

Educational Freedom Home Education Research, Survey, Data Analysis and Review.

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Educational Freedom



Executive Summary

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Research and evidence regarding home education remain limited, with the perspectives of home educating parents and children frequently absent from official discourse. Drawing on statistical data from surveys, anecdotal insights from casework and discussions, and information obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, this report seeks to inform discussions and decision-making around home education.

This report is intended to serve stakeholders such as the Department for Education, Local Authority Elective Home Education (EHE) teams, policymakers, media outlets, and home educators.

About the author: Educational Freedom

Educational Freedom is a UK-based non-profit organisation established in 2013. It is dedicated to providing free support and information to home educators. The organisation has supported tens of thousands of home educators, engaged with the majority of Local Authorities (LAs), participated in government consultations, and provided information to the Department for Education.

The report:

This report includes insights from a recent survey completed by home educators about their experiences with home education and interactions with their LAs.



Notably, many home educators expressed reluctance to participate in the survey, citing a lack of confidence that their voices would be heard and respected by either their LAs or the government. This sentiment should be considered by the authorities when formulating policies and legislation, as meaningful consultation with home educators is essential.

Home educators take their responsibility to provide a suitable education very seriously, and overwhelmingly oppose further restrictions, registers, or increased involvement from LAs.

Key Findings

- Home education is often not a choice, but a last resort for many families.
- Families cited a variety of complex reasons for choosing home education.
- Even when initiated due to negative circumstances, many families reported wishing they had started home education earlier and intend to continue it.
- Home education is generally viewed as a positive experience by families.
- Unmet Special Educational Needs (SEN) were a significant factor for many families, with some feeling that schools and LAs did not adequately support their children.
- A small proportion of home educators “unknown” to the LA participated in the survey. Most respondents were active and visible within and beyond the home education community, thus belying the perceived need for a national CNiS register to include home educated children.
- Issues raised about LAs not complying with legal requirements included
 - Being “doorstepped”

- Unannounced phone calls
 - Misleading letters/emails
 - Threats
 - Unfriendly language
 - Misquoting legislation
 - Refusing EHCP
 - Not respecting the wide array of styles which home education can take, with many LAs expecting to see school being recreated at home.
- Families reported significant distress due to these LA practices, resulting in wasted time, resources, and costs to both families and LAs (and, by extension, taxpayers).

A lack of transparency was also highlighted, with many LAs misquoting legislation on their websites, in policies, and in communications. Concerns were raised about inappropriate referrals to Children's Services, often triggered by deregistration from school, though inappropriate EHE referrals were also noted. There is no evidence that home educated children are at greater risk of harm than other children, yet families feel that government actions target them unfairly.

Few LAs provide financial support, though many families would welcome assistance with exam costs. However, this support should not come at the cost of increased LA intervention. Non-financial support is also rare, but could easily be improved.

Families noted that any information or assistance from LAs was typically available only after direct engagement, which was considered unacceptable by those wishing

to limit LA involvement. Additionally, the information provided was often incorrect or out of date.

Survey respondents expressed a strong desire for home education to be recognised as a valid educational choice, rather than a problem to be solved. They called for the ability to provide suitable education for their children without excessive intervention from LAs, unwarranted invasions of privacy, or the fear of consequences such as School Attendance Orders (SAOs) or referrals to Social Services.

FOI data collected by Educational Freedom revealed discrepancies in the way LAs maintain records, with inconsistent responses to identical inquiries. Of particular concern is the categorisation of Children Missing Education (CME), with some LAs reporting large numbers while others report none. This inconsistency suggests that any proposed register of Children Not in School (CNiS) would be unlikely to achieve its intended purpose.

Additionally, FOI data indicated that some LAs misuse Section 437(1) formal notices as a coercive tactic to compel home educators to comply with demands, even when there is no concern about the education being provided. The relatively low number of SAOs issued supports the conclusion that these notices are often revoked when parents comply with unreasonable requests.

Recommendations

- A CNiS register would likely fail to identify children missing from education and would instead further stigmatise home educators in an already challenging and often hostile environment.
- Consistency in the application of existing legislation across different LAs is critical, and the government should ensure that all LAs operate within the legal framework.
- EHE staff should receive comprehensive training, including in SEN and the various styles of home education, with input from experienced home educators.
- Home educating parents prefer a hands-off approach from their LAs.
- EHE teams should provide regular newsletters or up-to-date information on their websites.
- EHE staff should ensure they offer publicly available information on home education (or where to seek advice), local resources, such as exam centres that accept external candidates.

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Background and Introduction

Educational Freedom has been a professional, not for profit, support and information service for home educators since 2013; providing free information and support to home educators in the UK through their [website](#)¹, social media accounts and via email. They provide information to various media outlets when home education is in the news. They liaise with Local Authorities² when supporting individuals or groups of home educating families, and communicate with the Department for Education (DfE) on related matters.

In previous years, Educational Freedom has taken part in government consultations regarding EHE guidance³, communicating the thoughts and fears of home educators who shared their concerns, ensuring the DfE are aware of Local Authorities acting ultra vires, and striving to communicate with MPs, Peers, and the DfE concerning policy, guidance and legislation that could affect home educators.

Educational Freedom has carried out previous research, including submitting Freedom of Information requests in order to gather accurate and up to date information about the number of known home educators in the UK, and how many School Attendance Orders (SAO) have been served. Any resulting information is

¹ www.educationalfreedom.org.uk

² Throughout this document Local Authorities may be referred to as the LA, and the LA team or person responsible for elective home education referred to as the EHE. These terms are sometimes interchangeable especially when referring to any department within an LA that could make contact re EHE.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>

shared publicly on their [website](#)⁴ and on [What do they know](#)⁵. The 2024 data can be found [here](#)⁶.

Educational Freedom are signed up and committed to the values of the Home Education Alliance, as well as having their own ethos of supporting all home educators. Recently they were one of only three UK home education services representing UK home educators at the Global Home Education conference (GHEX).

In recent months Educational Freedom has been involved in consultations and communications regarding the proposed Schools Bill and Children Not In School Register (CNiS). Since the General Election, their current aim is to provide the Labour government with extensive information from home educators to support this sector with discussions about the proposed Children's Wellbeing Bill and renewed interest in creating a Children Not In School Register

It has been noted that there is a lack of usable data and information about home education and those who home educate. Much of the previously used data came only from anecdotal sources, or small data collection efforts. This work aims to fill that gap.

Educational Freedom wishes for the voices of the home educated child and parent to be heard. They therefore devised a survey and dispersed it across their social media accounts and website. With the aim of gathering a broad array of data, covering as

⁴ www.educationalfreedom.org.uk

⁵ <https://shorturl.at/wRP8p>

⁶ <https://shorturl.at/IBIXL>

many areas of England, Wales and Scotland as possible. The 2024 survey includes data from a total of 178 LA areas. The aim is to provide statistical and further anecdotal data to aid discussions and decisions made by home education organisations and groups, Local Authorities and the DfE.

The Educational Freedom service communicates directly with tens of thousands of home educators, and reaches a wide range of others. The anecdotal information gathered in those communications is as important as the data collated from this survey. A common theme emerged from messages received by the organisation in response to the survey, that LAs or the government have broken the families' trust and that the media frequently employ negative rhetoric when discussing home education.

'Negative media rhetoric and being treated with suspicion as potential safeguarding threats (without due cause) ... creates anxiety and distrust. Excessive burden of proof upon parents/carers draws time and focus away from providing an enriching experience for our children.'

With a total of 864 responses, Educational Freedom's recent survey is one of the largest of its type. Forty-six responses were unusable (bot/spam replies, families receiving EOTIS rather than EHE, or duplications), leaving 818 usable responses. Anecdotal evidence received on support groups suggests that some home educators feel the government or LA will never act in the favour of the home educated child or family. Those of that opinion see no point responding to surveys such as this as they

believe their input will not make any difference. Hence, it can be deduced that many of the negative experiences reported across groups and organisations are not included in the responses to this survey. This does not obviate their relevance though, and such accounts should be borne in mind by those seeking to truly understand the big picture.

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Home Education and the child

Elective Home Education (EHE) is more commonly referred to as home education. In the UK it is the term used to categorise a child who is not registered at school and, in accordance with s7 of the Education Act 1996, whose parent ensures that the child receives a suitable education. Home schooling is not the same as home education, and the two terms should not be used interchangeably. Unfortunately the incorrect usage of the term home schooling is often employed when the media want to portray a negative image, or it is used by an EHE team when they expect to see school type learning in the home. Incorrect terminology can and does cause confusion, with some schools refusing to deregister in the belief that the school or LA (with work set and sent home and assessed by a teacher) would be providing schooling at home (as during COVID lockdown).

Within home education there are many styles and philosophies; the sole purpose is to provide an education that is suitable to each individual child's age, ability, aptitude and SEN. Styles include (but are not limited to): autonomous/child led, unschooling, semi-structured and fully structured.

When a parent chooses to home educate they take full responsibility including the financial costs, thereby freeing up a school place for another child, as well as saving the government and their LA many thousands of pounds. This cost could be considerably more if the child has Special Educational Needs (SEN), Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and Additional Support Needs (ASN) in Wales and Scotland.

Home education should be viewed by LAs and the government as a valid alternative and equal to a school education, as it is equal in law. It should not be viewed with suspicion or as something that needs fixing. Home educating parents and families should be given the freedom to follow their own ethos without intrusion.

'Home Education needs to be accepted as valid ... are very invested in our children and want to see them succeed.'

'... EHE children are not "less than" and to end the discrimination that exists between EHE and their school friends. I would expect the LA to promote EHE in the community and media as a normal and therefore "not negative" thing... our LA do not want to support anything EHE because that would encourage schooling parents to consider it, which they absolutely don't want. This needs to change. Home ed sports day is as valid as the local primary school's, so are any achievements. Support as validation for the children themselves is just as important.'

School does not have to have failed in order for a parent (and child) to choose home education. For some though, school is a disaster and home education is not a choice; it is more of a necessity to save the child from serious harm. Other parents choose to home educate before ever trying school.

'... my son... was struggling, suicidal, migraines and self harm but the school just blamed my mental health and parenting. They told me he was polite and

compliant in school and my concerns were not serious enough... transition to secondary school. He attended for a couple of weeks but suffered in all the same ways. He refused to go again...CAMHS referral which has resulted in my son being assessed for ASD. Early help, the school and the attendance officer all politely suggested home education...'

The powers LAs currently have are ample to ensure that any children who are not being suitably home educated are supported.

The negative impact LAs have on home educating families can not be overstated, especially for those who have left an unsuitable or dangerous school environment. For many families having an LA who oversteps, threatens, turns up unannounced etc. compounds any previous anxiety around the system and 'authority'; it removes the feeling of autonomy, and undermines the parents' trust, who may have (rightly) informed their children that home is a safe space. An LA can re-traumatise children and parents at a time when they are trying to recover.

Parents are left with distrust and an unwillingness to engage. This can stem from their own personal experience of their LA or from hearing other home educators sharing theirs, in person or online.

Excessive demands and questioning from an LA interrupts education and routines of those who are well established in their home education, and undermines the time, effort and consideration taken to get settled and started with home education,

especially in the early months of home education. Lengthy or intrusive LA involvement is often seen as counterproductive and their involvement a hindrance rather than supportive. It is also an unnecessary use of time for LA staff who could instead be improving their own information and resource service, or supporting those families who approach them.

'They [LA] ... try to take advantage of parents that are simply trying to do their best. Many let down by the school system. Countless hours spent fighting the LA when as parents we know we are in the right lawfully, we win and it's all a huge waste of time. If we were treated with respect and listened to they would see we are not the enemy which is how they treat us. We just care very much about our children and don't always want to be in the situation that a failed inadequate educational system has placed us in. We also have the right to educate our children as we see fit.'

Home education is a valuable resource for LAs, with the potential to have positive outcomes for all, if they support it appropriately, and in ways that suit home educators.

Discussion about Statistics and Information from Freedom of Information Requests

Educational Freedom has been conducting Freedom of Information requests (FOI) since 2010 ([Research and Documents - Educational Freedom](https://educationalfreedom.org.uk/research-and-documents/)⁷), collating data on the number of known home educators in each LA, plus the number of s437(1) and SAO served in any given year. In more recent years data requested has included the number of children missing education (CME) and request for copies of standardised letters used by each LA (this material is yet to be analysed and will be available on the Educational Freedom website when complete).

The August 2024 FOI asked for current numbers of known home educated children, how many families those children came from, how many s437(1) or SAOs had been served, the outcomes of those SAOs, and the number of CME children. The FOIs are in the public domain and available [here](#)⁸. At the time of publishing this document not all LAs had replied to the FOI (thereby breaching the legal timeframe); statistics in the online FOI table will be updated live as necessary

It is interesting to note that the known number of home educated children quoted [here](#)⁹ by the government in 2023 did not match the data which Educational Freedom had gathered around the same time. The assumption could be drawn that LAs do not

⁷ <https://educationalfreedom.org.uk/research-and-documents/>

⁸ <https://shorturl.at/IBIXL>

⁹ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education>

keep accurate records. With some LAs giving different answers to (or refusing to answer) similar FOIs conducted by other individuals or organisations.

