HOME WORKS

Local authorities’ approaches to working with home educating parents in Scotland
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Chairman’s Preface

It is with mixed feelings that I present this report. I am pleased that it highlights the experiences of an often ignored and marginalised group of consumers – parents who educate their children at home.

I am, however, seriously concerned to have to report that when parents take this step, they can find shocking barriers put in their way by their local authority. This happens through a combination of poor practice by some local authorities, inadequate legislation to protect families, or by some local authorities choosing to interpret ambiguous law in quite unacceptable ways.

Parents in Scotland are legally responsible for their children’s education, and most choose local authority schools as the vehicle for providing that education. Some choose independent schools, while others choose to educate their children at home.

More often than not, the decision to home educate follows a period of insurmountable difficulty experienced at school, and parents exercise their right, and arguably their responsibility, to withdraw their children from school.

Our research has revealed a worrying range of concerns about the way local authorities approach their relationship with home educating families. From the outset, information and advice given by local authorities can be unhelpful or misleading. The law places no time limit on local authorities to respond to requests by parents to withdraw their children from school, and offers no flexibility on attendance even when children are clearly having problems. These are serious shortcomings in the law, as they can place intolerable strain on families.

The confusion over the continuing role of local authorities in home education can leave families vulnerable to poor practice by those who simply do not agree with the concept of home education. Worse, there appears to be a growing trend towards a blurring of the distinctions between education and social welfare issues by local authorities, leading to parents facing the terrifying prospects of legal action and social work intervention – all because of a decision they have legitimately made about their children’s education.

Such unacceptable harassment of consumers has no place in the 21st century, and may not stand the tests of the Human Rights legislation. We utterly condemn the practices we have come across by some local authorities in Scotland.
There are other local authorities, however, that try to take fair and supportive approaches in their relationships with home educating families, and we have had positive feedback from some that are trying to improve on their approach. If some can do it, all can.

It is a fact that parents sometimes find that home education is the most appropriate option for their children. They should not face barriers such as we have found in this report when they do.

Our estimate that there could be as many as 4,000 children in Scotland who are educated at home is much higher than the numbers known about officially. One reason for this discrepancy is that parents sometimes “disappear” rather than endure the obstacles put in their way. That some parents may choose to move house while others do not have that option begs the question as to whether our current system is encouraging “post code” education. If this were the case, we would be concerned that the government’s agenda for social justice and equality of treatment across Scotland may be hampered.

The SCC will continue to play an active role in promoting the consumer interest in education, including making sure that local authorities, the government and others are aware of the problems faced by home educating families and the solutions that will help them.

Graeme S Millar
CHAIRMAN
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the local authorities that took part in our survey, and we particularly appreciate their willingness to take the time to complete our questionnaire on what is a complex set of issues.

We are also grateful for the time taken by the home education organisations to discuss the issues with us, and to tell us about parents' experiences. The demands made on their time are enormous. Schoolhouse Home Education Association, Education Otherwise, and the Home Education Advisory Service have made invaluable inputs into the research.

Special thanks go to the home educating parents who got in touch with us during the research, or whom we had the opportunity to meet at organised events. Their willingness to share their often difficult experiences with us added much to our understanding.

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Summary

This report is about how local authorities approach their relationship with parents who decide to educate their children at home rather than at school.

We looked at five aspects of the local authority/parent relationship that have a bearing on home education. These were:

- Information and advice for parents
- Consent and withdrawal from school
- Local authorities’ continuing involvement in home education provision
- When things go wrong
- Local authorities and parents working together.

Based on a postal survey returned by 27 of the 32 Scottish local authorities, along with detailed discussion with home education organisations and a review of other research, we found:

- Local authorities did not tend to receive many requests for information and advice about home education, in contrast with the experience of home education organisations. Neither did local authorities find an increase in demand for information and advice about home education, unlike the home education organisations and the evidence from our own research on independent advice for parents.

- Advisers in local authorities did not receive regular training in home education and the law. The home education organisations all pointed to an inconsistency of advice given across local authorities, which seemed to be borne out by other research on parents’ experiences.

- While local authorities tended to produce written information for parents, an analysis of the information leaflets we received was disappointing. Clear contact details with the council were not always given, and none told parents how they could make a complaint. Most focused on the school-based 5-14 curriculum, which is arguably not always suitable for a home environment. Home education organisations said parents could experience problems with the local authority when they did not follow the 5-14 curriculum. None of the information leaflets referred in any substantial way to other education methods, and only three gave contact details for home education organisations. Worryingly, more than half the leaflets we saw contained misleading information about parents’ legal position.

- Local authorities did, however, tend to refer parents to other agencies for further information and advice.
• Most requests to withdraw children from school were granted. According to the local authorities, consent was normally given within six weeks to three months of the requests being made. Some did say, however, that there was a lot of variation from family to family. The home education organisations all reported that problems can occur during the process of consent, and that children can be inappropriately forced to attend school for lengthy periods. The law placed no time limit on local authorities for processing requests to withdraw children from school, an unfair principle.

• We heard worrying evidence of parents being referred to the Children’s Panel, where they had withdrawn their children from school prior to receiving consent. This was done on the basis of “truancy”, and it appeared that the law did not allow the flexibility needed to take into account any difficulties children may have been experiencing at school.

• Local authorities’ policies on granting withdrawal requests were not usually reviewed on a regular basis, and less than half had reviewed them at all. Where they had, however, they tended to involve parents and there was some evidence of changes being made to policies as a result of parental involvement.

• There was plenty of scope for confusion and disagreement about the continuing role of local authorities in home education, as the law in this area was not clear. Some form of guidance on good practice in the local authority’s continuing involvement, based on consultation with parents and with local authorities, would be helpful in avoiding conflict and allowing positive relationships to develop.

• Education officers who monitored home education provision generally received no training in home education methods. While the home education organisations gave examples of individual officers approaching them for advice on good practice, they said that there was considerable variation among the approaches taken by different education advisers even within the same local authority. Such variation could mean the local authority’s overall approach was unpredictable, and this was not likely to help foster positive partnership with parents.

• While councils usually had a written policy on their approach to monitoring, only half had reviewed it, and not many had involved parents in their review.

• Complaints information did not appear to be recorded as well as it should be. On one hand local authorities told us that they had received no complaints from parents, while on the other they were able to tell us about problems that had been raised by parents. The
low level of complaints recorded by local authorities sat uneasily with the high number of complaints described to us by home education organisations, which was what took up a lot of their time.

- Only a few local authorities had set out their approach to partnership with home educating parents in writing. However, councils tended to welcome partnership with parents, and most were able to identify things that would help improve partnership with parents. Issues related to resources were most commonly identified, along with the need to clarify certain aspects of the law.

