Parents and Carers tell us what they value from the Elective Home Education Service.

February - March 2014
Elective Home Education Survey Report

Summary

Effective services are those informed by the customers’ voice. It is more important than ever that we make sure the resources we do have are placed where they are most needed. This was an opportunity to explore what options are available for the future Elective Home Education service and identify the impact that any reductions in the service may have on the families who currently access the service.

We developed a range of methods for people to engage in the consultation between February and March 2014, by online survey, paper questionnaire. 64 parents responded to this survey and openly shared their views.

Parents value the understanding and support that they receive from the Elective Home Education (EHE) Service. The staff are frequently mentioned as positive, helpful and supportive; respecting the decision to home educate. Exam support is seen as extremely important, and there has been mixed views on that which is currently on offer.

Home visits are the most frequently accessed area of the service, but are not found as useful by many. Suggestions were made to operate an optional telephone/email support line instead. There was also a lack of awareness of services currently of offer.

19% of respondents identified themselves as being on a low income. Related to this were frequent references to the cost of providing adequate resources and funding exams.

The consultation has been conducted to explore what options are available for the future Elective Home Education service and identify the impact that any reductions in the service may have on the families who currently access the service. The views gathered have been fed into service planning for September 2014. An update will be provided in July.
Contents

Summary ......................................................................................................................... 2
Where did we start from? ................................................................................................. 4
How did we consult? ......................................................................................................... 4
   How did we involve people? .......................................................................................... 4
   What helped to gain effective engagement? ............................................................... 5
   How did we analyse what they said? ........................................................................... 5
What did they tell us? ....................................................................................................... 6
Use of the EHE Service ................................................................................................. 6
Strengths ....................................................................................................................... 6
   Understanding and support ....................................................................................... 6
   Exam support ........................................................................................................... 7
Areas for Development ................................................................................................. 7
   Home visits ............................................................................................................. 8
Resources ..................................................................................................................... 8
Menu of services .......................................................................................................... 8
Method of delivery ........................................................................................................ 8
Funding ......................................................................................................................... 9
Specific Groups ............................................................................................................ 9
   • Rurality ............................................................................................................... 9
   • Disability ............................................................................................................. 9
   • Religion or Belief ................................................................................................. 10
   • Low income ..................................................................................................... 10
   • Minority ethnic group ...................................................................................... 10
   • Gypsy or travelling community ....................................................................... 10
What will we do with this information? ....................................................................... 10
Where did we start from?

Children, young people and parents/carers have a right to comment on services they receive and tell us what is important to them and this must be given due weight (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK in 1991). It is more important than ever that we make sure the resources we do have are placed where they are most needed. The team of 2.1fte Advisory Teachers for Elective Home Education is currently funded through the Central Schools Budget. At its meeting in January the Schools Forum, on the recommendation of the Compact Executive, agreed that, given that no funding is received for these children and young people through the Dedicated School Grant and the limited statutory nature of the work, the Central Schools Budget should no longer fund these activities from the end of this academic year and alternative funding arrangements should be made. This survey was an opportunity for parents/carers who home educate to tell the council what is important to them within this service and the impact that any reductions in the service may have.

How did we consult?

How did we involve people?

To maximise our reach, we developed a range of access points for people to engage in the survey between 17th February and 9th March 2014. Parents and carers had the option of an online web based survey, an electronic copy to download and either upload or post the completed version, or a hard copy with prepaid envelope that could be requested by either telephone or text message from Somerset Direct.

The survey was publicised to all parents/carers with a child or young person who have chosen to be registered as electively being home educated (310 children and young people in total), and all parents/carers with a child or young person who have notified us of home educating but have elected not to be on the register (128 children and young people in total). This amounted to 275 parents/families in total receiving letters including 100 parent/carers receiving emails also. Flyers were handed out to parents and carers when they accessed the Elective Home Education Service activities. Flyers were also shared with Home Educators Yeovil, HE Social Group Yeovil, Glastonbury Home Ed Group, FAB Home Ed (no longer operational), Exmoor Home Edders, Wellington Home Education Group, and Taunton/Oake/Wiveliscombe Home Education Group with the offer to attend a session and facilitate discussion if requested, this offer was not taken up by any group – most feeling their members were happy to complete of their own accord. Email reminders were sent one week before the closing date.

The following numbers of responses were received across these methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent and carers</th>
<th>Incomplete responses</th>
<th>Complete responses</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper survey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>23.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Page 4 of 10
In order to monitor anticipated impacts respondents could share if their household considered themselves to be part of a group with protected characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent and carers</th>
<th>Complete responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>12 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority ethnic group</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of a structured religion or belief system</td>
<td>13 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gypsy or travelling community</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rurality (living not in a large town or city)</td>
<td>17 27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low or no income, unemployed, part-time or seasonal workers</td>
<td>12 19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td>7 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military status</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>8 13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What helped to gain effective engagement?

