “Enrolment and Attendance”, “Student Behaviour”, “Dress Code” and several other topics. There was no background paper specifically relating to home education. Home educators felt confident that no

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changes were in store for them and very few, if any, home educators outside of THEAC, were involved in this phase of the Education Act Review. The then Chair of THEAC (a home educator) was involved in one of the government’s working parties in 2015. THEAC was also consulted by the government and Department officials about home education when the first draft of the Education Bill was written during 2015/2016. However, since this work occurred behind the scenes and THEAC was not free to talk publicly about these potential changes during the formative period of the legislation, most home educators were unaware of what was coming. Consequently, there was a great deal of surprise and considerable alarm when the first draft of the *Tasmanian Education Act 2016* was released for feedback in March 2016 and home educators first learned about the significant changes planned for how home education registrations would be managed.

x) How an increase in the number of home educating families impacted THEAC:

THEAC’s administrative responsibilities had been increasing in the years leading up to the Education Review. There were more staff for THEAC to manage and an ever-growing number of home educating families to oversee. Considering that the Council members were all volunteers, albeit receiving a small honorarium, the demands placed on them were considerable. The home education representatives on Council also had to balance the increasing demands of their THEAC role with the needs of their own home educated children. The role of Chairperson, in particular, was very onerous, and could easily absorb several days per week of the volunteer’s time, at a cost to their own family. The Chair’s position has traditionally been held by a home educator, but with the increasingly relentless nature of the work attached to the role, it became more difficult to find home educators willing to Chair THEAC. In August 2015, the position of Chair, was (reluctantly) taken on by one of THEAC’s ministerial nominees, as no home educators were willing or able to step into the role at that point. Having a non-home educator assume the Chair’s role was less than ideal from the perspective of all members of THEAC, but did enable THEAC to continue to be able to fulfil its administrative responsibilities.

xi) Factors impacting THEAC’s capacity to connect with the home education community in 2015/2016:

Whilst Council members continued working hard throughout 2015-2016, to ensure that HESPs were read and the many other core parts of THEAC’s ongoing work continued, THEAC also experienced a number of challenges which impacted its relationship with the home education community. These challenges included: THEAC’s increased workload due to the growing number of families seeking registration to home educate; the unsustainability of continuing to carry the workload as a volunteer body; the difficulty in finding home educators willing to step into the role of Chair; and the loss of some experienced home education representatives on Council as their terms of service expired.

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All these factors coincided with the external pressure caused by the pending legislative changes, which THEAC, as the Minister’s advisory body, was unable to publicly comment upon. The result was that THEAC was overstretched and not able to communicate with the home education community during this period as much or as openly as many home educators desired. THEAC acknowledged this situation in a letter sent out to home educators on 20 April 2016.

xii) The lobbying period in 2016:

When the first draft of the new *Tasmanian Education Act* was released in March 2016, concern about the impact of the proposed legislative changes and disappointment with THEAC’s lack of communication with home educators about these, fueled seven months of energetic lobbying by home educators all around the state.

The home education community in Tasmania is diverse and diverse opinions and strong feelings were expressed, particularly in Facebook groups. It was a difficult and, at times painful, experience for many people in the home education community, irrespective of which ‘camp’ people identified with. There was disagreement about who could legitimately speak on behalf of home educators. At the beginning of this period, there was no unified state-based body to coordinate a campaign and, outside of THEAC, no-one had contact lists for all the home educators around the state. It took time to establish connections, understand the issues and work out how to respond to the proposed changes. Some local home educators approached the national Home Education Association (HEA) for support and produced a submission to the Education Act Review under the HEA’s banner. Other home educators lobbied independently. There were also some who felt disenfranchised by both THEAC and the HEA. Nevertheless, HEA members made a significant contribution to the 2016 lobbying effort, as outlined in further detail later in this document. Moreover, in the time since the Education Act was passed by parliament, HEA (TAS) has made concerted efforts to bring home educators together, by inviting participation in regular teleconferences, by providing information to home educators via email and online, and by generating new opportunities for home educators to work together to create events such as teen-focused functions, picnic get-togethers, and a state conference, tentatively planned for 2018.

xiii) THEAC’s role in establishing the Standards by which home education programs would be assessed under the new regulations:

As the lobbying heated up, THEAC recognised that many home educators were disappointed that THEAC had not informed the home education community earlier about the proposed regulatory changes and that the community wanted to be consulted on matters concerning the registration requirements. So, in the midst of the intense lobbying

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that spanned the final phase of the Education Review in 2016, whilst the draft *Tasmanian Education Act 2016* was being re-worked, THEAC organised three working parties made up of volunteer home educators, to revise the list of criteria by which home educators’ applications for registration would be assessed. THEAC then amalgamated the results of these brainstorming sessions to produce a draft set of standards for the assessment of approved home education programs and invited the home education community to give feedback on these via an online survey. THEAC used this feedback to produce its final version of the Standards, which were then incorporated with very little change into the *Education Regulations 2017*. The consultation process on the standards was initiated and driven by home education representatives on THEAC, who had the contacts and wanted to ensure that the standards were written by home educators rather than by government officials with limited experience of home education. Despite the controversy surrounding this process (it was highly contested within the home education community, with varying views on how it ought to have been conducted), it was a significant achievement by THEAC to have these standards accepted largely intact into the secondary legislation. It also demonstrates the importance of having home educators on Council. Home educators have a vested interest in ensuring that home education is a valued and achievable educational option into the future, which, in this case gave them the added drive and commitment to see the standards process through and to at least attempt a consultative process involving the home education community.