Educational Freedom initiated an FOI in March 2023. By July all but one LA had responded (legal timeframe to respond is 20 days). Across the UK 100,340 children were known to be home educated, with 92,424 being reported as home educated in England. In 'Autumn' 2023 the government only reported 87,700 from 95% of local authorities in England, leaving the government to then estimate figures from the outstanding LAs to reach a total of 92,000 home educated children. If LAs can not respond in a timely manner to requests for data, can they be trusted to keep a register up to date and accurate?

A CNiS register is most unlikely to be fit for purpose: everything would hinge on LAs inputting details accurately and keeping the registers updated, and that cannot be guaranteed. The government claims that the purpose of the register is to find children missing education (CME); however, the latest [CME data](#)¹⁰ shows that LAs are already gathering this information, though there are clear and worrying discrepancies in what each LA considers to constitute CME. In some LA areas a child will be categorised as CME when concerns are raised about the suitability of the home education prior to serving a s437(1)¹¹ formal notice to satisfy. Some LA areas never include home educated children in CME figures even when they are subject to an SAO. Some LAs include children waiting for a school application to be actioned, whilst others do not. Many LAs have zero children classified as CME;

¹⁰ <https://shorturl.at/IBIXL>

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/437>

some have more than 2000. Is it possible for an LA to have no CME? Or are they classified as something else? LAs have ample powers to find children missing from education. Some appear not to be making use of those powers, and whilst other authorities appear to have an excessive number of CME and should surely be working towards getting those children into education or getting them reclassified.

It should be noted: 'Children not in school' is not the same as 'children missing education'. A CNiS register will cause home educators to appear to be doing something wrong, or worse still, to criminalise them. Educational Freedom fully supports the need for children missing education to be educated, but this does not have to come at the cost of home educators' rights and freedoms.

Whilst conducting FOIs, it became apparent that a large number of LAs are unable to respond within the mandatory period of 20 days allowed to them, further skewing government data. Many LAs refused to give SAO statistics as these are not recorded in an easily accessible way, thus giving cause for concern about any further centralised data collection.

As the [2024 data collection](#)¹² shows, there is an inconsistency around the percentage of s437(1) and SAO served, even in those LAs with a similar number of home educated children. The LAs with large numbers of s437(1) and low numbers of SAO could be using the Formal Notice to Satisfy as a threat and coercing families to conform to the LAs frequently ultra vires demands. Casework and discussion in

¹² <https://shorturl.at/IBIXL>

groups allows this provisional conclusion to be drawn. In some scenarios s437(1) and SAOs are served when a family chooses to only provide information about the provision in writing, when the LA wish to visit or be shown photos or videos of the learning. It is clear in those situations that families who comply with the demands made on them have different experience to those choosing to provide written information (at no point in these cases were actual concerns raised about the suitability of the provision). The law does not mandate annual enquiries, nor does it prescribe the manner in which a home educating family should respond to a LA. There is no evidence to suggest that a family choosing to provide information in written form is any more likely to be dishonest than a family who shows photos of the learning, has visits or phone calls. In fact the written information could be said to allow a more holistic view of the education than a few photos (which could have been screen grabbed from Google).

The Survey

The Educational Freedom 2024 survey stated that no personal data (name and email) would be disclosed. However, it was noted that some responses contained personal details in the free text boxes, therefore, to protect anonymity these responses will not be disclosed in their original form. Some quoted comments have been edited so as to ensure confidentiality for the respondent.

The survey was shared on the [Educational Freedom](#)¹³ website, as well as being accessible via the website menu. The link was shared on the Educational Freedom public [Facebook page](#)¹⁴ and their related private Facebook groups and other social media accounts. It was then shared by home educators across many other social media pages and groups. The survey opened on 18th July and closed on 31st August 2024. There were 818 usable responses.

The survey concluded with this disclaimer:

Reminder: While we do require personal information such as your full name and email address to be shared as part of this survey, this information will never be shared with any third-parties or organisations external to Educational Freedom. We only request this information in order to help reduce spam and false information being submitted as part of the survey.

¹³ www.educationalfreedom.org.uk

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/educationalfreedom1>

Details requested were first name, last name, email, confirm email, and which UK country of residence, followed by a tick box 'I consent to Educational Freedom storing my submitted information so they can review my survey answers'.

Educational Freedom



Data Analysis and Results

What is your home education status?

Currently home educate at least one child.

Previously home educated but the child is 16+

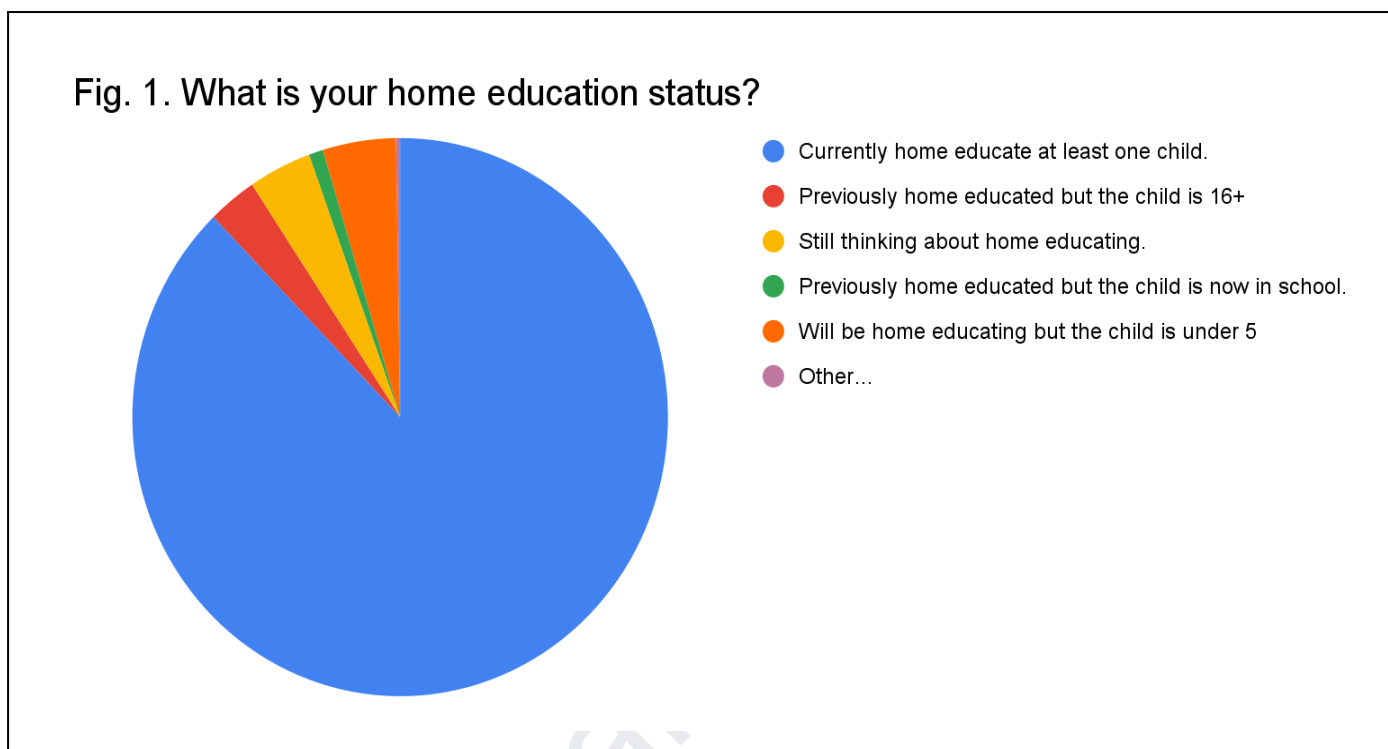
Will be home educating but the child is under 5

Still thinking about home educating.

Previously home educated but the child is now in school.

Other...

The majority of respondents were currently home educating at least one child (Fig. 1)



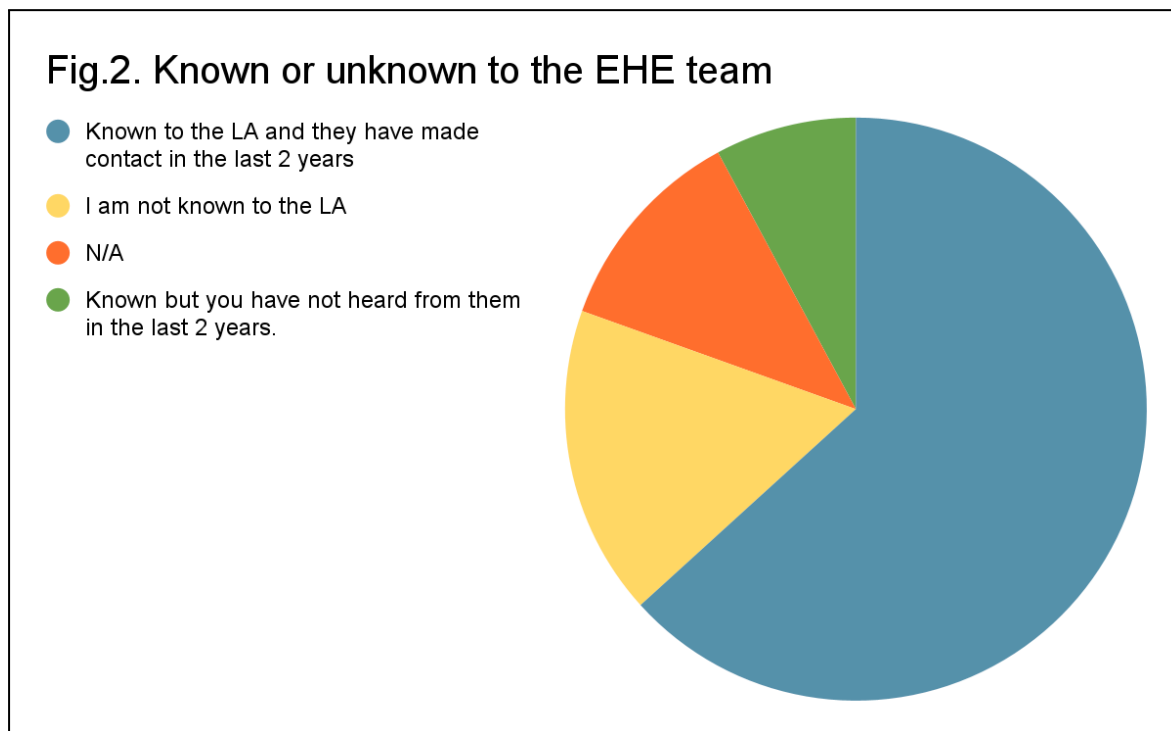
Known or unknown

Are you:

Known to the LA and they have made contact in the last 2 years

I am not known to the LA

Known but you have not heard from them in the last 2 years.



Note: An N/A category was added during the data analysis stage, as it became apparent that responses were being submitted by those who were about to deregister, no longer home educated, or had children under 5 and therefore did not fall into any of the pre-existing categories.

The number of unknown home educators in the UK is a reason often used to justify the need for a register. However, there is no evidence to show that home educated children, whether known or unknown, are at any greater risk of being a Child Missing Education (CME), or of harm or neglect. There appears to be no evidence that the

proposed register of CNiS would find those children the government hopes it would find. Families who are refusing to provide a suitable education, or worse, are very unlikely to volunteer their information to their LA even with the threat of a penalty. A register would be detrimental to home educators as it would empower LAs to act further beyond law than they currently do. A mandatory register automatically implies guilt of some sort. Forcing families to make themselves known to their LA under threat of prosecution is viewed as abhorrent by home educators who responded to the survey and many of those who discuss the proposed register on social media.

Throughout this document it is evidenced that the support available from LAs is minimal, and the risk of harm to parents and children significant. There is currently no need or reason for a home educator to initiate communication with their EHE team or choose to become known to them, since more accurate and readily available information is available to them via home education organisations and groups. This argument is backed up by survey responses to the questions asking about what support home educators would (or would not) like the LAs to provide.

It is an unproven myth that parents are using home education as a cover for abuse and neglect. Ongoing research into Serious Case Reviews which reference home education indicates that home education has not been the decisive factor. In the majority of instances, children were already known to the relevant services, as acknowledged by DfE in their 2019 Guidance for Local Authorities¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elective-home-education>

para 7.3 “There is no proven correlation between home education and safeguarding risk. In some serious cases of neglect or abuse in recent years, the child concerned has been home educated but that has not usually been a causative factor and the child has normally been known anyway to the relevant local authority.”.

In the majority of instances where it was believed the child was home educated it was found, by professionals, to be a case of CME rather than EHE. All cases had professionals involved who failed to use their existing powers to intervene. If used appropriately current legislation is more than adequate to identify children not in receipt of a suitable education.

If LAs acted within the boundaries of the law and were more transparent and honest with home educating parents, they might find their relationship with them becoming more positive. In turn home educators might then find there would be less reason to remain unknown to the LA. The focus should be on ensuring that LAs act appropriately, rather than giving them more powers.

Unknown home educators are not in hiding; they are out in the community at groups, shopping, seeing their GP etc. They are no different to known home educators except that they are not in receipt of ‘informal enquiries’ from their LA. There is no evidence to support the accusation that unknown families are a concern, or a problem that needs fixing.