- Many local authorities struggled to find examples of good practice in their own approach to partnership, although there were examples. Home education organisations, too, found it difficult to identify examples of good practice. They did, however, point to individual officers working hard to support families, though often within unhelpful overall local authority policies.

- There were mixed views on the three ideas we posed – dual enrolment; flexi-schooling; and changing the law on consent. Views on dual enrolment were more positive than views on flexi-schooling. Many of the local authorities’ reservations stemmed from the government’s requirements to report certain information. There were mixed views, too, on the suggestion of changing the law on seeking consent to withdraw children from school, to bring the law into line with that in England and Wales.

The SCC takes the view that relationships between local authorities and home educating parents can be positive, and where they work well, can provide the support needed in a child’s education. Approaches to partnership can influence the relationships that develop. However, the evidence so far does suggest that partnership may be too one-sided, with parents experiencing difficulties with local authorities’ approaches. We have seen examples through the home education organisations of local authorities threatening parents with the intervention of the Children’s Panel and social work powers, based on what would appear to be a difference of opinion over what constitutes an appropriate education. This blurring of education with other issues is bound to be terrifying for parents, and is not likely to lead them to seek to work positively with the local authority. Such approaches may well be in breach of Human Rights legislation.

We made the following recommendations based on our findings:

1. The government should facilitate a review of the continuing role of local authorities in home education.

2. Local authorities should provide parents with copies of reports written about their education provision.
3. Local authorities should make sure their advisers are trained in home education and the law.

4. Local authorities should make sure their written information for parents is impartial and based on an understanding of home education methods.

5. Local authorities should publish clear information about their approach to home education.

6. Local authorities should make sure they monitor dissatisfaction related to home education and have a way of using this information to improve their service for children’s benefit.
Chapter 1 Introduction

Background

In Scotland, parents are responsible for making sure their children receive education suitable for their age and ability. Most choose to do this by sending their children to local authority schools, and some by sending them to independent schools. Some, however, make arrangements to educate their children from home rather than attending school. As in many countries, children in Scotland do not legally have to attend school to receive their education.

However, *schooling* is often used mistakenly as a term to refer more broadly to *education*. Because of this, people may be unaware that children do not have to go to school. While this is likely to make little difference to the majority who would prefer their children to attend school, it can make life difficult for those who could benefit most from home education. For example, parents who need to look beyond schooling as an option will not consider home education if they are unaware of it; or parents who ask their school or local authority for advice may be told wrongly that it is not lawful to educate children at home.

There is a large body of research on home education, much of it from the USA, but also a large amount from the UK. The research tends to examine the reasons for educating at home; educational attainment and social development of home-educated children; children’s and parents’ experiences of home education; and the relationship between families and local authorities. Paula Rothermel was carrying out a substantial piece of research involving 1,000 home educating families in the north of England at the time of our own research. Her research was conducted in several stages, including interviews with parents and measurement of children’s educational performance. It explored the aims and practices of home educators in the UK. Other notable researchers who have gathered evidence on home education in the UK include Roland Meighan, Amanda Petrie, Alan Thomas and Steve Lowden, among others.

The reasons why parents choose to educate their children at home are many and varied. For example, they may decide to educate at home due to religious or other beliefs. More commonly the decision to educate at home is made when difficulties have been experienced at school, or when arrangements for meeting special educational needs are not satisfactory. Paula Rothermel found of the parents in her research⁷:

- over half the reasons given for educating at home related to school (such as children being unhappy at school);
• almost a third of the reasons were child-centred, such as the desire to stimulate children’s learning; and

• one in five decided to educate at home because of personal belief.

Distance to the school was also listed as a reason for the decision to home educate by one of the local authorities in our research. There are also instances where children with special educational needs attend school part-time and are educated at home part-time.

Amanda Petrie has pointed out that parents are likely to have a combination of reasons leading to the decision to home educate. Importantly, she found that

“when the combined reasons seem large and overwhelming, only then do parents consider home education seriously.”

Paula Rothermel’s research supports this conclusion, in her finding that many parents decided to home educate because they saw this as the only accessible alternative to school, rather than because it was the best option for them.

Some children are educated at home for a large part of their “school-aged” years, while others are educated at home for a time and return to school.

Parents whose children have never attended school do not have to receive the local authority’s permission to educate at home, and there is evidence that many home educating parents avoid contact with their local authority. This makes it very difficult to estimate with any degree of accuracy how many children may be educated at home. The Department for Education and Employment attempted to conduct research on the level of underreporting by home educating families, but had to abandon this due to an unwillingness on the part of parents to take part. There is general agreement among researchers that the level of “underreporting” is very high. Schoolhouse Home Education Association, for example, says “it is a fact that most home educators have no contact with local authorities”.

Nevertheless, there have been various attempts to find out how many children might be involved. The most recent estimates come from Education Otherwise, that at least 50,000 children in the UK are home-educated. According to official statistics, the number of pupils at primary schools and secondary schools in the UK was 8,896,400 in 1996/97. 50,000 children equates to 0.6% of the total numbers of pupils at school according to these figures. 0.6% of the total numbers of pupils in Scottish schools at the same time amounts to just under 4,250 children in Scotland. Looking at the figures another way, the total number of pupils
in Scottish schools was 8.5% of the total in the UK. 8.5% of 50,000 children gives a similar figure, 4,260 children who may be educated at home in Scotland. Yet, the latest available official figures on the number of children educated at home is just over 300 in 1998. Whatever the true figures, there is clearly a discrepancy between the actual and known numbers of children being educated at home in Scotland. Establishing the size of this sector would be a useful area for further research.

Steve Lowden looked at the relationship between parents and local authorities in England, and found that there was confusion between the concepts of schooling and education. The implications of this were that some local authorities were providing inappropriate information for parents, or were making unreasonable demands about the education provided at home. This is likely to have a negative impact on partnership with parents, in turn leading to difficulties for children.

If indeed such problems are widespread, this could explain why large proportions of home educating parents seek to avoid contact with the local authority. However, the relationship between home educating families and local authorities in Scotland is not well understood. We hope that by examining it, we may contribute to developing practices that lead to more supportive relationships between local authorities and home educating families.

The SCC survey

Where parents decide to educate their children at home, local authorities still have a responsibility to ensure they are receiving a suitable education. This places local authorities and parents in a relationship, albeit an unusual one. Where the relationship breaks down, or does not work well from the beginning, children can experience extreme difficulties. For example, many children who are home-educated have suffered mental health problems because the school environment is not suitable for them; yet they may have to attend school because of a negative relationship between their parents and the local authority.