The largest electronic responses coincided with a web link being emailed to EHE Groups who obviously electronically shared it wider. The online survey was fully tested and piloted prior to publication and so previous technical ‘glitches’ experienced by other surveys were avoided. However, the County Council changed its master website during the open period and the shortened URL that had been publicised stopped working. This resulted in people not being able to access the online survey from 26th February with it only being brought to our attention on 3rd March. For those responding to the letter or flyer, the opportunity to access a hard copy via Somerset Direct was still an option although it appears people tried the online link a few times over the weekend before simply giving up. The email sent to parents for whom an email address was recorded (100 of the 275) was re-sent with the longer URL and apologies for the inconveniences experienced.

How did we analyse what they said?

The questionnaires provided a variety of tick box questions to be able to pull off quantitative data, with a free text box for further comments or suggesting ideas that would improve their responses (e.g. ‘what has been your experience of the Elective Home Education Service?’ outstanding/good/ satisfactory/unsatisfactory, ‘please describe your experience’). The qualitative data from free text boxes was able to provide some depth and explanation to the quantitative data. Analysis of the questionnaire responses was completed within the online survey system Inovem, with those returned electronically already on the system and those returned by post entered manually onto the same system. Inovem then allowed data capture by spreadsheet for qualitative data analysis, and tagging for content analysis.

The response rate is counted as percentage of responses (complete or incomplete) compared to numbers directly notified. It is not anticipated that there are any parents who have not been directly notified and therefore this counts as the whole population. 20-50% is a typical response rate so the survey response
rate of 23.3% is good, and as such the survey anticipates a +/-10.7% margin of error at 95% confidence level.

**What did they tell us?**
The reasons for choosing to Home Educate were varied and often not just one reason. Of the respondents, the largest number (68%) chose to home educate because of dissatisfaction with provision in school. 51% had chosen due to personal philosophy, and 34% due to practicality and family circumstance. 43% of those who highlighted dissatisfaction with provision in school also referenced personal philosophy. Comments frequently noted a 'one size fits all' approach which doesn’t fit all, and need for smaller class sizes/more nurturing environment. Adding play onto the curriculum and removing bullying also were brought up.

**Use of the EHE Service**
A large amount of parents who responded, 46%, had not accessed the EHE Service in the last calendar year. A further 38% had accessed it only 1 or 2 times. Only one parent had accessed it more than 5 times. Of those who had not accessed it in the last calendar year; 79% had chosen to home educate due to dissatisfaction with provision in school.

When ranking the different aspects of the service the Home Visits were most accessed (only 9% hadn’t). The perceived importance of each aspect of the service will be discussed later, but referrals to other support agencies, resources and the activity day were the least used aspect of the service – all with more than 25% stating they have not accessed it. Eight parents felt nothing was offered to them and they weren’t aware of the services, and seven parents felt the website wasn’t up to date or accurate in terms of what was on offer.

Only 35% of responses recorded their (eldest) child as having spent more years in home education than they had in school, and comments throughout reflected differences of use and need between at the beginning of their home education practice compared to being experienced and established home educators.

**Strengths**
44% rated the EHE Service as either ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’.

**Understanding and support**
There was great appreciation of input from teaching professionals that understand the value of the way learning happens at home, being supporting and not critical. It is clear that the continuity is valued of always seeing the same worker.

“It is pleasant that it isn't heavy handed and that as parents we are permitted to follow the most appropriate 'routes' and learning styles which in turns allows their knowledge base to grow without restriction.”

When asked about what areas of the service were valued and which areas of the service were not found to be useful several clear elements emerged. By far the most valued part of the service was how positive, helpful and supportive the
advisory teachers are, and how they respect the decision to home educate and understand learning through many ways (52% of positive comments). There was also great appreciation that the service was available if needed, but its use not enforced. The advisory teachers also were mentioned as informative as well as supportive. The activity day and residential were also valued, even though a couple comments were raised about location and transportation issues.

**Exam support**

SCC currently offer limited IGCSE examination support to home learners registered for 2 years or more, in Years 10 or 11, for up to 3 subjects, of no more than £300 in any one year. SCC also has an arrangement with 2 examination centres that will take external candidates, and make ad hoc arrangements with others where we can.

Five parents valued the exam support, and three highlighted support with exam costs as being appreciated and essential. However, three also raised the lack of information and support for exams (including funding) as an area of the service that wasn’t useful. Exam support was most clearly seen as extremely important when activities were ranked (see Figure 1). 23 people listed either advice regarding exams, and/or financial support for exams, as support that is essential to keep. Home educators also struggle to find up to date information about courses and places to sit exams and it would help to have these in one place.

**Figure 1** Ranking activities in order of importance for the future

Areas for Development

Of the 16 (25%) that rated the EHE Service as ‘Unsatisfactory’, 14 of those had also selected that they chose to home educate because of dissatisfaction with provision at school. However, none of those rating it as ‘Unsatisfactory’ had highlighted their child having a learning need or barrier, compared to 86% of
those who identified their child as having a learning need or barrier also having chosen to home educate due to dissatisfaction with provision in school.