Figure 2 shows that less than a quarter (17%) of the respondents to the survey are currently unknown to their LA as being home educated. This, in part, is due to the respondent being new to home education and having not yet received communication from their LA (respondents did not always make it clear that this was why they were classing themselves as unknown).

It should be noted that 8% (64 people) were known to their EHE team but there has been no attempt to contact the family within the last 2 years. This could also suggest that some LAs cannot cope with the workload under the current guidance and legislative framework, or that the system of data storage is insufficient resulting in 'losing' people from their records. More positively it could also suggest, in some cases, that the LA are actually empowering established home educators to continue with their home education without unnecessary and inappropriate interference.

To provide the level of support being advocated for in the Children's Wellbeing Bill and CNiS register, there would need to be a considerable boost to budget and also considerable improvement in training. There is currently no evidence of mandatory training incorporated into the role of an EHE team member. Such training should include a proper understanding of the different styles and methodologies common within home education, plus training around SEN. The lack of such training and the impact of this was referred to 205 times in the survey. Specific examples included: EHE staff claiming laws that don't exist, evidence that they have never read the EHE guidance, ignorance around SEN, making demands beyond their remit and a lack of knowledge and respect for styles of home education that do not resemble school.

Home educators perceive themselves to be at the mercy of EHE personnel and at risk that the EHE officer will not understand or respect their approach or philosophy. Families within the same LA will often report a differing experience. One respondent described how the EHE officer harasses her monthly for information, and tells her she isn't doing a good enough job, but treats a family member who also home educates completely differently. The two families share the home education responsibilities and there is no reason to believe the respondent was failing to provide a suitable education, she feels the EHE officer *'just doesn't like me.'*

'Staff should have training to work within the law. I really feel they should have some SEN awareness. Seeing as the law states the education we provide should be to the child's aptitude and ability. Neurodivergent children will/can vastly differ in their education needs to neurotypical children.'

Educational Freedom



Why did you start home education?

Liked the idea of it

Child's SEN not being met in school

Philosophical reasons

Child not happy in school

Religious reasons

Other

Fig. 3. Why did you start home educating? (Respondents could choose more than one answer).

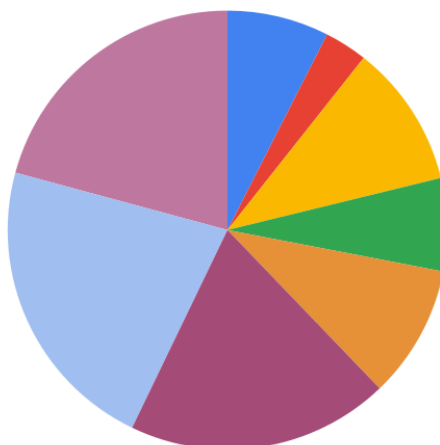
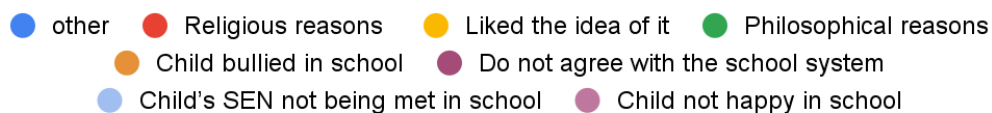


Figure 3 illustrates the reasons families started home educating. Respondents were able to choose more than one option, which the majority did, with 818 respondents giving 2030 reasons. This supports the view that the decision to home educate is usually a complex one.

Note the purposeful choice of the word 'start' rather than 'choose' or 'elect'. It is unfortunate that for a large number of families, home education is not a choice; they feel they have no choice but to home educate. Nearly three quarters of the answers referred to 'negative' experiences. But it is equally important to note that starting home education for seemingly negative reasons is not a cause for concern; most of these families say that once they had settled into home educating, they wished they had done it sooner. Their children are thriving now despite having had a negative experience in school.

Currently, in some areas, if the LA becomes aware of what they consider a negative reason for choosing home education then it automatically looks to force the child to school. Many parents choose not to tell their LA why they started home educating to avoid repercussions, meaning therefore that statistics gathered from LAs are unlikely to be accurate.

To encourage accurate data collection in the future, a lot of work needs to be done to build trust between home educators and their LA. LAs should look at how they can support families by ensuring they have support and information including that sourced from independent organisations. When a family is in the situation that they had no choice but to home educate they often have a distrust of 'the system', having been let down by a school.

Note that some answers given in 'Other' were deemed to fit other criteria listed, so the responses were recategorised accordingly. For example, a respondent talked about not wanting their child to be part of a competitive school so this was moved to 'Do not agree with the school system'. Many used the 'Other' category to expand further on their earlier categorised answers, and therefore their 'Other' count was removed.

The reasons for starting home education are split fairly evenly between not agreeing with the school system (19%), child not happy in school (21%), and child's SEN not being met in school (22%) (with some responses stating that CAMHS advised the parent to home educate rather than continue with school). The bullying category accounted for roughly 10% of the total, though it should be noted that many of those who cited bullying went on to explain that it was school staff who did the bullying. Philosophical motivations and liking the idea of home education together received 17%. Only a small number (3%) chose religious reasons as a contributing factor. Whilst acknowledging that the survey may not have reached those families choosing to home educate solely for religious reasons, it should be noted that these findings do not support the narrative of needing to clamp down on illegal religious schools allegedly being used by home educators.

'My child was bullied by a child at her first school and then by the headmaster at her second school.'

Answers in the 'Other' category cited reasons like the freedom to travel, issues with

transport to the school, the cost of sending their child to school including all the hidden extras, wanting to have the time to encourage a second language to be spoken, children being failed by the LA and the school when off sick long term. There were also a large number of responses which spoke about illnesses which meant being in school put their child at risk though the respondents made no mention of any request for alternative provision or EOTIS (Educated Otherwise Than In School).

Unfortunately, it appears that the majority of people who responded to this survey were home educating because of a negative reason, but around 80 answered solely with positive reasons such as liking the idea, philosophical or religious reasons. Most answers, however, were accompanied by a negative experience with the school system. It is important to reiterate that coming to home education due to negative experiences does not equate to a need to get that child into another school.

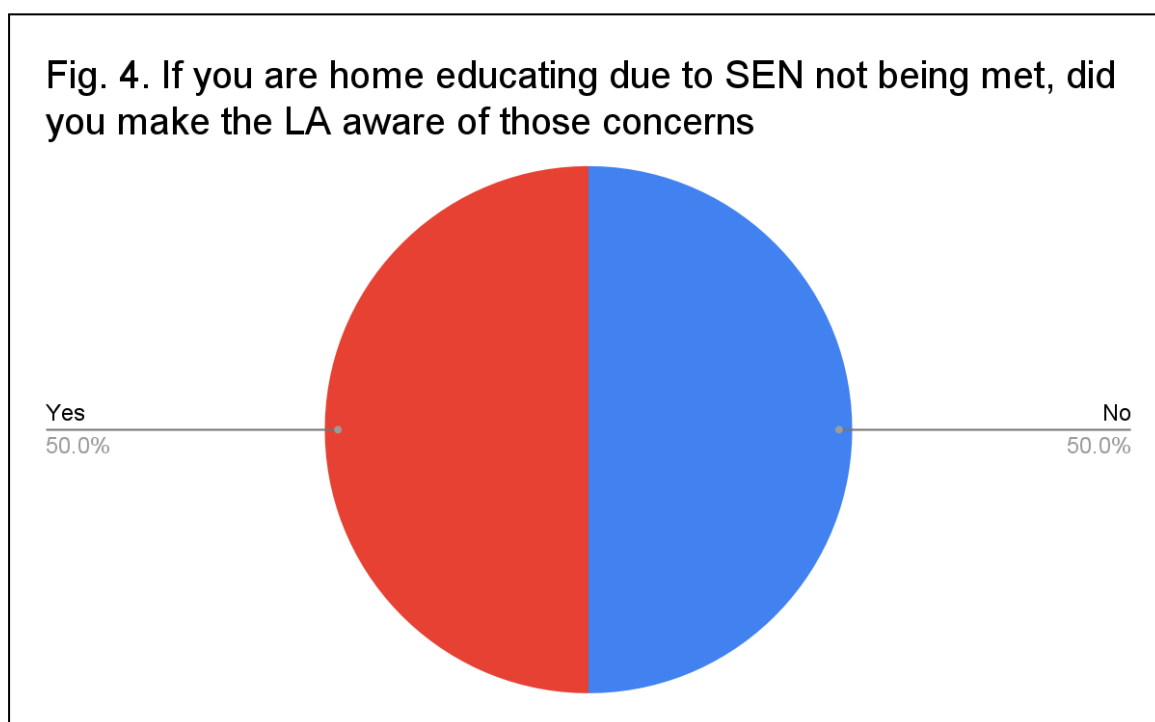
Anecdotally 'I wish I had done it sooner' indicates that home educators are now happy with what they are doing and the majority are happy to continue home educating. The only instances where this is not the case are when LAs can not provide a school that meets the child's needs, which would indicate that there should be more funding for EOTIS agreements and more schools suitable for SEN children.

If you are home educating due to SEN not being met, did you make the LA aware of those concerns?

Yes

No

Explain further, did the LA make an appropriate offer of alternatives for suitable education such as EOTIS, alternative provision, a different school, or did the LA give you the impression there were no other options?



Of the 436 who answered that they came to home education because of SEN not being met in school, exactly half had made the LA aware of their concerns (Fig. 4). The responses follow a clear pattern. After alerting the LA to their concerns around SEN; the parent tried to access other services or support via the school but the LA refused, or were of no help. A large number of those who did not inform the LA that school was failing to meet SEN already had previous experience of being let down by the LA so they felt it was a waste of time. A common theme was that parents

were so exhausted from the constant battle to have their child's needs met they decided that home education would be easier for all concerned.

'I had had enough of a fight to get school to listen to our concerns that I wanted to concentrate on her and not another fight for EOTAS etc'

'LA were not interested and we gave up the fight in the end. Very thankful we did both kids are flourishing now.'

'I tried exploring alternatives with the LA but they made it sound like a very long and difficult process so we didn't feel we had any other option other than to home educate'

Those who did make the LA aware of their concerns experienced issues such as denial of an EHCP assessment due to now being home educated, being told to access services that were not suitable (for example, a 14 year old was offered a place in a primary school), or the LA failing to respond further when questioned. The majority of respondents were given no support or advice.

'Getting any support for the nhs [sic] has been just as challenging because my child is not in school.'

'We were discriminated against due to home educating, being told that because they are not in school it's unlikely they will be able to diagnose!'

School should not be the only gateway to SEN services. But many commented that referrals, assessments and appointments were refused on the grounds of being home educated. Some parents managed to overturn this decision with the explanation that the department had a duty to all children, and that there are alternatives to getting information from school.

Educational Freedom

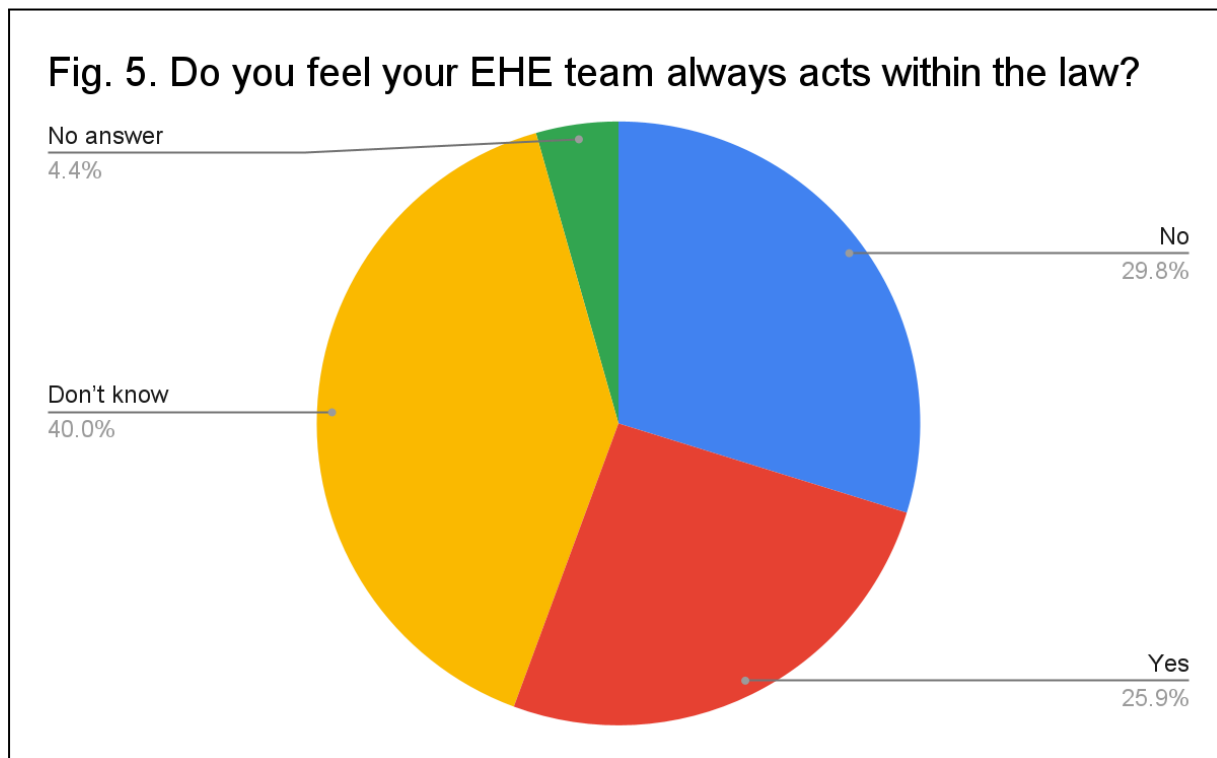


Do you feel your EHE team always acts within the law?