Consumers have traditionally been the recipients of providers’ decisions in the public sector. For example, most people assume they have to send their children to school, and few seem to be aware this is not the case. Therefore, while parents have a right to educate their children at home, the decision to do so could be seen by some as a threat to accepted practice. The local authority’s response to parents having made the decision rather than following "normal" practice is likely to influence the nature of the relationship that develops between them. Parents’ views of the local authority, too, can impact on how this works.

We were interested in looking at how far the relationship between parents
and local authorities could be described as a partnership. The concept of partnership in education is generally based on the definition by Pugh⁵, who says that partnership needs

- a shared sense of purpose;
- mutual respect; and
- willingness to negotiate.

In the case of home education, it could be argued that parents and local authorities have a shared sense of purpose in wanting the most appropriate education for children. However, local authorities and parents could well have different views on what constitutes appropriate education. The extent to which parents respect the role of local authorities and local authorities respect the role of parents will determine whether the two can work in partnership. For example, advice agencies report parents experiencing difficulties with their local authority as a key reason for avoiding future contact with the local authority.

As for negotiating, local authorities as large bureaucracies are likely to have significantly more weight than parents, who may well lack the information they need or the resources they need to engage in negotiation. Partnership can be difficult to achieve where one partner is more powerful than the other. For example, the evidence of local authorities looking for a curriculum approach similar to schools can cause difficulty for parents who do not see this as meeting their children’s needs. On the other hand, home education organisations say there are a number of local authorities who do want to consult with home educators to develop more family friendly policies and procedures.

The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) decided to begin by looking at local authorities’ perspectives on their relationship with home educating families. This was as a response to the difficulties that children can face if such relationships do not work well; and to draw out broader lessons about local authorities as partners with consumers, which could apply across a range of policy areas.

**Methodology**

Following a review of the research literature available on home education and extensive discussions with home education organisations, a postal questionnaire was sent to all 32 local authorities in Scotland, prompting for their views on various aspects of partnership with home educating families. The questionnaire covered the following themes:

- Information and advice for parents
- Consent and withdrawal from school
- Local authorities’ continuing involvement in home education provision
• When things go wrong
• Local authorities and parents working together

The questions we asked, along with the numbers who responded to each question, are given in Annex 1 of the report.

**Structure of the report**

The report outlines the responses to the questionnaire. It follows the five themes of the questionnaire, and each theme is reported within a similar structure:

• What the law says about the particular issue
• What the evidence from other research suggests
• The findings of the SCC survey.

Twenty-eight of the 32 local authorities responded to our survey. This included 27 returned questionnaires, and one council who discussed their approach with us rather than completing a questionnaire. The report provides an analysis based on the 27 questionnaires returned. Some councils asked for their views to remain anonymous in the report, and this has been respected.

The councils that did and did not respond to us are listed in Annex 2 of the report.
Chapter 2 Information and advice for parents

The law

Parents are entitled to certain written information, such as basic information about schools in an area from the local authority, school handbooks from individual schools, or copies of policies and guidelines (for example admissions policies). They are also entitled to information about their own children’s progress, and certain information where the local authority wishes to assess a child for special educational needs. There is, however, no entitlement to information about home education. There is no entitlement, either, to advice about education generally, other than a parent’s entitlement to the assistance of a Named Person when their child has a record of needs. There is no requirement for printed information to contain details of where to obtain advice.

Research evidence

The Scottish Consumer Council recently conducted a survey of advice providers, about advice for parents on all education matters. Advice about home education was included in the survey, and in common with other aspects of education, a wide range of agencies gave advice about home education. However, very few agencies specialised in advice about home education, as was the case with other aspects of education. Overall, we found serious gaps in the provision of education advice for parents in Scotland. There were gaps in provision, a lack of specialist knowledge, and a restricted range of advice services (notably counselling or advocacy). This was against a background of evidence of increasing demand for education advice from parents, including home education.

There are a number of organisations that can provide specialist information and advice for parents about home education, including Schoolhouse Home Education Association (Schoolhouse), Education Otherwise, and the Home Education Advisory Service.

Schoolhouse

Schoolhouse was formed in 1996 as a response to the lack of information, resources and support to children who are educated at home and their families. It recognised a gap in advice about the legal position specifically in Scotland. Schoolhouse has an elected management committee, and consults with members and the wider home education community in order to set priorities. It offers support and advocacy to home educating families, and a public information service to those interested in home education throughout Scotland. It also facilitates and distributes a newspaper produced by and for home-educated children. Membership of Schoolhouse is free.
The widespread confusion of *schooling* with *education* may mean that some staff in local authorities are unaware of parents’ right to educate their children at home. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that parents are sometimes told mistakenly that their children must attend school. It is important, therefore, to ask questions about who gives parents information and advice within local authorities about home education, the training of these officers in home education and the law, and referral to other organisations.

**The SCC survey findings**

We asked about the level of requests for advice about home education, and who dealt with these requests.

- The number of requests to councils for advice about home education was generally low. The most typical was 2 – 5 requests during the past 12-month period (14 councils). Three councils had received no requests, while the highest number of requests was 11 – 20, received by one council (Fife).

- Councils thought, on the whole, that the level of requests had remained the same over the last five years.

- Designated education officers almost always dealt with advice requests to councils. However, none of these officers received regular training in home education and the law. Of the 26 responding councils, half provided training “as required”, while the other half provided no specific training. A number of councils commented...
that although no specific training was provided, staff were experienced.

Other sources of information and advice can be important to parents, so we asked about written information and referral to other agencies.

- Councils generally said they had written information for parents and young people who enquire about home education. Dundee was one of the councils who had written information, and was currently reviewing it with the help of a home educating family. Fifteen of those who said they had written information for parents sent us copies. Five councils said they did not have written information, while two said information was currently being prepared.

- Councils tended to refer parents and young people to national organisations for information and advice on home education, while a smaller number referred them to local advice agencies. In addition to local and national advice agencies, Argyll and Bute referred parents to other home educating families who agreed to be contacted. Six councils did not refer to other organisations. There were only two councils who neither produced information nor referred parents to other organisations when advice was sought.

We looked at the content of the information for parents sent to us by the 15 local authorities⁹. Eight of these, all former Strathclyde Region authorities, had information that was almost identical. Fife provided information that was also very similar to these. One of the councils admitted that the information was “not entirely user friendly”, and that it tended to use it as the basis for a meeting with parents where staff would provide information on a personal basis.

- Only eight of the 13 information leaflets gave clear contact details within the local authority. Seven did not. Their only contact details were for parents to get in touch if they wished to return their children to school.