The exact origin of the new standard relating to Wellbeing during this period is difficult to trace, but is in keeping with the Tasmanian government’s [“Strong Families - Safe Kids Implementation Plan 2016-2020”](#) and [“HEALTHY TASMANIA FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN July 2016”](#). The latter has the stated goal of increasing “*student health and wellbeing through the Student Health Initiative*”³. The insertion of the wellbeing requirement in the new home education standards was widely perceived as government overreach and raised suspicion throughout much of the home education community. Many home educators felt that the initial wording of the wellbeing standard threatened parental autonomy and had overtones of a child-protection agenda. Intense lobbying by home educators saw this standard scaled back to its present form, which focuses on **education** about safety, health and wellbeing.

xiii) Changes in reporting requirements under the new legislation:

Another major change that commenced with the *Education Act 2016*, was the requirement for annual, instead of biennial, reporting by families. Additionally, from January 2017, families were required to submit a separate program for each child.

³ Tasmanian government [Fact Sheet: “Healthy Tasmania Five Year Strategic Plan”](#)

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xiv) A summary of the trends in Tasmanian home education since the formation of THEAC:

A glance through the history outlined above, shows that:

1) there has been a trend towards increased reporting requirements and greater accountability to government over time (some might describe this as increased government surveillance),

2) there has been ongoing and substantial growth in the number of families seeking to home educate. Consequently, the registration model that was established with the creation of THEAC in 1993 to cater for the approximately 98 families home educating at that time⁴ had, by 2016, become unsustainable.⁵ (By early 2016, there were more than 450 home educating families and over 900 home educated children in Tasmania),

3) the time demands associated with the role of THEAC Chair increased over the years and it became increasingly difficult to get home educators to take on this responsibility, particularly in a voluntary capacity.

Change of some sort was inevitable; the real question was how to remodel the registration system to be both sustainable and appropriately accountable, whilst retaining the best of the original Tasmanian model (its supportive nature, its independence from the Department of Education and its formal inclusion of home educators in an advisory capacity and with direct input into assessing the home education programs submitted by families seeking registration)

xv) The new Tasmanian registration system and THEAC’s place in it:

In 2016 home educators expressed a range of differing views on how the registration system should be re-structured, including various suggestions about what selection criteria and processes should be used when appointing members to THEAC. The HEA’s recommendations in regard to remodelling the registration system are on record in its May 2016 [HEA Submission to the Review of the Tasmanian Education Act](#).

In the end, the Tasmanian government went ahead with its preferred regulatory model, involving the creation of the new independent statutory Office of Education Registrar to oversee a number of functions including the registration of home educators. The new model has retained some of the flavour of the previous system by including THEAC in the

⁴ Jacobs *et al.* Report of Ministerial Working Party on Home Education in Tasmania, October 1991, p.7.

⁵ THEAC, letter to home educators, dated 20 April 2016. See https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10153736825522087&id=303521127086&substory_index=0

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Education Act 2016 (it was not protected under the previous Act, and therefore its continued existence was subject to the will of whichever Minister was in power at any given time).

As an Advisory Council, THEAC was never legally empowered to employ staff; the fact that it had done so for many years was an anomaly that was discovered during the Education Act Review that took place between 2014 and 2016. After this irregularity was identified, the government moved to transfer THEAC’s monitoring officers and administrative staff across to the public service. This occurred from September 2016, before the *Education Act 2016* was enacted by parliament. One result of this change, was that THEAC’s crippling administrative burden was partially lifted, leaving it free to focus on reviewing HESPs, providing advice to the Registrar and Minister of Education, and formulating its new priorities in the context of the changed registration system.

xvi) Home educators’ changing perceptions of the role of THEAC:

Historically, THEAC has been largely seen by the home education community as “*our body*” or “*for us*”. It has certainly made a very significant contribution over the years to ensuring that the Tasmanian registration system is a generally supportive one and that government agencies are better informed about home education than is often the experience in other Australian states. Nevertheless, the changes in THEAC over the last few years and, more recently, the restructuring of the registration system associated with the new legislation, have led some home educators to ponder, “What is THEAC now?”. One telling comment made by the Minister for Education in 2016 stated that “*THEAC is a body which was set up by past Ministers to provide advice and support to the Minister. It is not a body funded or contributed to or “owned” in any way by the community.*”⁶ Clearly, THEAC does continue to play a vital role, although perhaps not in quite the way home educators have previously supposed.

xvii) Relationships between THEAC, the Registrar and the Home Education Association (HEA) in Tasmania:

Now that the new Education Act has taken effect and the Office of Education Registrar has been established, all parties involved with home education in Tasmania have made concerted efforts to establish cordial relations and open communication channels. New processes are being established for keeping home educators as informed as possible about what to expect under the new system. The exact priorities, roles, responsibilities, boundaries and relationships between the various parties, including THEAC, the Office of Education Registrar (OER) and the new HEA (TAS) subcommittee, are still being worked out, but there has been a great deal of good will and increased openness on all sides. It is to

⁶ from private correspondence received by an HEA member in August 2016.