Yes

No

Don't know



When asked if they felt their LA always acted within the law (Fig. 5), a worryingly large number (30%) said their LA did not. A slightly smaller percentage (26%) selected the positive option. 40% did not know, and less than 5% did not answer.

Survey feedback from the cohort uncertain about whether or not the LA was acting within the law attributed this to one of several factors, namely having had no contact with the LA, being unknown or new to home education (i.e. potentially yet to hear from them), but also because the majority of LAs do not make the legalities

comprehensible (respondents explained how their LA will send letters that make no sense, they are full of legal 'jargon').

LAs do not suggest that parents read the EHE guidance and very few link to accurate EHE support services where they can read in basic language the details of what the law and guidance requires. LAs make the assumption that the home educator will automatically know everything is their legal responsibility, including researching the legalities. This is problematic as already noted, since many come to home education after the school system failed their child. They trusted a system which let them down, and now find themselves home educating but not knowing where to get information. This would be a good opportunity to make clear information accessible online for anyone needing to access it. This could be as simple as a link to a service such as Educational Freedom. Or as just a small number of LAs have done, creating a comprehensive home education section on the council website.

The free text response to this question produced a myriad of answers, with an overwhelming pattern of LAs badly misrepresenting their legal duty:

'I am aware of significant breaches on their part such as door stepping families and demanding work samples etc'

'They send letters misrepresenting their rights to home visits etc'

'At the beginning they were pushy and requested things that weren't compulsory (meetings etc) once they were reminded of the law they behaved and did not cause problems.'

'They have asked for things they're not entitled to but when I refused they accepted it.'

*'We have been an HE family since 2011, and until recently *****have been a very good LA. It seems as if that is changing a little currently with requests being made for things they are not entitled to.'*

'They've been asking people I know for photos of work but haven't contacted me personally'

'They ask for dated samples of work.'

'I think they push for more info than they are legally entitled to and that they ignore my requests for all communication to be in writing and try to telephone me.'

Unfortunately there are very few positive comments to share:

'They are very clear about what their remit is and how we can interact with them. They send us newsletters as we signed up to them but there are many opportunities to not engage in that way'

'Other than very nice initial contact letting me know they are there if I need them and some very useful links. No other contact with them as yet.'

A considerable number of people responded with details of the kind of training they felt their EHE officer should take. All the elements listed below would contribute to improving the relationship between LAs and home educating families.

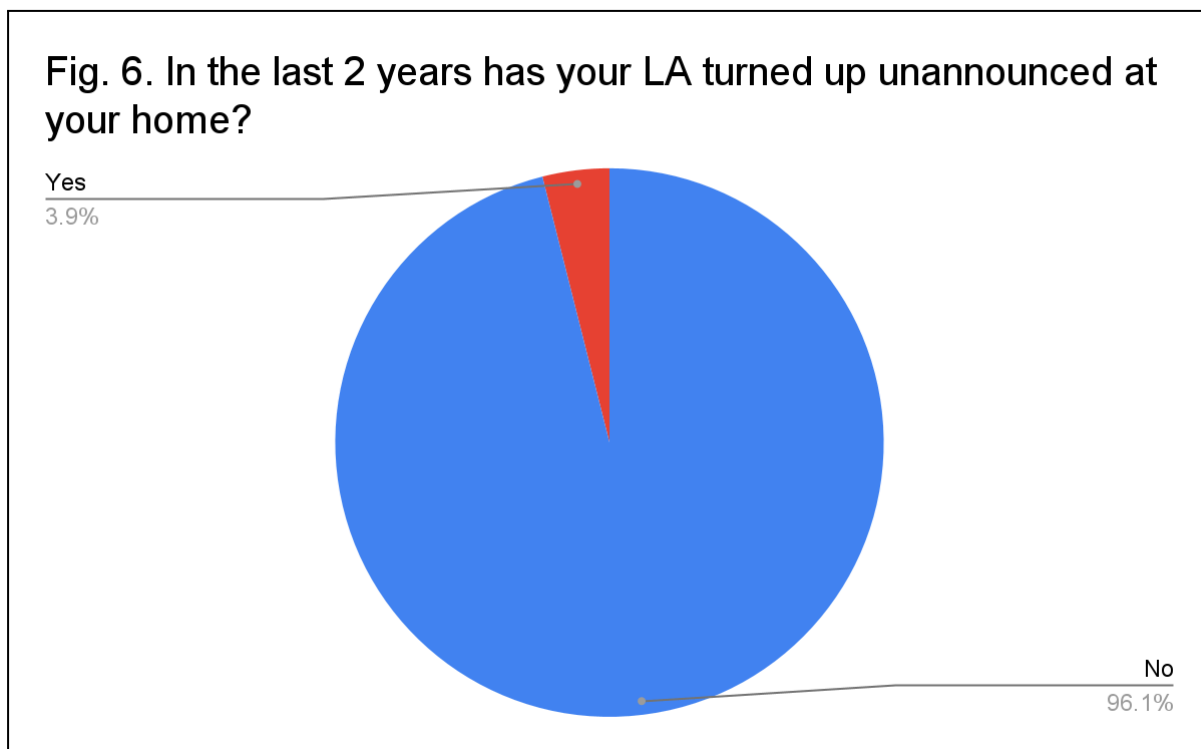
Components which home educating parents wished to see included in LA staff training include:

- 1) Different styles of home education
- 2) SEND includes SEN, mental health, medical needs, neurodivergence (the latter including but not limited to PDA, ADHD, Autism.)
- 3) Discrimination and Equality Act, including minimising ableist approaches
- 4) Data Protection including confidentiality and GDPR
- 5) Effective communication
- 6) Effective co-production
- 7) Child development/ child psychology training
- 8) Trauma awareness and sensitivity training
- 9) Relational and trauma informed approaches
- 10) Bereavement and loss

In the last 2 years has your LA turned up unannounced at your home?

Yes

No



When the veteran members of the Educational Freedom team first started home educating and providing support to home educators nearly 2 decades ago, 'doorstepping' was a considerable problem. Some LAs were more insistent than others, but a large proportion of families were subjected to aggressive LA staff demanding entry to the home, threatening to come back with the police, and more. This usually took place in situations where no prior concerns had been raised about the family. The policy of taking an aggressive approach appears in some areas to have been in response to instructions from management to drive home education numbers down. It is important to note that this was taking place before changes to

the EHE guidance were made in 2019. The previous guidance had allowed home educators to choose to have no involvement with the EHE team.

Unannounced doorstepping no longer appears to be common practice. However, it is still an issue in some LA areas, ideally the practice should be stopped completely.

If an EHE officer has access to the home address or email, they should write to the family. If no response is garnered then alternative reasonable action could be taken, but from extensive experience doorstepping is often used as a first attempt at contact. Survey responses indicate that the following authorities have all doorstepped at least one family in the last 2 years: Brent, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Dudley, Durham, Essex, Hammersmith, Huddersfield, Liverpool, Medway, Monmouthshire, Newham, North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Oldham, Plymouth, Redcar & Cleveland, Rotherham, Sheffield, Shropshire, Somerset, Sunderland, Surrey, Wakefield and West Sussex. Casework tells us these are not the only LAs using this outdated practice.

Doorstepping (and unsolicited phone calls) is both intrusive and distressing, often leaving the parent feeling caught off guard. Unfortunately this seems to be the driving force behind this practice. On some occasions it is an EHE officer making the unannounced visit, but all too often it is an Education Welfare Officer (EWO), or similar, with no role in home education. In some instances this practice poses a safeguarding risk, there are situations where the visitor has not been carrying their council identification. It is frequently LA policy to use an 'initial visit' to gather

information. However it often appears that the person at the door does not understand the legalities of home education and misinforms the parent about both duties and legalities.

Comments feature daily in support groups from parents who answered the door (or phone) to someone from the LA. These report that the visitor fails to declare who they are in a clear and comprehensible manner, made claims that the family must follow a curriculum or do formal learning for a set number of hours a week. They asserted that if families did not allow visits, the police would be called, and that the parent must give them access straight away in order to let them assess the education. It has also been known for the parent to be told that they are breaking the law. Such ultra vires, and often legally incorrect, claims are sometimes accompanied by aggression and threatening behaviour.

Given that this is the first interaction with the LA these families have; it is not conducive to a respectful relationship. Even those LAs who practise 'doorstepping' (or unsolicited phone calls) and appear 'nice and friendly' still frequently fail to explain the legalities accurately, making claims of duties they do not have, but, because these things are said with a smile, the family believe them to be true. It is only later, when the family makes contact with other home educating families or has found sources of more accurate information, that they realise they were misled. Those LAs who think doorstepping is helpful, and an easy way to interact with their home educating families, should consider carefully the negative impacts of their 'friendly pop round'.

'They have doorstepped several of my friends. They have filed untrue reports against some of them. They often issue SAOs with no previous contact!'

'I've read their local policy and it suggests major overstepping and reporting to Social Services if you refuse a home visit... doorstepping people and bullying them.'

'For me this would be doorstepping. Peoples homes are their safe spaces, for autistic families such as ourselves this heightens our sense of vulnerability and safety.'

There is usually no consideration of the effect that this practice has on the family, or how it impacts disabled, SEN, traumatised and anxious parents and children, many of whom left the school system due to being let down, bullied or harassed. Having an official turn up unannounced at what should be both the child and the parents' safe space is upsetting and can have long lasting consequences.

Has your LA (in the last 2 years) misled you/failed to be transparent?

(ie made an appointment to visit without telling you the visits are optional)

Yes

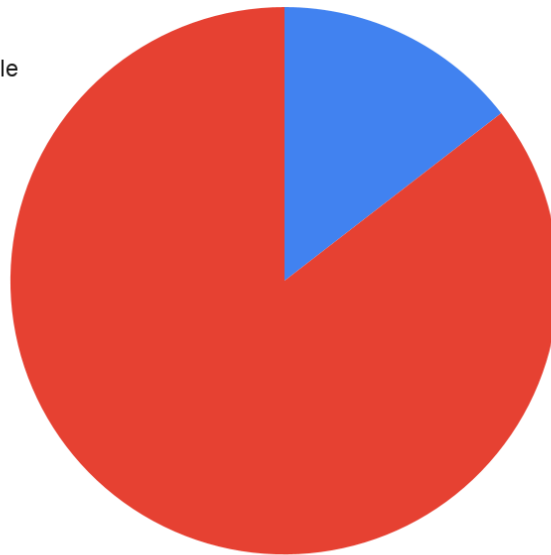
No

Don't know

Not applicable

Fig. 7. Has your LA (in the last 2 years) misled you/failed to be transparent? (ie made an appointment to visit without telling you the visits are optional)

● Yes
● No/Don't know/Not applicable



This question asked if the respondent felt their LA had misled them or failed to be transparent in the last two years (Fig. 7). 119 of 818 respondents said they felt their LA had misled them within the last 2 years. In this case 'No' and 'Don't know', and 'Not applicable' have been totalled together, because of this category crossover in many of the written responses.

Many respondents stated that their LA had previously misled them but also said that they have acted within the law in the last 2 years. Some commented that once they explained that they were conversant with the law around home education it brought forth a very different attitude from the EHE team, often changing from an initial attempt to demand more than entitled, to quickly backtracking and staying within their duty. Of those who answered that their LA had not misled them (or didn't know), a large number went on to state that their LA had phoned unannounced, implied that visits were compulsory, asked for information beyond their remit, or requested information more frequently than was necessary. Significantly, an estimate based on the written responses would increase the proportion of those claiming to have been misled to at least half of all responses.

The written responses from this "felt misled" category provide more detailed insights into different aspects of the issue. Examples given include meetings made to sound compulsory, with many not offering an alternative or being transparent, and with some threatening police or court action if a family chose not to meet the LA. Samples and photos of children's learning were demanded despite being in receipt of written information explaining a suitable education. Unannounced phone calls, unprofessional texts and Whatsapp messages, late-night communication, the implication that the National Curriculum was mandatory, saying that unschooling was illegal, disregarding SEN suitable education and demanding 'age appropriate' learning are just some of the examples cited.

'Overbearing and somewhat threatening demeanour and/or written letters/emails/phone calls, rewording things to insinuate LA questions must be answered and the lack of actual knowledge of what home education is and how personal and unique each educational journey is causing a lot of the barriers we face, including needless bureaucracy.'

'The threatening nature of the initial letters received is completely unnecessary.'

'During my last contact (at a EHCP review) the EHE Officer was rude, threatening and made ridiculous statements about her role in the EHCP review. She did not know what different sections in the EHCP were for and when I tried to politely correct her she reminded me she had the power to deem the education unsuitable!'