- All but one of the information leaflets spelled out the role of the local authority in determining whether parents could continue to educate their children at home.

- None of the information leaflets however, gave any information about how parents could make a complaint about any aspect of the local authority’s involvement with their decision to home educate.

Only two councils had written their information in terms that could at all be described as supportive of parents who had made the decision to home educate. These were Aberdeenshire and Dumfries and Galloway.
For example:

“The education service will provide you with as much support and guidance as possible in developing and implementing your home education programme, including advice on curriculum, methods and materials.”
Aberdeenshire, draft guide for parents

“Dumfries and Galloway Education Authority will be pleased to support parents who opt for home education once it is satisfied that adequate provision is being made.”
Dumfries and Galloway

- Aberdeenshire and Moray were the only two councils whose information we saw who did not concentrate on the 5-14 curriculum for schools as the approach expected at home. All of the other information leaflets gave parents a clear indication that following the 5-14 curriculum was what would be expected by local authorities in making their decision about whether appropriate education was being provided at home. Other than vague cursory references to “reputable correspondence courses”, none of the councils acknowledged other education methods or approaches.

Six information leaflets had information that could be misleading about the legal position parents were in. For example:

- Some said that parents had to inform the local authority of their intention to home educate, even if their child had never attended school. This is not the case, although local authorities do have a duty to intervene if they have reason to believe that education provided at home is not suitable.

- A few leaflets told parents they would have to allow eye and hearing tests to be carried out. They do not.

- Some leaflets commented after discussion of the 5-14 curriculum that parents could provide religious education according to their wishes. In fact, parents can provide their children’s entire education according to their wishes.

Nine of the 15 leaflets contained advice that could be seen as patronising to parents. Common among these, for example, was advice such as:

“A suitable room and furniture should be provided”

or

“Some form of physical exercise should be provided”.

Finally, only three of the leaflets gave contact details of home education organisations. All of the others gave contact details that did not go beyond the council, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum.

**Comments**

The following comments compare our findings with information from Schoolhouse, Education Otherwise and the Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS), gained through discussions with them as well as their printed material.

Local authorities did not tend to receive many requests for information and advice about home education. This is in contrast with the high numbers of contacts recorded by Schoolhouse (461 during a ten-month period). The difference could be explained by a suggestion by Education Otherwise that parents tended not to approach the local authority for information and advice.

Local authorities felt that the trends in numbers of information and advice requests about home education had stayed the same over the last five years. Schoolhouse, on the other hand, reported that advice requests had “rocketed”\(^{10}\), both directly from families and indirectly from other advice agencies. The evidence from our previous research on independent information and advice was of advice agencies reporting increasing numbers of requests on education, including home education\(^{11}\). HEAS and Education Otherwise confirmed this increasing trend.

Advisers in local authorities did not receive regular training in home education and the law, and some local authorities commented that advisers were experienced in this area. Schoolhouse, Education Otherwise and HEAS all pointed to an inconsistency of advice given across local authorities. They knew of cases where parents had been given wrong information, for example that home education was not legal. HEAS was disappointed that local authorities in Scotland (in comparison with England) had never taken up their offers of training.

Local authorities tended to produce written information for parents, although an analysis of the information leaflets we received was disappointing. Clear contact details with the council were not always given, and none told parents how they could make a complaint. Most focused on the school based 5-14 curriculum, which is arguably not always suitable for a home environment. None referred in any substantial way to other education methods, and only three gave contact details for home education organisations. Worryingly, more than half the leaflets we saw contained misleading information about parents’ legal position.
The councils in our survey, however, did tend to refer parents to other agencies for further information and advice. We recognise that it can be a considerable challenge to local authorities to provide information to parents who do not get in contact with them. Establishing a relationship with other agencies, therefore, could help local authorities to disseminate information to parents.

Positive relationships need to be based on reliable information. This includes information for parents as well as information for local authority staff advising them.

Closer attention to the initial contact between parents and local authorities, when parents request initial information, could have a significant impact on their relationship later on. We have evidence from our own research in other policy areas\textsuperscript{12} that the initial information and advice from a service provider can impact significantly on changing relationships. For example, if accurate information is not provided at the outset, consumers can become suspicious of the local authority’s involvement later on. From the information we saw, there is plenty of scope for improvement.
Chapter 3 Consent and withdrawal from school

The law

Section 35 of the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act sets out the legal position about withdrawing children from school to educate them at home.

If children have not started school, parents do not need the local authority’s permission to educate at home. If, however, a child has attended school for even one day, parents do need to obtain permission. Such permission cannot be refused by the local authority without good reason. However, there are no time limits to which local authorities have to adhere in reaching their decision.

While parents are responsible for their children’s education, local authorities have an obligation to ensure the “adequate and efficient” provision of school education in their area, and have a duty to enforce school attendance. Local authorities, therefore, need to be assured that a child is receiving appropriate education at home, and have powers to allow or refuse parents permission to educate their children at home.

There is an important difference in the law between Scotland and England on consent to withdraw children from school for home education. In England, parents can withdraw their children upon written notification to the local authority, while in Scotland, parents cannot withdraw their children until permission has been granted by the local authority. On 9 May 2000, the Education, Culture and Sport Committee of the Scottish Parliament considered an amendment to the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Bill, which would have brought the law into line with that in England and Wales. While the amendment had cross-party support, it was narrowly defeated in a vote.

Section 28 of the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act says that children should be educated according to their parents’ wishes, while Section 30 states that it is the parents’ responsibility to make sure their children receive education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude. The 5-14 curriculum is the agreed approach for schools in Scotland, but there is no legal requirement for parents to adopt this or any other particular curriculum.

The parental responsibility for children’s education, and local authorities’ responsibility to make sure there is adequate provision in their areas, means parents and local authorities should have a relationship of some sort where a child is educated at home.
Research evidence

Two broad points of potential conflict between local authorities and parents wishing to home educate can be identified. The first of these is when parents seek the local authority’s consent to withdraw their child from school. Steve Lowden’s research provides evidence of some local authorities in England being judgmental about parents wishing to home educate. Anecdotally, there is evidence in Scotland of some parents withdrawing their child from school before consent is granted. This is most likely to be because the decision to home educate has arisen from difficulties the child is already experiencing at school. It is important, therefore, to explore aspects of the process of granting consent to withdraw children from school for home education.

The SCC survey findings

We asked the councils how many requests they had received from parents to withdraw their children from school.

- Across the 27 councils, there were 103 requests to withdraw children from school recorded in the last 12 months. Four councils (Orkney, East Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire and East Renfrewshire) had received no requests. Fife received the highest number of requests (11), while North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire each received 10 requests. 13

- Most of the requests were granted, with only a very few refused.