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be hoped that this positive and constructive ethos can be maintained into the future, especially if and when new personnel enter the scene.

xviii) The ongoing importance of THEAC:

It is imperative that home educators are made aware of the importance of considering volunteering for THEAC at some stage during their home education journey. This is particularly important now, as under the new regulatory system, THEAC’s pivotal role of reviewing the registration process, will be less visible to the general home educating community. Whereas, previously, THEAC was the “front door” for registrations in Tasmania, now all applications and enquiries will be handled by the Office of the Education Registrar. A possible consequence of this is that, as earlier waves of home educators are succeeded by a growing population of newer home educators who have less direct contact with THEAC, the significance of THEAC may recede in the consciousness of the home education community. Yet the involvement of home educators is vital to the success of THEAC and THEAC plays a legally mandated role in the oversight of home education in Tasmania.

xix) In conclusion: The advisory council needs to retain a strong presence of both current and experienced home educators in its membership so that it will be equipped to provide well-informed advice to the Registrar and to the Tasmanian Minister of Education. Having home educators at both ends of the home education journey is important because this provides a balance of long term home education experience and a living connection to the contemporary home education community.

In order to attract volunteers, THEAC will need to ensure that it creates ongoing points of contact with home educators. One way this could happen is for the HEA and THEAC to work together on some projects or events in service of the home education community.

5.2 How did the Home Education Association (HEA) work to protect home education in Tasmania during the legislative changes that occurred in 2016?

Tasmanian HEA members and representatives were key players in the home education lobby from the time the draft version of the *Tasmanian Education Act* was released in March 2016. To see some of the work the Home Education Association did on home educators’ behalf during the recent period of legislative change, look at this submission that Tasmanian HEA representatives made to the state government’s Education Review in May 2016:

13-05-2016: [HEA Submission to the Review of the Tasmanian Education Act](#)

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In addition, HEA members:

- organised 3 information sessions in April/May 2016 to inform home educators about the proposed legislative changes
- produced several detailed documents aimed at informing and updating home educators about the legislative process and about sections of the Education Act relevant to home educators, which were circulated through local Facebook groups and email lists
- met with many members of Parliament, including the Minister of Education and Premier, to explain the HEA’s concerns
- organised an open letter to the Tasmanian Minister of Education, hand-signed by 271 Tasmanian home educators and their supporters, and presented this letter to Minister Rockliff in a meeting in his Ministerial office in August 2016
- gave a briefing to a group of Members of the Legislative Council at Parliament House in September 2016 (one of the home educators involved in this briefing had been a home educated child in one of Dr Alan Thomas’ Tasmanian research families in the early 1990s)
- met with the Shadow Minister for Education on more than one occasion
- had extensive conversations by phone and in person with the Minister’s Chief of Staff and other advisors
- attended a technical briefing on the Education Act in October 2016 at which HEA representatives questioned the writers of the legislation about various clauses in the new Act and the intention behind them

The HEA’s national committee and lobby group provided invaluable mentoring and support to the Tasmanian lobbying team throughout 2016 and continues to support the HEA (TAS) subcommittee to develop a positive presence for the HEA in Tasmania.

5.3 How successful was the 2016 lobbying effort in preserving the uniqueness of the Tasmanian home education system?

Home educators certainly made their presence felt in the halls of power!

Whilst the lobbying resulted in only a few small (though significant) changes to the *Education Act* itself, the full fruits of home educators’ input and lobbying have since shown up in the wording of the *Education Regulations 2017* and in some policy decisions made by the new Education Registrar.

The regulations and the Registrar have taken into account many of the concerns raised behind the scenes by home educators on THEAC and, more publically by the HEA during the lobbying period.

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For example:

- the regulations clearly state that Tasmanian home educators are not required to adhere to any particular curriculum
- the standards for the assessment of home education programs, whilst widely disputed in the home education community during 2016, are quite unique and reflect the fact that they were written by home educators not education bureaucrats - they emphasize the parents’ responsibility for creating a rich learning environment according to their own educational philosophy, rather than focussing on a narrow assessment of the child’s progress
- very importantly, the Registrar made an executive decision upon taking office to ensure that the registration officers employed to assess non-government school registrations will be different people to the registration officers employed to assess home education applications. This is **extremely important** because home-based education is very different from the education of children in an institutional (school) environment. We need registration officers who have home education experience, or at the very least, a non-institutional learning framework, to be assessing our home education programs
- the Registrar has also supported and encouraged the existing experienced and highly valued monitoring officers to stay on as registration officers.

These positive changes were made possible by the active lobbying of Tasmanian HEA representatives and the valuable contributions made by a great many home educators, including those on THEAC, during the state government’s Education Review period.