Parents explained that until they read home education support and information websites or social media, they had no idea what their own or the LA's legal duties actually were: their LA had failed to accurately explain, or failed to explain in understandable language. Respondents also reported various other worrying facts as follows: some LAs deliberately misquoted legislation to fit their own agenda of demanding information beyond their remit or enforcing home visits, ultra vires expectations to see samples of the child's work despite the parent providing a written provision and resource report/update, many misquoting the law to claim a duty to

monitor or assess, with most claiming that their duty is to check the education is suitable rather than their actual duty of identifying those children missing education.

Casework provides evidence that when a parent asks the LA to provide legal support to back up a claim of a duty, they are usually met with misquoted EHE guidance.

Dozens of times, daily, across social media, instances can be seen of an LA letter/phone call that has included a misrepresentation of the LA duty, or a very clear overstep. There are very few LAs currently without fault in this regard.

Educational Freedom



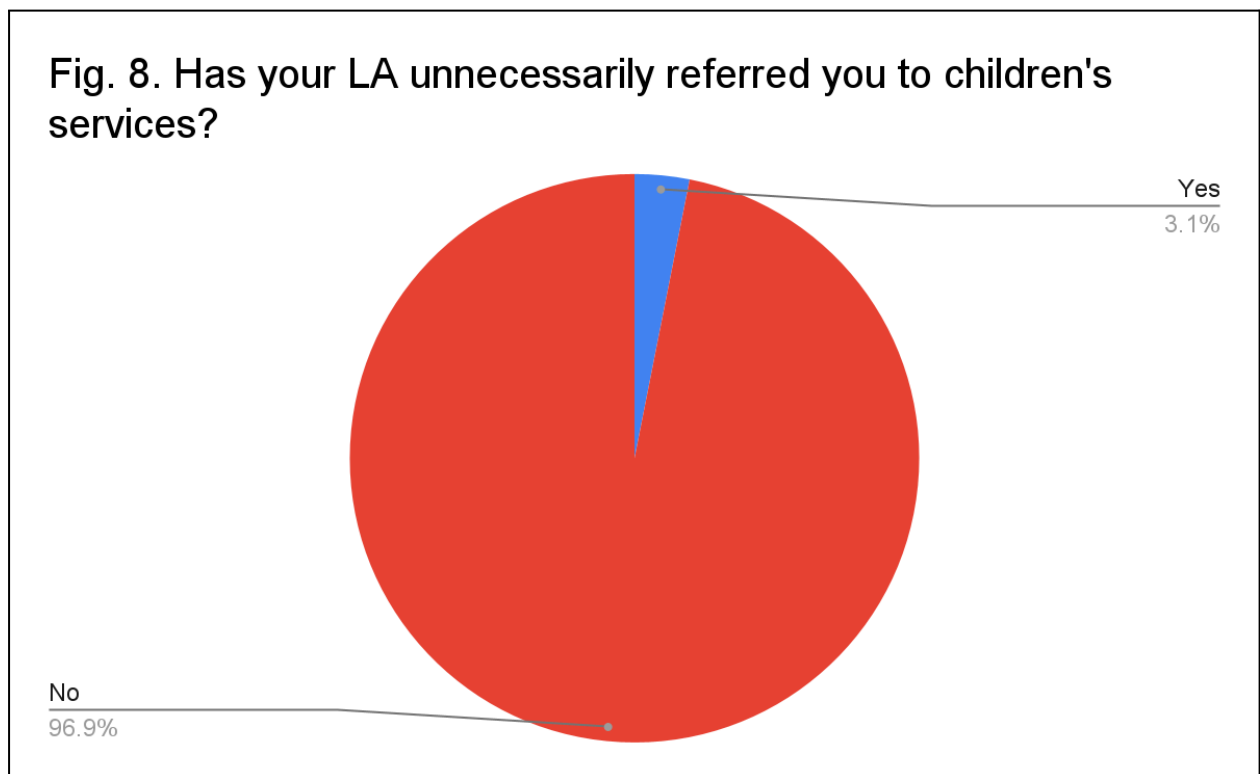
Has your LA unnecessarily referred you to children's services (social services)?

Yes

No

Please share a brief outline of why it was not a necessary referral...

A small number of families have experienced unnecessary referral to children's services (Fig. 8). In most cases these appear to be due to the school making a malicious referral upon receipt of the deregistration letter.



The DfE should ask all LAs to remind schools of the deregistration process. In mainstream schools in England and Wales, this should be as soon as practicable when the conditions are met and a school is in receipt of the deregistration letter. It should also be reiterated that choosing to home educate is not a welfare concern. If

the school (or anyone else) legitimately had concerns about the child they should have acted before this point.

'The head teacher did and lied in her referral - which the paediatrician verified was all untrue'

Unfortunately, both casework and information given in the survey demonstrate that there are instances where it is the EHE officer who has made a referral. Examples include the EHE officer referring when the family chooses to communicate only in writing (and no safeguarding concerns have ever been known); EHE making a referral due to not liking the living situation (e.g. a lot of boxes because a family just moved into the home); or the child not speaking to the EHE worker because they were playing outside. One far too common occurrence is the EHE threatening a social care referral if a family (with no previous social services involvement) chooses not to meet them.

'They [EHE] have shared false allegations and accusations including that children have been without education for years despite satisfying the council's EHE dept yearly...'

Thankfully the majority of malicious referrals are perceived to be malicious by Children's Services and no further action is taken. However, this does not diminish the impact of such referrals, causing upset to the family in question and wasting already stretched public resources.

Whilst this issue may impact on only a very small number of people, as noted above, the impact on the family concerned is massive. Most social workers receive no training on home education and rarely have knowledge of the relevant legislation. Educational Freedom have communicated by phone and email with many social workers over the years, to help them understand what home education is and that in and of itself, is not a welfare concern. Many think home education is illegal, most incorrectly believing that it is necessary to follow a curriculum or school-type learning and term times, and a large number try to demand an EHE visit before signing the family off despite having no welfare concerns. Casework provides examples where social workers have escalated a case to Child Protection purely because the home educating family does not create school at home. However, in all of these cases the EHE has agreed that the home education is suitable.

The long lasting impact of these malicious referrals remains known, but members of social media groups and survey respondents report how their children run and hide when they hear a knock at the door in fear of someone coming to question them and force them to school. Others speak of the impact on their self-confidence, and the doubting of their own abilities brought about by being told by an official that they couldn't do what they were doing.

'On the day I deregistered from school a clearly malicious referral was made with accusations of being controlling, but all the things they claimed were what

professionals had told them they must do in the EHCP. Case closed after a phone call. But left extremely distressed.'

'But school did after deregistration. (They said I was a risk to his future financial stability)'

In a few such situations the EHE worker's response was helpful. They offered information to the social worker, refused to turn up with them unannounced, reminding them that it was not their job to assess the provision.

'We have been referred to children's services ...cited home educating as the sole reason. I contested this, and the early help team recognised that this was a problem. ... The LA explained to children's services about EHE, and also explained all the reasons that she was happy with our EHE...'

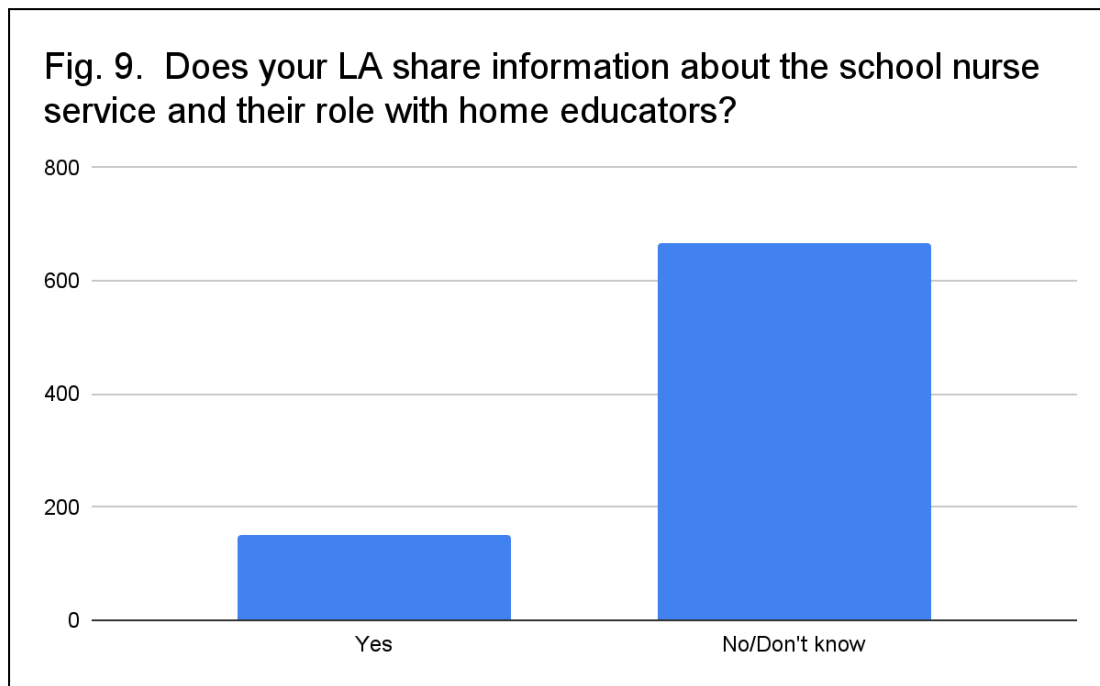
'...the school asked the police to do a welfare check on my child and visited me at home and asked to see her.'

Does your LA share information about the school nurse service and their role with home educators?

Yes

No

Don't know



Where do home educators go for vaccinations, referrals for autism assessment, and other health checks usually carried out in school? In some areas it is the GP surgery, in others it is the school nurse team. In some areas the situation is unclear, and it depends on the person spoken to at each service. In some instances even the GP or the school nurse do not know the answer.

Figure 9 shows that less than 20% of the respondents received information about the school nurse team. (This could easily be made publicly available on the LA website, in a letter from the EHE team, or directly from the school nurse team).

Historically the school nurse teams in most areas would refuse involvement with home educators. This situation has now changed with school nurses being allocated responsibility for all children in their areas regardless of educational setting. Many however still refuse to support home educators, sending them back to the GP. Some GPs refuse to take action and redirect the child back to the school nursing service, with the end result being that the child can be left without a vaccine or a referral. The parent then often gives up trying.

This problem could be rectified easily if each EHE team ascertained the local process for accessing these services, and then included this information on their LA website and in a newsletter/update.

The LA making the information available to the home educator is a much more preferable solution than what currently occurs in some areas, where the LA pass on personal data to the school nurse team for them to then make contact with the family.

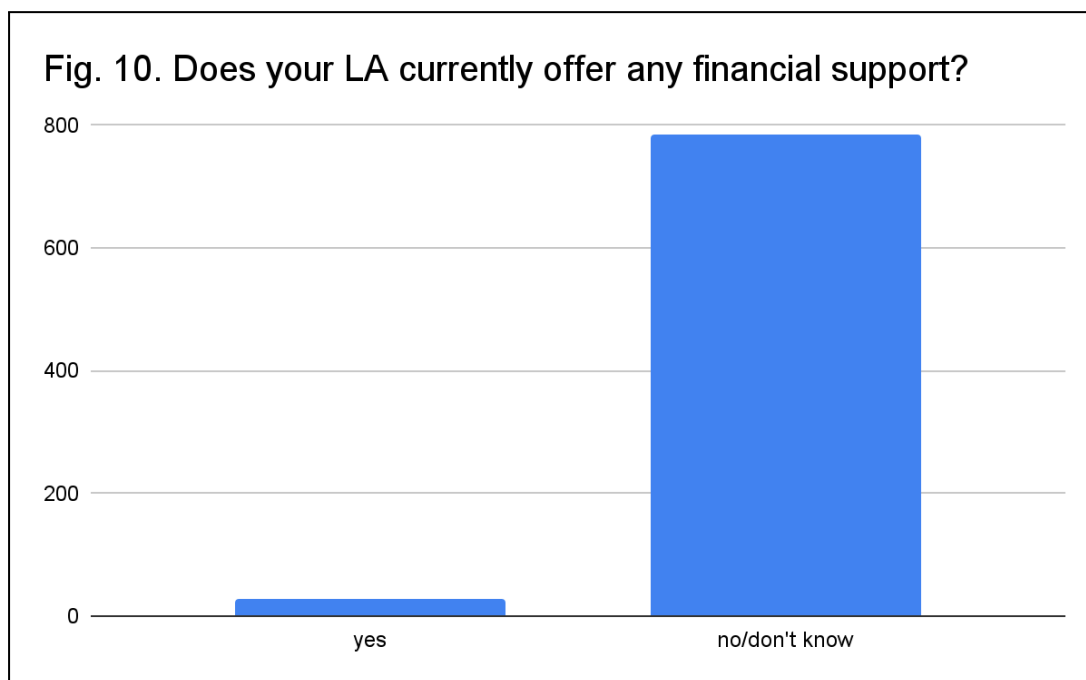
Does your LA currently offer any financial support?

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes, please give more details and any limitations or criteria.



Most home educators know (or discover very soon after starting home education) that they, the parent, are now responsible for the financial element of educating their child.