- According to the councils, parents typically waited up to six weeks, or between six weeks and three months for the local authority’s decision on their request to withdraw their child from school. One council said it took three to six months, but none were longer. Some councils commented that the actual time could vary, for example depending on the quality of information received from parents.

- The councils used a combination of correspondence and meetings as the methods of involving parents in the decision process. Very few used other methods, and these tended to be asking parents to submit study programmes. Correspondence was the most common method, used by 22 out of the 27 councils.

We asked about written policies on granting consent to withdraw children from school, and about parents’ involvement in developing these policies.

- Councils normally had a written policy on consenting to withdraw children from school. Only six out of the 27 said they did not.
• Councils most commonly had not reviewed their consent process, although almost as many said they did from time to time. Only four councils regularly reviewed theirs.

• Of the 15 councils who had reviewed their process at some point, there was a tendency to seek parents’ views (10 councils). Six of these said changes had been made to their process as a result, while the remaining four said no changes had been suggested. Angus was one of the councils which sought parents’ views, and commented “home visits are arranged and parents are fully consulted and informed throughout”. Perth and Kinross and Aberdeenshire councils had made changes to their information for parents following a review.

Comments

Seeking consent to withdraw a child from school is a potential point of conflict between local authorities and parents wishing to educate their children at home. It can be a serious challenge for local authorities and parents to turn this into a positive relationship.

It is important that local authorities have clear policies on their approach to granting consent, based on listening to parents’ views and concerns, and that they make these policies known to parents. However, there is a serious weakness in the law, in that local authorities do not have to adhere to any time limits when making their decision.

Most requests to withdraw children from school were granted. According to the local authorities, consent was normally given within six weeks to three months of the requests being made. Some did say, however, that there was a lot of variation from family to family, and tended to say that the length of time depended on the information received from parents. Schoolhouse, Education Otherwise and the Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS) have all reported that problems can occur during the process of consent, and that children can be inappropriately forced to attend school for lengthy periods. They had many examples of local authorities taking what might be viewed as unnecessarily obstructive approaches. Given our finding in the previous chapter, that local authorities tend to look for school-based approaches to home education, it may well be that an unwillingness to accept alternative education methods drags out the consent process. In addition, the home education organisations report that local authorities sometimes refer cases to the Children’s Panel, where parents have withdrawn their children from school prior to receiving consent. This is done on the basis of “truancy”, and it appears that the law does not allow the flexibility needed to take into account any difficulties children may be experiencing at school.
Local authorities’ policies on granting requests were not usually reviewed on a regular basis, and less than half had reviewed them at all. Where they had, they did tend to involve parents and there was a little evidence of changes being made to policies as a result of parental involvement. However, this seems to be an area that could be further improved. Clear policies based on listening to parents’ views and concerns will help promote partnership.
Chapter 4 Local authorities’ continuing involvement in home education provision

The law

Section 37 of the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act says that local authorities can intervene if they have reason to believe that parents are not providing a suitable education. This applies whether children have been withdrawn from school or have never attended school. The law does not, however, say how local authorities can determine that they are not satisfied with home education provision.

Local authorities can make any of the following decisions about children being educated at home:

- **Allow it to continue, if the local authority is satisfied that the child is receiving proper education**: parents do not require a teaching qualification to teach their own children. Groups of five children or more educated together may be defined as an independent school.

- **Allow parents to provide home education only if certain requirements are met**: if the local authority insists on a particular course of study or particular education methods, parents are not required to adhere to these, but could face legal action from the local authority if they do not.

- **Order parents to send the child to school**: local authorities can serve a school attendance order, naming the school the child should attend. The parents must be given the opportunity to state their views before the order is served, and can appeal to the sheriff court.

To reach a decision, the local authority can monitor the arrangements made by parents, such as by arranging home visits or inspecting samples of the children’s work. They can keep such monitoring under regular review. Any decision the local authority makes has to take account of the principle that children are to be educated according to their parents’ wishes as long as the education is suitable and avoids unnecessary public expense.

It is important to note that the law does not require local authorities to carry out home visits, nor does it require adherence to any sort of curriculum.
Research evidence

Monitoring education provision is a second potential point of conflict between local authorities and home educating families. There is plenty of scope for disagreement over what the law actually means in this respect. For example, local authorities have a duty to intervene if they have reason to believe that education provided at home is not suitable. On the other hand, parents do not have to receive the local authority’s permission to home educate if their child has never attended school. There is no guidance on what “suitable” education means in different settings, and the tendency to use the 5-14 curriculum as a measure will not always be appropriate. Furthermore, there is scope to argue that monitoring where there is no reason to believe the education is unsuitable could be a case of “guilty until proven innocent”. Whatever the answers may be to these questions, it is clear that the law gives room for confusion and disagreement between parents and local authorities.

Steve Lowden’s research found that some local authorities in England tended to project “schooling”, including the national curriculum, to home education. Anecdotally, there is evidence that some parents object to the local authority’s role in monitoring their provision, while some object to the criteria used by local authorities. There is also growing evidence from some advice agencies that parents are being told, wrongly, that they must comply with home visits. Indeed, we have seen written evidence that some local authorities threaten referral to the Children’s Panel unless parents agree to home visits. A blurring of education and social work intervention appears to be happening with home educators in a way that does not seem to be happening with parents who educate their children through school. The Human Rights Act may well have implications for such developments.

Given the large scope for conflict over the continuing role of local authorities in home education provision, it is important that parents and local authorities are able to work together in a positive relationship. In particular, a partnership approach (where they have a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate) could allow parents and local authorities to work together for children’s benefit. It is important, therefore, to look at issues concerning monitoring home education provision.

The SCC survey findings

We asked about the number of children whose home education the local authority monitored.

- The 27 councils monitored the home education of 286 children. This ranged from one child in each of two councils, to 38 children in
Perth and Kinross. There were 212 children withdrawn from school, and 74 who had never attended school.

- Most councils had a written policy on monitoring home education provision, although four out of the 27 did not. None of these four (Borders, Western Isles, Shetland and Highland) had a written policy on granting consent either.

- Home educating families were most likely to be contacted for monitoring about once a year, although this could vary according to families’ needs or circumstances. Designated education officers, in all cases, carried out the monitoring. These officers, however, tended to have no specific training in home education methods. There were only nine councils who provided training, and this was as required rather than regularly.

We asked about how parents were involved in monitoring home education provision, if they were involved in reviewing the process, and if so what changes had resulted.

- Most councils said they involved parents in the monitoring process (one council said it did not), and this was most often done through meetings.