Home visits

An annual home visit is currently offered to provide support. This can be declined by parents, of their own choice.

Areas of the service that haven’t been found as useful are dominated by the annual home visit. Comments revealed a mixture of viewing the home visit as an interference box ticking exercise, or viewing it as a support and recognition that it’s being done well – but still a part of the service that could be missed without much impact. Supporting this were also complaints about the administration process such as visits being cancelled last minute, the report writing taking a long time and not being of much worth. And this is also very clear in Figure 1. Several parents vocally emphasised that there is no requirement for Local Authorities to regularly monitor the provision or assess the progression of the child.

“Rather than having the emphasis on keeping a check on EHE families, the LA should place themselves as a resource for home educators. As a public service, they should operate in much the same way as GPs do. Families visit their doctor when they need help and advice and possible sign-posting/referral to other support agencies. Once registered with a doctor, the practice does not insist on yearly check-ups for families and they trust parents to make the best decisions for the development of their child. Families can arrange to see their doctor several times a year or not at all.”

Resources

SCC currently loan a limited amount of books and resources, including some initiatives available to schools. SCC also have arrangements with the Youth Equipment Store and Elmwood School Resource Centre to support EHE families.

It was raised by many that resources are expensive and support with access/borrowing would be incredibly valuable. Frequently the financial impact of choosing to home educate was raised both in terms of loss of earnings but also requiring purchase of items such as science kits that schools receive funding to provide. In services essential to keep, eight parents highlighted the need for access to resources, often due to constraints on their finances.

Menu of services

Eight parents found that apart from the annual visit, there has been a lack of contact and they aren’t aware of what services are on offer. As mentioned previously, seven highlighted the website as being out of date or inaccurate and not hosting enough information to be of use.

Method of delivery

Ten parents mentioned a telephone line or email support as the best method to deliver the support they see as essential to keep, to reduce the logistics of home visits. This will allow them to access help and advice as they need it. One of these however did note the need for home visits for children in years 9 and above.
as they consider this exam support is essential. Another suggested designating a school to be available to answer questions particularly around exams.

**Funding**

Schools currently receive funding from the Department for Education per child on the school roll. When a child is taken off the school roll for Elective Home Education through parental choice, this funding does not continue to go to the school nor get redirected to SCC. Similar to when a child attends independent school through parental choice. Schools have until now been funding the SCC EHE Service despite not receiving funding themselves.

If a child has a Statement for a Special Educational Need which specifies the education is best conducted through Home Education, then any funding is allocated through the annual statement review process led by SEN professionals. Changes are anticipated in September with introduction of the Education Health and Care (EHC) plan.

Only 3 parents noted they would consider paying for the advice, visits and support offered. Interestingly 2 of these 3 had identified themselves as being part of a group with the characteristic of low or no income. One would consider paying for services only when they felt they needed them, another was for activity days only, and the third was for only access to information that is not already in the public domain.

The biggest justification (40% of comments) for not being willing to consider paying for services was a reference to families currently contributing via taxation and their children are ‘saving’ the formal education budget but having no sight of this funding themselves. A further 26% raised the issue that their family is of low income due to having made the choice of home education over employment, and therefore would be unable to afford support if there was a fee attached. 12% also raised the existing financial implications they are under as a home educator having to pay for resources and activities themselves without financial aid. 21% were unwilling to pay as they felt they had no need for the service as currently provided.

From the comments beyond the Yes/No, parents appear more comfortable with contributing towards the costs of resources and activity days, but the idea of paying for visits or services they feel they don’t need or aren’t good is very unpopular. The general feeling is that plenty of support is currently available for free through local Home Education Groups and peers.

**Specific Groups**

- **Rurality** responses (27%) reflected those of the general population with no significant additional focuses. Interestingly, the two comments made about location of activities and costs of transport were actually from parents who hadn’t identified themselves as being from a rural group.
- **Disability** and **Carer** responses (19% & 11%) typically reflect those of the general population. However, one comment was received relating to willingness to pay for services which highlighted the unwillingness to pay as the Local Authority was unable to provide appropriate SEN support in
mainstream (who receive additional funding for SEN) and home education was the only option. And one parent particularly valued the support and advice availability for parents who are disabled and who therefore cannot gain access to Home Education groups.

- **Religion or Belief** responses (20%) reflected those of the general population with no significant additional focuses.
- **Low income** responses (19%) broadly reflected the general population with a slightly more frequent mention of requiring support for examination costs, provision of activity days, and support with resources. Interestingly, two of the low income responses would consider paying for the advice, visits and support offered.
- **Minority ethnic group** response (2%) raised issues reflected elsewhere by the general population, and with only one to consider it could not be said whether this is a representative view or not.
- **Gypsy or travelling community** response (2%) raised few detailed comments, and with only one response to consider it is not possible to treat this as a representative view.

**What will we do with this information?**
The consultation has been conducted to explore what options are available for the future Elective Home Education service and identify the impact that any reductions in the service may have on the families who currently access the service. The views gathered have been fed into service planning for September 2014.