Figure 10 shows that the majority of LAs offer no financial support or that families are unaware of any such support. Those providing a written response explained that there is sometimes a contribution towards GCSEs, or that a Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) may be extended to home educators. Book tokens or money off resources and Forest School were also mentioned. A few touched on

EOTIS and Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) personal budget (PB), with some raising situations where an LA had refused PB to home educators regardless of their needs detailed in the EHCP.

The most costly element is often stated as exam access. Whilst GCSE and IGCSE exams can (in a small number of places) start at £45 each, they usually run into hundreds of pounds. Alternatives are becoming available with some colleges offering a 14-16 provision which includes some GCSEs, but these are still not commonplace. The majority of LAs offer no financial support at all, for exams or other costs, though exams are one expense where some parents would like to see help with funding (Fig. 11).

Financial support can be a contentious subject amongst home educators, with a large number saying (anecdotally through social media and emails as well as in the survey) that they would never want funding, as it would probably be accompanied by hoops to jump through. And that limitations would be put on the use of said funding.

'I'd prefer it if we were not offered anything. I think it's a road where exams start to become compulsory if the gov are offering to fund them and it's a roll on effect. Then the curriculum must be followed ect. One child will be sitting exams in the next two years but the subjects and where to sit them are our choice.'

'I don't want support. I don't want the government feeling that because we are supported that they can then influence the education we provide at home'

When discussing other forms of support, replies included:

'Allow local libraries to support home ed. Our libraries state that they can't have home ed groups, as the LA have said they're forbidden. Seems a bit unfair, when they're allowed to support school children.'

'I'd like access to HAF holiday programmes'

'To be honest; I would much prefer to be left alone and to be allowed as a family to get on with home educating in the way that works for us. It would be nice to have the support and for the option to ask for support if we so wanted this.'

If the DfE wrote support into the EHE guidance, what would you hope to get from your LA?

Advice about EHE

Signposting to sources of assistance

Resource ideas

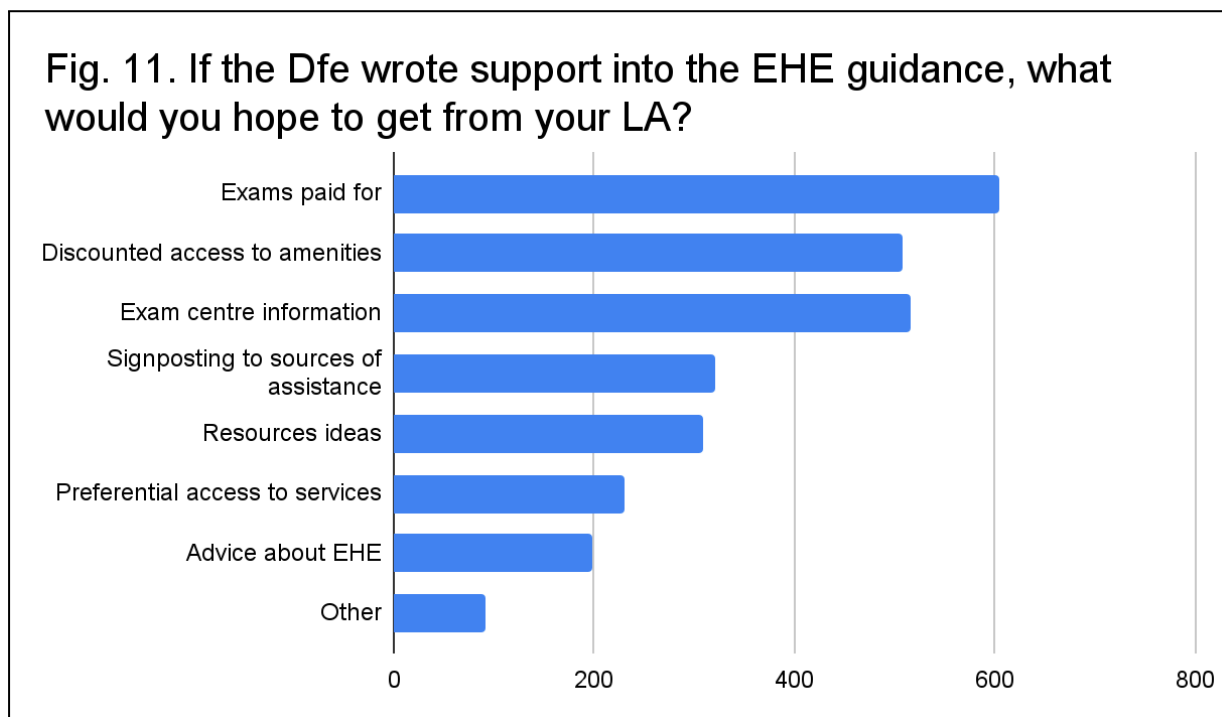
Exams paid for

Exam centre information

Discounted access to amenities

Preferential access to services

Other



Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Much of the support home educators would like to see would not be costly: they want information (Fig.11) which very few LAs currently provide (see Fig. 12). They want to know about local exam centres; for example, a simple list on an LA website stating which local schools take external candidates would be invaluable.

Another request would be that LAs ensure their website includes links to helpful information about the legalities and different styles of home education, this could be to independent established support and information services. Respondents suggested LAs provide local resource ideas. Neither of these are costly improvements.

Exams were the most commonly mentioned item, with 610 respondents saying they would like exam costs written into guidance. However, the vast majority followed this up by saying they would not be willing to give up their current freedoms in return for paid for exams; they would not be willing to accept further LA interventions.

Does your LA currently provide any of these?

Advice about EHE

Signposting to sources of assistance

Resource ideas

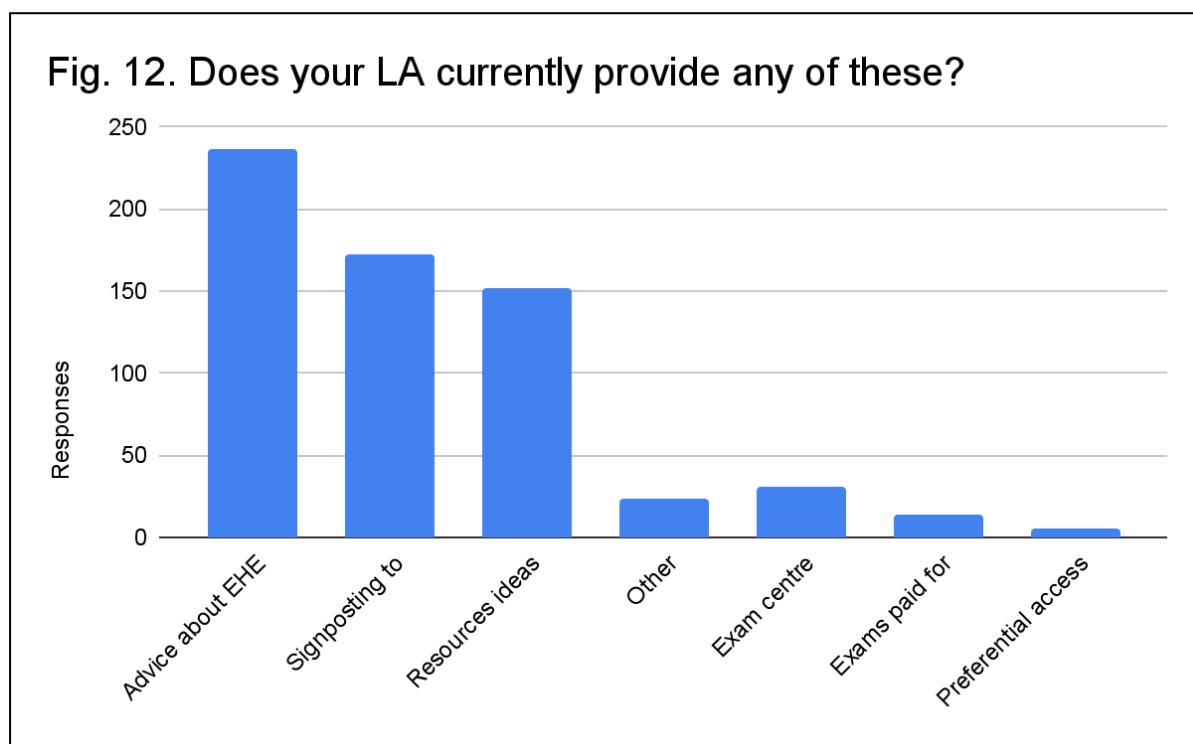
Exams paid for

Exam centre information

Discounted access to amenities

Preferential access to services

Other



Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

More than half (472 respondents) did not answer this question (Fig. 12). This could be due to the respondent not knowing what is available (i.e. the LA does not make it clear), or because their LA does not provide any of the options.

It is concerning to see how few LAs provide anything considered supportive or useful. The priority of the EHE teams and government alike should be for home educated children to receive the best home education possible. To achieve that many families need access to information, whether to chat with other home educators, to have accessible information about the law, information about different styles of learning and resources, or a list of exam centres etc. This would be a simple fix as all LAs could easily update their websites to include links to national, free home education organisations and spend a few hours collating other useful information and making it publicly available there. The information would not have to be comprehensive, it could offer a few options, then suggest further avenues for research, for example by providing people with the knowledge that there are home educating styles beyond school at home. This can only be a good thing.

One comment which featured frequently in the written responses to this question was that the information that was available was out of date or not relevant to home education. This surely does not instil a sense of trust in the LA if they can not ensure that simple information is accurate.

If your LA provides any of the above is it

Accessible on the LA website

Posted/emailed out to you

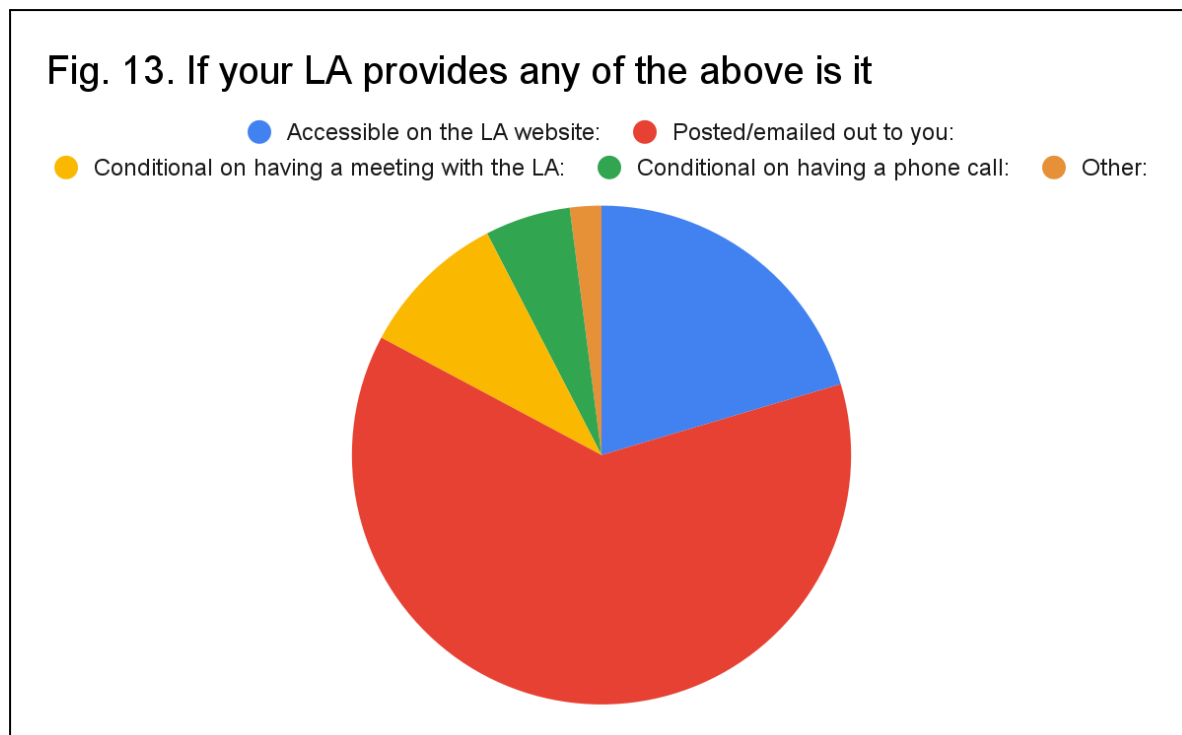
Conditional on having a meeting with the LA

Conditional on having a phone call

I am not aware of any support available

Other

Please note: the categories shown in Figure 13 have been altered from the original question as the option of 'provided by email' was not included. Many people indicated in the text box that their LA emailed them with information, these such responses have now been included in the 'posted' category.



The majority (683) of respondents either did not answer this question or were unaware of any support. This chart only shows the answers given.

A large proportion of the support available is conditional on having a phone call or a meeting, or is posted/emailed out to families, meaning that it is only available to families known to the LA. Only around 20% of the respondents stated that the 'support' was publicly available on the LA website. This means that those considering home education or those who are unknown to the LA will find themselves unable to access information via the LA website without specifically reaching out to ask for it.

Educational Freedom



Was the information your LA provided correct, up to date and fully inline with the law?