- Less than half said parents were always given a copy of monitoring reports, while almost as many said a copy was available for inspection if requested. Some councils said parents were given verbal feedback on the reports. Three councils, however, said the reports were confidential to the local authority.

- Half of the councils had not yet reviewed their monitoring process. Of those who had (14), most did so from time to time rather than regularly. Only eight councils sought parents’ views as part of their reviews (three always and five sometimes). Six of the 14 councils who reviewed their monitoring process did not seek parents’ views.

- Of the eight councils who sought parents’ views, three had made changes suggested by parents, while half said parents hadn’t suggested any changes. The changes included timing and arrangements of visits, and availability of monitoring reports. Angus and East Ayrshire councils, for example, said they now made monitoring reports available to parents as a result of listening to their views.

Comments

The law gives local authorities a continuing role in monitoring home
education provision, but it does not indicate how they should do this or what they should look for. Evidence of many local authorities requiring something resembling a school curriculum at home is confirmed by home education organisations who say parents often experience problems when they do not follow the 5-14 curriculum. While the 5-14 curriculum may represent best practice in the school environment, other methods are more likely to be needed in home education. Our finding that education officers who monitor home education provision generally receive no training in home education methods suggests there is scope for conflict in this area. While the home education organisations gave examples of individual officers approaching them for advice on good practice, they said that there was considerable variation among the approaches taken by different education advisers even within the same local authority. Such variation can mean the local authority’s overall approach is unpredictable, and this is not likely to help foster positive partnership with parents.

While councils usually had a written policy on their approach to monitoring, only half had reviewed it, and not many had involved parents in their review.

Effective partnership needs to be based on a shared understanding of what is to be expected from each of the parties involved. However, there is disagreement between local authorities and some of the home education organisations about what the local authority’s role actually is, and the law does not provide clear guidance. Some form of guidance clarifying this area, based on consultation with parents and with local authorities, would be helpful in avoiding conflict and allowing positive relationships to develop.
Chapter 5 When things go wrong

Before considering ways of improving relationships between local authorities and home educating parents, we asked about the problems they experienced.

The law

Local authorities are not required to operate complaints procedures for parents, although in certain circumstances there is recourse to an appeals committee of the local authority. Service First, although it has no legal basis, expects public service providers to have an effective complaints procedure, and the local government ombudsman may consider the lack of a written complaints procedure to be maladministration.

Research evidence

In 1994, the Scottish Consumer Council conducted research into complaints handling in education\textsuperscript{14}. At that time, the existence of written complaints procedures in local authorities was patchy. Several years on, we looked at complaints involving a contractor delivering services on behalf of the local authority\textsuperscript{15}, and we found written complaints procedures to be more commonplace by then. However, we were disappointed to find that complaints information was not being used to improve services as much as we would have expected.

Research shows that there are many barriers to making a complaint in the public sector, and our own research confirmed that parents can find complaining very difficult.

- One of the key barriers to making a complaint is not knowing what to expect from the service in the first place. From our evidence so far, there is plenty of scope to improve the written information produced by local authorities on their approach to home education.

- Poor knowledge of how to make a complaint, or who to contact about a complaint, is another important barrier. The written information for parents we have seen so far did not give parents details of how to make a complaint.

- A further key barrier to making a complaint is a lack of confidence that anything will improve as a result. In a 1997 MORI study\textsuperscript{16}, 43% of local authority customers with a complaint said the problem had happened before. There were very high levels of dissatisfaction
with how local authorities handled complaints, and two-thirds of those who were dissatisfied said this was because nothing was done, or the same problem had happened again.

In our own research into complaints and contract monitoring in 1998, we found that local authorities had an optimistic view of how easy it was for parents to make a complaint. This was despite evidence of a lack of information about what to expect from the service, a lack of readily available information on how to complain, and not much evidence of complaints information being put to use to improve services.

Discussion with Schoolhouse, Education Otherwise and the Home Education Advisory Service revealed that many complaints from parents about the local authority’s approach to home education were known about. Indeed, the agencies spent some considerable time helping parents across the country who were having difficulties. There was a feeling that parents were unable to challenge poor practice by local authorities. Schoolhouse said that one of the main difficulties home educators reported was “dealing with the council”. The majority of those who actively avoided contact with the local authority felt that the council’s policies and procedures were unreasonable. Indeed, Education Otherwise said that parents tended to “disappear” rather than make a complaint.

It is important to explore areas of difficulty that may lead to complaints, to ensure positive relationships can be established and maintained in the best interests of children.

The SCC survey findings

Most councils said they had handled no complaints about home education in the last 12 months. Only six out of the 27 councils said they had received any, and in each case they said it was only one complaint.

On the other hand, ten councils said problems had been raised by parents about the process of consent; and 11 about the local authority monitoring their home education provision.

- Ten councils gave details of problems raised by parents about the process of granting consent to withdraw their children from school. “Other issues” were most common. (These included resources for parents; the law was too demanding on curriculum requirements; and concerns about exam arrangements.) Time-scale and ambiguity in the law were next most commonly mentioned, but only by three councils in each case.
• While only 10 councils listed problems from the parents’ perspectives, 16 gave problems from their own. The most common problems for councils were ambiguity of the law, and resources. “Other issues” featured as prominently as resources, however. These included getting information from parents; parents’ reluctance to co-operate with the council; being sure that children’s education was appropriate for their needs; and concerns about children’s rights being overlooked. Eleven councils said they had no problems with the process of consent.

• Eleven councils told us about problems raised by parents about monitoring. Criteria for monitoring and privacy issues were the two more common problems for parents. Some parents felt that the council had no right to monitor provision.

• Again, however, more councils (17) told us about problems from their own perspectives on monitoring. By far the most common problem was lack of resources (12 councils). Ambiguity in the law was a problem for seven councils. “Other” problems included a lack of national guidance on what should be expected; the use of resources being out of proportion to the number of children involved; and concerns about children’s rights. Ten councils said there were no problems about monitoring.

We asked about school attendance orders and legal action.

• Most councils had no experience of school attendance orders or legal action relating to home education in the last five years. Only four councils had issued attendance orders, while a further two were currently involved in legal action.

Comments

Effective partnership requires understanding each other’s difficulties as a step towards resolving them together. In turn, this requires local authorities to have good mechanisms for recording complaints information, to identify where the problems are. Taking complaints seriously enough to record them properly for use in improving services will go a long way towards improving trust and respect, the foundations of good partnership.

However, the evidence appears to suggest that complaints information is not being recorded as well as it should be. On one hand local authorities told us that they had received no complaints from parents, while on the other they were able to tell us about problems that had been raised by parents. Problems raised by parents need to form part of the information available to local authorities about where they can
improve their services.

The low level of complaints recorded by local authorities sits uneasily with the high number of complaints described to us by home education organisations, which was what took up a lot of their time. Much of their work involved making complaints or helping parents to do so, therefore we would have expected to see different findings in our survey than we did.

It is important that local authorities look at the barriers they may be putting in the way of parents making complaints, as well as the way they record and use complaints information. A failure to do so would be an indication that parents’ views are not being respected. This is serious because it could mean that difficulties with children’s education may be left to continue or get worse.
Chapter 6 Local authorities and parents working together

The law

Where a child is educated at home:

- the parental responsibility for children’s education, coupled with

- local authorities’ responsibility to make sure there is adequate provision in their areas,

puts local authorities and parents in a relationship. One way to improve the relationship is to treat it as a partnership. We believe that partnership would be of benefit to the child’s education.

Research evidence

The evidence from others’ and our own research suggests that it can be very difficult for parents and local authorities to work together in a positive way. There is evidence that some local authorities are judgmental about parents’ decision to educate their children at home; that serious problems for children can be caused by the process of granting consent to withdraw from school; and that there is scope for disagreement about the legal position of local authorities’ continuing involvement in home education.

One of the key ways to improve relationships is to encourage local authorities and parents to view one another as partners, each with clearly defined rights and responsibilities. As described in the introduction to this report, the concept of partnership in education depends on a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and a willingness to negotiate.

While parents and local authorities have a shared sense of purpose in wanting the most appropriate education for children, they can often disagree on what constitutes appropriate education. The lack of clarity in the law about local authorities’ continuing role in home education can mean approaches being taken that do not respect parents’ right to educate their children according to their wishes. The lack of recorded complaints information from our own survey suggests that some local authorities do not take parents’ concerns seriously enough.

With the possibility of legal action or referral to social work or the Children’s Panel, parents may feel unable to enter into any form of negotiation with the local authority over what is the most appropriate
approach to their children’s education.

Where partnership between parents and the local authority is poor, it is the child’s education that can suffer the most. It is important, therefore, to look at how partnership actually works.

As well as their current approaches to partnership, we asked local authorities for their views on alternative ideas that some writers have argued could help partnership. In particular we asked about the two concepts of “flexi-schooling” and “dual enrolment”. Flexi-schooling is where there is an arrangement for a child to be educated at school part of the time, and at home part-time. This has parallels with adult education, where adults can attend specific classes in a school. “Dual enrolment” is where a child is enrolled at his/her local school but does not attend it, with the possibility of releasing resources to schools from central government based on pupil numbers. Evidence from America suggests that dual enrolment can be attractive to parents who would like to keep schooling open as a possibility in the future, and appears to be attractive to school administrators as they can count home-educated pupils for funding purposes. Evidence suggests that partnership between local authorities and parents has developed more positively under this sort of arrangement18. As mentioned earlier in this report, Paula Rothermel’s research in England19 found that many parents home educate because they see this as the only accessible alternative to school. Often they would prefer the option of flexi-schooling, and some local authorities, more particularly in England, do offer it. This suggests that if flexi-schooling were more widely available, a number of home educators would find this a more attractive option.

Viewing one another as legitimate partners will help develop positive relationships between parents and local authorities. This in turn is beneficial to children’s education. This chapter looks at how partnership arrangements currently work, as well as at alternative approaches to education that could encourage partnership.

The SCC survey findings

Councils generally did not have a written policy on working as partners with home educators. Only six did, while another three were currently in preparation. Some did, however, comment that partnership was assumed as part of the council’s core values. One council said “The authority respects the right of parents to educate their child at home, and as such, aims to work with parents to ensure that provision is appropriate for the needs of the child”.

• Councils tended to think there was no common view among parents about partnership with them (13 councils), although eight thought
parents welcomed partnership and thought it worked well. Only one council thought parents did not welcome partnership with it.

- Councils most commonly welcomed partnership with home educating parents, but thought it needed improving (15 councils). All but one of the six who said they welcomed partnership and thought it worked well, said they thought parents felt this too.

- Two councils said they did not welcome partnership with home educating parents. One noted that by withdrawing their children from school, parents were also in effect withdrawing from partnership.

We asked about things that would help improve partnership with home educating parents.

- More resources for the local authority, more time for face to face contact, and more resources for parents were the three things most likely to help improve partnership. Eleven councils also thought clarity in the law would help.

Perth and Kinross reported several other things that would help improve partnership. These were if the parents had a better understanding of the total implications of home education, if there was better training for home visiting staff, and if there was more trust on the part of the local authority of parents as educators.

We asked local authorities to tell us about their own good practice that had helped improve partnership. Surprisingly, only 17 did so. The 17 were most likely to say they had developed good practice in making time for face to face contact with parents (12), and good communication with parents (8). One council added that it had developed effective procedures.

Next we asked about views on flexi-schooling, dual enrolment, and changing the law to allow withdrawal from school upon written notice to the local authority. Councils had mixed views about the concept of dual enrolment, which we defined as home-educated children being enrolled with their local school but not attending it. Eight councils had never heard of it, but of the remaining 13 who answered, the majority thought it could improve partnership with parents.

- Some councils, such as the one making the comment below, thought dual enrolment would lead to difficulties with performance reporting requirements:

  "All data associated with the school (eg attendance, target setting etc) would be false / in error."
• A few councils were unsure about why there would be dual enrolment, such as one that said:

“What is the purpose of enrolling other than to attend?”

• Some councils felt such an arrangement would work well in some circumstances more than in others. For example

“Where parents do not have a good relationship with their local school, it could create further tension. However it would support partnership with parents by its existence and if it brings per capita resources schools may be in favour.”

“The link could be helpful for both schools and home educators. Schools may need extra staffing resources to respond to needs.”

There was more awareness of flexi-schooling, which we defined as home-educated children attending school part-time. Only three councils had never heard of it. Three councils indicated that they already operated flexi-schooling arrangements for some children. Overall, councils’ views were mixed. The majority, however, thought flexi-schooling would be too complicated to administer.

• There were comments on the potential for tension between advantages and disadvantages of flexi-schooling. For example:

“It might improve partnership with parents. In practice this might be workable in the early years when the curriculum can accommodate a flexible situation. However in later years when the curriculum is more formal, with specific targets to be achieved, then this is likely to be difficult to implement.”

“Has been used in some instances to ease particular pupils back into the social life of the class. Even on a small scale this complicates considerably the teacher’s planning and management of the work of the class.”