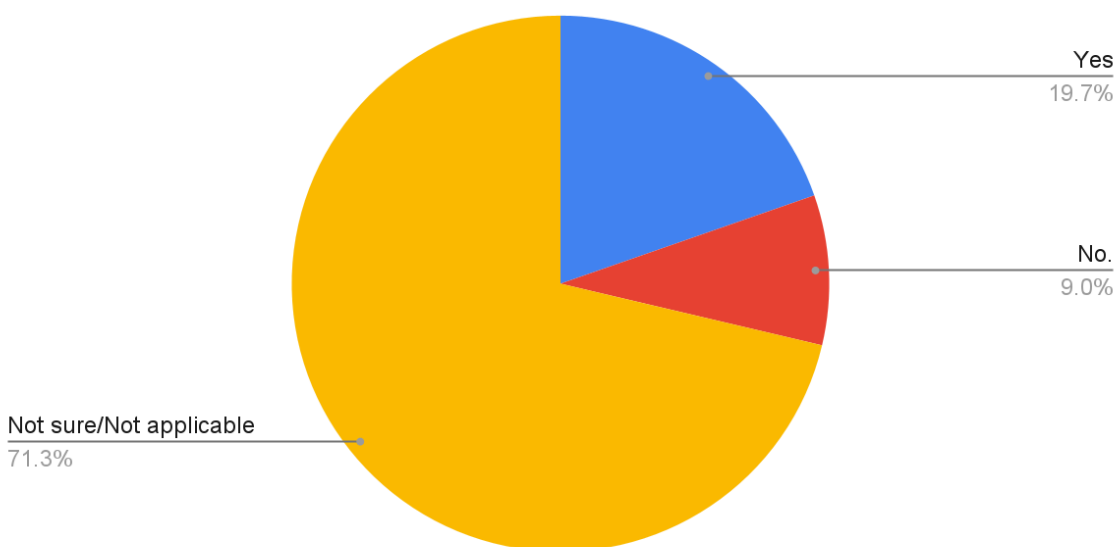
Yes

No

Not sure

Not applicable

Fig 14. Was the information your LA provided correct, up to date and fully inline with the law?



The Educational Freedom team have looked at the majority of LA websites over the last year and found that most have only a limited amount of useful information. Very few have links to support services, and only a small number have any factual or useful information about what home education is or pointers to where such information can be found. It was noted that the majority of websites misrepresented the LAs legal duty.

Figure 14 shows that for the most part home educators did not receive any support (either direct or indirect) from the LA and therefore could not state whether any information was legally accurate. Of those that answered 'yes' or 'no', nearly half said they did receive support but the information was not correct, up to date or fully inline with the law.

Educational Freedom

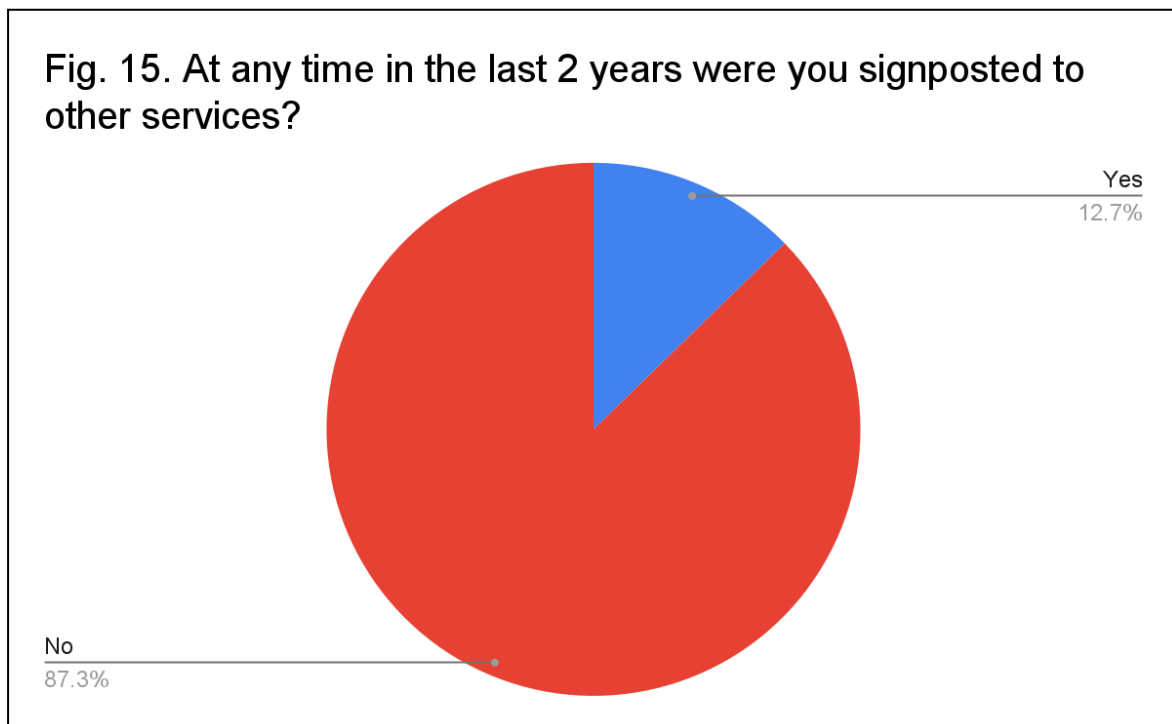


At any time in the last 2 years were you signposted to other services?

Yes

No

If yes, were the services appropriate to your circumstances? And were the services free?



Support can often include signposting to other relevant services. However, as Figure 15 shows, only a very small number of people were signposted elsewhere and the comments from these respondents are mixed. Many stated that the service was not suitable, or was not free, or that they had refused the referral. Some, however, reported that their EHE officer had supported referrals for autism assessments, for dyslexia help and to social groups, though these such responses were very rare.

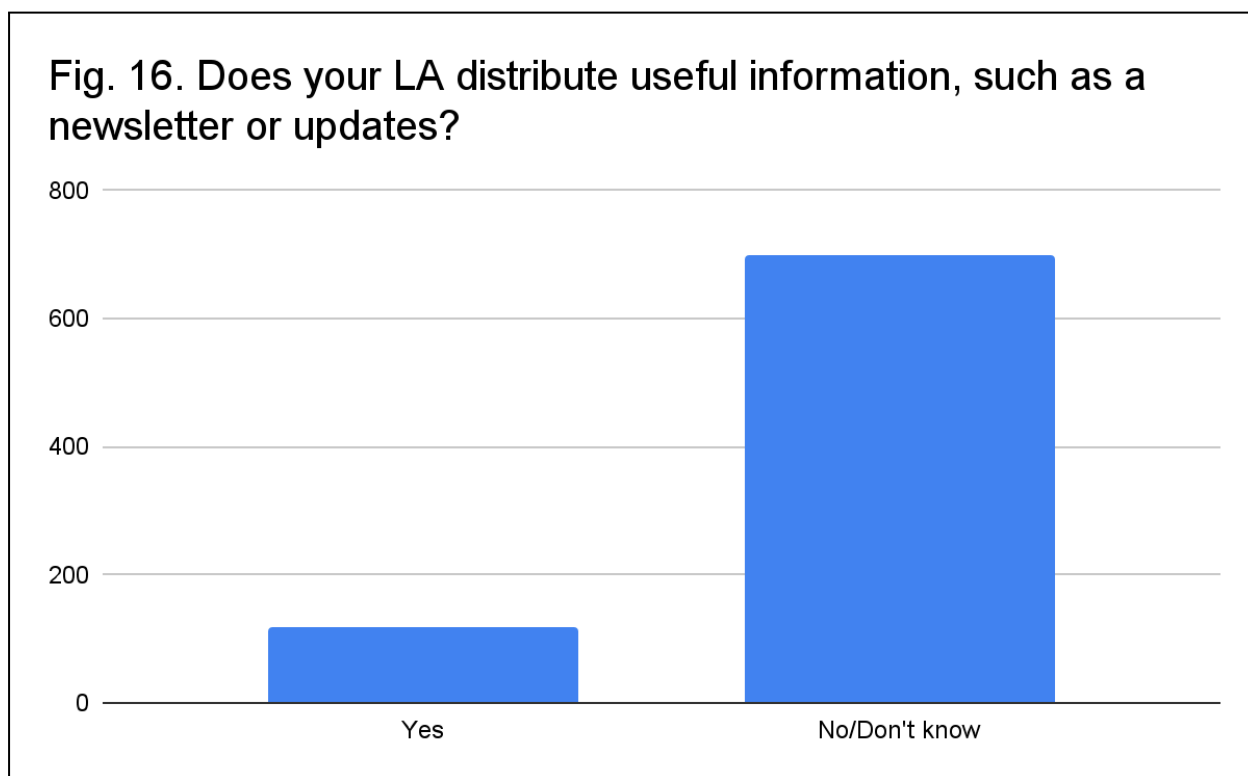
Does your LA distribute useful information, such as a newsletter or updates?

Yes

No

Don't know

If yes, is it useful to you? If it is not useful, please detail what information you would find useful.



There was an overwhelmingly large proportion of 'No' and 'Don't know' responses when participants were asked if their LA distributed useful information such as a newsletter or updates.

Whilst the compilation of a newsletter would demand investment of EHE staff's time, this would seem to be a better use of that time than seeking information from families they know are well-established in their home education. Though a regular newsletter is not yet commonplace (Fig. 16), it is positive that this is something a few LAs are taking the time to produce. Unfortunately though, what is currently provided can often be sporadic, contain school-centric resources and 'schooly' language, and sometimes out of date information. Some respondents said they knew a newsletter existed but they had never been sent one, inferring a lack of consistency within the LA.

Those commenting positively said that the newsletter or update provided details of local groups, activities, resource ideas and news updates. A small number said that the information was good but not relevant to the age of their child. Some stated that the information was often received after the event had taken place or too close to the event for it to be useful, with one event being shared with just one day's notice, only 2 families turned up!

‘If you could tell the DfE anything about your experience with the LA , what would it be?’

Involvement and Autonomy:

- Many respondents prefer minimal contact with LAs, valuing autonomy in their home education journey.
- Positive experiences often mention that LAs are hands-off and respectful of the parents' educational choices.

2. Trust and Respect:

- Trust in LAs varies significantly. Positive feedback highlights respectful, supportive, and understanding interactions.
- Negative feedback often centres on distrust, perceived contempt, and feeling misunderstood or judged by LA representatives.
- There is a desire for LAs to be upfront about what they can legally request and to avoid misinforming parents, such as by incorrectly implying that visits are compulsory.
- It was suggested that LAs should include home education as an option when sending out applications for school places.

‘There is nothing to fear regarding the education parents are able to provide. Parents have a vested interest in seeing their children thrive and become economically independent, and should be supported to achieve that if they ask.’

3. **Communication and Professionalism:**

- Effective communication is a key factor in positive experiences. Professionalism and clarity in interactions are appreciated.
- Poorly written communication, lack of responsiveness, and unprofessional behaviour contribute to negative experiences.

4. **Respect for Educational Choices and Parental Decisions:**

- There is a desire for LAs to respect diverse educational approaches that do not necessarily follow traditional school models. Parents want LAs to recognise that effective education can look different from the conventional school setting.
- Parents want to be trusted as the primary educators of their children. They feel that their decisions and the unique needs of their children should be respected, without undue interference from LAs.

'It is imperative that EHE remains an option for families. My child simply wouldn't be alive today had this option not been available to us. We have the freedom to tailor his learning to meet his needs and it is ensuring he receives an education school could not provide. Although this was not our first choice, it turned out to be the best choice and the DfE should be respectful of that. Current guidance around attendance and the lack of resources and training for staff in SEN is forcing families into home education to then make home education difficult and to penalise families for doing so is abhorrent and adds to the systems generated trauma these families are suffering from.'

5. Minimal and Non-Intrusive Contact:

- Many parents prefer minimal and non-intrusive contact from LAs, feeling that too much oversight can be counterproductive and stressful.
- Several respondents value a "hands-off" approach, where LAs require minimal information and do not impose frequent visits or demands.
- Families appreciate being left to focus on their child's education without having to negotiate bureaucratic hurdles.

6. Consistency and Training:

- There is a call for consistency in LA policies and better training for LA staff to understand home education.

'... staff are not all on the same page, and often let their personal views cloud their judgement.'

- Experiences with LAs vary widely, often varying within the same LA. Some parents reported positive interactions, while others described their experiences as negative, marked by inconsistency and variability in the approach of different staff members.
- Inconsistency in approaches and lack of understanding of home education laws and practices are common complaints.
- Many LAs are seen as overworked and understaffed, leading to delayed responses and lack of proper support for home educating families.
- Frequent changes in staff and lack of consistency in how different LA officers handle home education cases lead to confusion and mistrust.

7. **Support and Resources:**

- Some parents appreciate offers of support, such as educational resources or guidance.
- There is a clear call for more support and resources from LAs, particularly for families of children with special educational needs (SEN). Parents expressed a need for information on local resources, groups, and funding opportunities.
- However, many feel that support is inadequate, either due to lack of resources or because interactions feel more like monitoring than genuine support.

8. **Special Educational Needs (SEN):**

- There is significant concern about the handling of SEN children. Many feel that schools and LAs fail to meet their children's needs, thereby leading families to opt for home education.
- Positive experiences often involve LAs that are knowledgeable and supportive of SEN requirements.

9. **Experience and Expertise:**

- Parents value LA staff who have relevant home educational experience and show a genuine understanding of home education.
- Families often find themselves educating LA officers about the legal framework and home education methodologies.
- Negative feedback often mentions LA staff lacking knowledge or appearing to have an anti-home education agenda.

10. Legal Understanding and Compliance:

- Many parents expressed frustration with LAs overstepping legal boundaries or not understanding the legal framework governing home education.
- Clear and lawful communication from LAs is highly valued, while ambiguity and threats are criticised.
- Many parents emphasised the importance of LAs understanding their legal remit and respecting the autonomy of home educators. Requests for unnecessary home visits or work samples were seen as overstepping legal boundaries.
- Some LAs are reported to overstep their legal boundaries by pressuring for visits, photos, or more frequent updates than legally required.
- There are instances of LAs using intimidation, scare tactics, and even lying, which creates a stressful environment for home educating families.

11. Impact on Families:

- Some families report stress and anxiety due to negative LA interactions, fearing repercussions or unannounced visits.
- Some parents feel judged or pressured by LAs, particularly regarding their choice to home educate. This judgement can be more pronounced when dealing with SEN children, where parents feel a lack of understanding and support from LAs.

- Some parents reported feeling harassed or threatened by their LAs, describing tactics that felt more like scaremongering than supportive oversight.
- There are reports of LAs' actions negatively impacting children's education and family well-being, sometimes causing long-term stress and health issues.
- Positive interactions are described as reducing stress and allowing parents to focus on educating their children without additional pressure.

12. Policy Suggestions:

- Standardisation of policies and resources across LAs is a common suggestion.
- Home educating families also advocate for better training for LA staff and more consistent, lawful approaches to home education.

‘If you could tell the DfE anything about your experience of educating your child, what would it be?’

1. Critique of Traditional Schooling:

- Many parents are dissatisfied with the traditional school system due to its focus on their draconian rules over well-being, insufficient support for special educational needs (SEN), and negative impacts on mental health. They argue that the rigid structure fails to meet diverse learning needs effectively.

‘It wasn’t my first choice, but school just wasn’t suitable’

2. Benefits of Home Education:

- **Personalised Learning:** Home education allows for a customised approach that caters to each child’s interests, needs, and learning style, fostering a love of learning.
- **Improved Mental Health:** Many parents report that their children experience better mental health, increased happiness, and reduced stress outside traditional schools.
- **Flexibility and Freedom:** The ability to adapt learning schedules and methods provides a more relaxed and supportive environment compared to traditional schooling.
- **Holistic Development:** Home education supports a broader range of experiences and practical skills, addressing academic, emotional, and social development.

'It has changed their lives. They're secure, confident and learning in their own time and way. It doesn't look like school because it isn't supposed to be.

'It's honestly been the absolute best thing for my children. They are thriving and happy and I wish there was more understanding and acceptance around home education.'

3. Challenges and Sacrifices:

- **Financial Strain:** Home education often involves significant costs for materials, resources, and extracurricular activities, which can be a burden.
- **Lack of Support:** There is a need for more financial and logistical support from authorities, including access to exam centres and educational resources. Without further interference or hoop jumping.
- **Isolation and Misunderstanding:** Home educators may face stigma and a lack of understanding from the general public and from local authorities, adding to their stress and sense of isolation.

4. Community and Support:

- The home education community is valued for its support and resource-sharing, which helps families navigate challenges without extensive official assistance. However, many families did not know where to find their local home education group.

5. Socialisation:

- Contrary to some misconceptions, home educated children often enjoy diverse social interactions through various community activities and networks.

6. Calls for Systemic Change:

- There is a strong desire for reform in the traditional education system to better support all learners, including those with SEN.
- To acknowledge home education as a valid and effective option.

7. Parental Involvement and Satisfaction:

- Parents generally find home education rewarding, appreciating the close involvement in their children's learning and the positive educational outcomes despite the challenges.

'It made my sons learn to love learning. They continue to learn by choice, one doing a BA, aiming for an MA. It gave them confidence to mix with all age groups and offered real life experience which gave them far more opportunities than school. I eventually did 22 years of HE with my 4. They all succeeded in further or higher education later.'

This summary captures the core themes of home educators experiences, emphasising the advantages of home education, the difficulties faced, and the desire for broader systemic changes.

‘If you could suggest any improvements LAs could make that does not require a legislation change, what would they be?’

1. Staff Training and Expertise:

- **Understanding Home Education:** Staff need comprehensive training on various home education styles and neurodiversity, emphasising respect for diverse educational approaches and children's needs.

‘To not doorstep, to not ask for examples of work. Have them better trained so they can see that not all information has to be written down to know that a child knows it, or that they may work at different levels to their peers in school, and that is ok. It’s a marathon not a race.’

- **Experience and Empathy:** Employ staff with direct experience in home education or related fields (not school teachers) to enhance understanding and support. Job advertisements rarely ask for experience of home education, instead the role is described as one of monitoring and school education knowledge is required.
- **Legal Knowledge:** Ensure staff are well-versed in legal requirements to avoid overstepping boundaries and to provide accurate information. A worrying number have never read the government’s EHE guidance.

2. Communication and Transparency:

- **Clear Communication:** Maintain clear and honest communication, in writing, detailing roles and legal limits of EHE staff, in language that is

easily understood. If a legal quote is required, it would be valuable to explain it in a straightforward way.

- **Language:** Ensure the correct use of the term 'EHE' or 'home education' to avoid confusion with home schooling.
- **Job titles:** 'Home schooling monitoring teacher' is not truly representative of what the job entails, EHE advisor is much more appropriate. A breakdown of job titles is discussed [here](#).
- **Avoiding Intrusiveness:** Refrain from unannounced visits or phone calls, opting instead for structured, respectful interactions via email/letter in order to build trust.

3. Support and Resources:

- **Financial Assistance:** Increase financial support for exam fees and educational resources, including discounted or free access to qualifications and materials.
- **Resource Access:** Develop a centralised website with guidance, support, and easier access to exam centres and educational materials.
- **Socialisation Opportunities:** Enhance support for social activities and educational events that facilitate interaction with peers and community engagement.

4. Respect and Relationship Building:

- **Building Trust:** Foster positive relationships through respect and understanding rather than intimidation or threats. Realise that home educators participate in national groups, and they see the harm being done around the country.

- **Non-Judgmental Approach:** Approach home education with a positive, collaborative mindset rather than suspicion or bias.

5. Legal and Administrative Issues:

- **Consistency and Fairness:** Apply policies consistently across LAs, ensuring fair treatment and adherence to legal frameworks.
- **Understanding Legal Framework:** Ensure staff understand and respect legal boundaries and provide clear, accurate information about legal requirements.

6. Support for Special Needs:

- **Neurodiversity and SEN Awareness:** Provide tailored support for children with special educational needs (SEN) or neurodiverse conditions, including appropriate resources and referrals.
- **Support with EHCP:** EHE teams should be supportive when EHCP are applied for, and should not invite themselves to be part of the EHCP annual review as these are two different processes.
- **Sensitivity to Trauma:** Be aware of the emotional impact on families, especially those transitioning from traditional schooling due to trauma or other issues.

7. Public Perception and Awareness:

- **Positive Recognition:** Promote home education as a legitimate educational option, informing parents about it when considering school options.
- **Combat Stigmatisation:** Address and reduce stigma associated with home education. This includes ensuring MPs, DfE staff and Peers fully

understand home education and the legalities, which could then prevent some of the misinformation shared via the media.

8. Emotional and Psychological Support:

- **Sensitivity to Trauma:** Recognise and address the emotional and psychological needs of families, particularly those affected by trauma.

9. Administrative Efficiency:

- **Efficient Processes:** Streamline administrative procedures to avoid unnecessary delays and ensure timely responses and support.
- **Avoid Giving Deadlines:** LAs should refrain from giving deadlines to respond to communications, unless it is made clear that this is for administrative reasons rather than a legal requirement, i.e. a parent could notify an LA that they require more time to reply without fear of consequences.

10. Community Engagement:

- **Informal Interactions:** Facilitate informal meet-ups for home education families and LA staff in order to foster better relationships and mutual understanding. However, make it transparently clear that an EHE staff member is organising it, that no personal details will be required, and that it is a setting where policy changes can be discussed.

These consolidated themes reflect a broad desire for improved understanding, respect, and practical support in home education. Emphasising empathy, training, consistency, and effective communication can help to build stronger, more supportive relationships between home educators and LAs.

‘Any other information you think we will find helpful...’

1. **Bias and Xenophobia in Schools:**

- Issues of bias and xenophobia among school staff can create a hostile environment for some students, prompting parents to consider home education as a safer alternative.

2. **Support and Intervention:**

- There is a call for more supportive and cooperative interventions from LAs rather than punitive measures like School Attendance Orders (SAOs), particularly for families dealing with trauma or abuse.

3. **Resources and Support:**

- The need for better resources for home educators and visible, easily accessible support.

4. **Bullying and Safeguarding:**

- A significant emphasis on the need for more effective action against bullying and safeguarding issues in schools, ensuring that children are safe and supported.

5. **Financial and Practical Support:**

- The financial burden of home education is acknowledged, with suggestions for more support from the government or LAs, such as funding or reduced costs for resources and hall hire.

6. **Understanding and Respect for Home Education:**

- Calls for better understanding and respect from LA staff and other authorities of the diverse and individualised nature of home education.

There is also a desire for less intrusive oversight and more support for families navigating home education.

7. Misconceptions and Communication:

- Addressing misconceptions about home education and the need for better communication and support from local authorities. This includes recognising the different needs of children and respecting parental choices.

8. Quality of Education and Reform:

- Concerns about the quality of education in schools, particularly for SEN-students, and calls for a reform in the education system to better meet the needs of all students. There is pressure for more flexible and individualised approaches, both in schools and home education.

9. Safeguarding and Legal Issues:

- Issues with the safeguarding system and the need for legal reforms to ensure that home education is recognised and supported appropriately. This includes avoiding unnecessary or discriminatory practices.

10. Community and Social Opportunities:

- The importance of social opportunities for home educated children and the need for LAs to support families in finding or creating these opportunities.

11. Emotional and Mental Health:

- The impact of school environments on mental health and the benefits of home education in providing a more supportive and less stressful learning environment for some children.

These themes reflect a broad spectrum of concerns from practical issues in home education to systemic problems within the traditional school system.

Educational Freedom

Conclusion and Further Research

One of the clearest themes evident throughout this document is the disproportionate harm being caused to home educating families by the current attitude from government and LAs. At a time when we should be strongly aware of the importance of well-being and mental health, and still striving to address the long term consequences of COVID and lockdown, there is evidence of LAs exacerbating or even causing long term harm. Yet at the same time the research findings demonstrate simple and effective ways of quickly eliminating many of these issues.

There is clearly a need for LAs to make training a priority, ensuring that it is accurate, useful and evidence based; ideally this should be provided by home educators with real-life experience.

A further need that could be addressed quickly and cheaply, would be to ensure that every LA has up-to-date and useful information on their website. This should include their policy, which should align with EHE guidance, having been consulted on with home educators. The website should feature clear and concise information about the legal framework (without excessive legal quotations), links to support organisations (such as [Educational Freedom](#)), some resource ideas that are not just school related, information about different styles of home education possibly including snippets of information from local families, and local exam centres willing to accept external candidates.

When working with home educators LAs should also consider their language, communication methods, and their own bias, taking into consideration the harm previously discussed. They should not be using s437(1) and SAO powers as a means of intimidating parents, nor should they be dictating the manner in which a home educator can choose to respond. If concerns become known, the EHE should look to support the family before forcing an SAO. Language should be inclusive of all styles of home education (which it is not currently). Focus should be on supporting those who are struggling, rather than forcing a child into school (especially when school has previously let the child down), signposting to support services, and working together to support families. Such measures would lead to a far better outcome for everyone.

The survey, FOIs and the analysis clearly highlight the need for long term research to provide facts and evidence. This should be undertaken prior to updating EHE guidance and making legislative changes that could harm a child's right to education and parental ability to choose home education when it is the correct choice for their family.

So many of the issues raised are the result of inaccurate assumptions, negative bias, and comparisons which employ different measures of success. Accurate information and training could quickly address some of these.

Introducing a CNiS register will not achieve the government's aim of identifying those children missing from education. Instead, fostering a positive relationship will be

likely to make more families reach out and become visible to the LA. Whereas, the threat of prosecution will make those truly missing from education harder to find. Advocating for registration gives the impression that home educators need careful surveillance. This only increases the negative attitudes towards home educators, thus isolating the community further.

Further research into exam access and costs would be a valid contribution to the discussion. Other beneficial approaches could include sourcing more information about EHE staff turnover; establishing whether the current, generic template letters are in line with the law; investigating how each LA categorises CME and what they do to support those known as CME; whether LA EHE policies are inline with their legal duty; gathering information about how many instances of data breach have occurred within this sector.

With further research comes a fuller picture; without this it would be inadvisable to move forward with a register or new EHE guidance.

It is hoped that a change of attitude and approach, within the current legislation, will result in all children being able to access their chosen learning journey. This will not be achieved through a register or more invasive EHE guidance.