• Some councils viewed flexi-schooling as an option that would benefit the child:

“Children will be able to socialise and interact with others; it may prevent children from being isolated or being lost to the system when they move home.”

• Others, however, thought there would be disadvantages to children:

“Unsettling for children and their classmates.”
On a change in the law allowing parents to withdraw their children from school upon notifying the local authority, as in England and Wales, half the councils said they would not support this (13 of the 25 responding councils). Nine said they would, however, support this change, while the remaining three said they did not know.

- Some councils said that parents sometimes withdrew their children from school before receiving consent anyway:
  
  “In our experience parents tend to withdraw their child before informing the local authority.”

- Comments were a balanced mix of arguments for and against a change in the law. For example, opposing a change in the law:
  
  “If parents made a hasty or ill-considered decision the present arrangements continue to guarantee their child’s place in the local school in the interim period.”

  “No, because the local authority decision formalises the arrangement and allows the EA to fully discuss the issues – ie that parents are responsible for all resources and the EA is responsible for monitoring. In practice agreement to home educate is given very quickly.”

- Comments in favour of a change in the law included:
  
  “It would avoid possible confrontations if the law were changed.”

  “This may be a reasonable position to adopt, assuming that the parents have engaged in reasoned discussion with the school and/or local authority prior to notification of intention to home educate. There are implications of course if the local authority decision is “delayed” for a number of weeks.”

**Comments**

Viewing each other as partners is an important way to improve the relationship between parents and local authorities.

A starting point to encourage partnership is for local authorities to clarify in writing their approach to partnership. It is disappointing, therefore, that so few local authorities had set out their approach to partnership with home educating parents in writing. On the other hand, it is encouraging that councils tended to welcome partnership with parents, even though they recognised the need for improvements. Most councils, too, were able to identify things that would help improve partnership with parents. Issues related to resources were most commonly identified,
and options for addressing resources should be explored further. Clarifying certain aspects of the law was identified as a need by several local authorities, and if differences of opinion over the law lead to a breakdown in partnership, it is worth reviewing the areas of concern.

It was surprising to find that many local authorities struggled to find examples of good practice in their own approach to partnership, although there were examples. Home education organisations, too, found it difficult to identify examples of good practice. They did, however, point to individual officers working hard to support families, though often within unhelpful overall local authority policies. Examples of good practice need to be highlighted more widely.

Good partnership also requires a willingness to consider new ideas. While there were mixed views on the three ideas we posed – dual enrolment; flexi-schooling; and changing the law on consent – views on dual enrolment were more positive than views on flexi-schooling. This is despite the practice in some local authorities to provide part-time schooling alongside part-time home education, for example when children have special educational needs. It is surprising, too, that this should be viewed as complicated to administer, when many local authorities encourage adult learners to attend school part-time.

Many of the local authorities’ reservations stemmed from the government’s requirements to report certain information. There is perhaps a case for reviewing these requirements if they act as a barrier to some children’s education.

The SCC takes the view that relationships between local authorities and home educating parents can be positive, and where they work well, can provide the support needed in a child’s education. Approaches to partnership can influence the relationships that develop. However, the evidence so far does suggest that partnership may be too one-sided, with parents experiencing difficulties with local authorities’ approaches. We have seen examples through the home education organisations of local authorities threatening parents with the intervention of the Children’s Panel and social work powers, based on what would appear to be a difference of opinion over what constitutes an appropriate education. This blurring of education with other issues is bound to be terrifying for parents, and is not likely to lead them to seek to work positively with the local authority.
Chapter 7 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Where a child is educated at home, the parental responsibility for that education coupled with the local authority's responsibility to make sure the education provided is suitable, puts parents and local authorities in a relationship with one another. The relationship is an unusual one, and one that is open to difficulty. Where the relationship does not work well, the child’s education can suffer. One way of improving the relationship is to encourage a partnership approach between local authorities and parents. However, for partnership to work positively and for children’s benefit, there needs to be at least a shared sense of understanding, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate with one another.

Parents decide to educate their children at home for a wide variety of reasons, chief of which appears to be because their children have experienced serious problems at school. In many cases, then, the decision to educate at home is a difficult one for parents. While the number of children educated at home is unknown, there is some certainty that a high proportion are unknown to local authorities. In many cases this is linked to parents actively avoiding contact with their local authority, for reasons including differences of opinion on the role of local authorities in home education, or difficulties when the local authority introduces social work procedures into what is an education matter. On the other hand, local authorities can feel unable to fulfil their responsibilities if their efforts to assess the suitability of education provided at home are unreasonably obstructed.

We looked at several aspects of the local authority/parent relationship that have a bearing on home education. The first of these was advice for parents.

When children experience difficulties at school, or parents wish to consider home education for other reasons, the local authority can play an important role in giving information and advice. This is a crucial stage in what may become a continuing but changing relationship between parents and local authorities. From research we have carried out in the field of housing, we have evidence that initial information and advice can impact significantly on the relationship that then develops between consumers and providers at a time of change.

From our survey and from other sources, however, things appear to be going wrong at this early and crucial stage. Local authority staff who advise parents about home education do not appear to receive regular training on home education and the law. Rather, many local authorities
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claim that their staff are knowledgeable in this area. Home education organisations say that some parents are being given the wrong information (most typically being told that home education is unlawful), and that advice given across the country is marked by inconsistency. There is evidence that many parents are avoiding the local authority as a source of information and advice on home education. Added to this, the written information from local authorities that we received did not always give parents clear contact details with the council, did not tell parents how to make a complaint, focused on the school-based 5-14 curriculum, and half contained misleading information about parents' legal position.

Information and advice for parents needs to be reliable and impartial, allowing parents to make the decisions that best meet the needs of their own children.

The second aspect of the partnership we explored was the process of granting consent to withdraw children from school to home educate. This is a potential source of conflict between parents and local authorities. While parents need to take the decisions that meet their children's needs, local authorities need to make sure the provision being proposed is suitable. In England and Wales, parents can withdraw their children from school upon written notification to the local authority. In Scotland, however, parents need to make sure their children continue to attend school while the local authority processes their request to withdraw. Local authorities do not have to adhere to any time limits, an unfair principle. Given the fact that the most common reason for educating at home is that children are experiencing difficulty at school, many parents feel unable to prolong the difficulties, and there is evidence from local authorities and home education organisations alike that parents do withdraw their children from school while awaiting consent.

Careful attention needs to be given to ensuring no unnecessary barriers are put in the way of parents wishing to educate their children at home. In particular, the threat of legal action facing parents who remove their children before consent is granted needs to be examined more closely. Many parents make this decision to help their children avoid prolonged suffering where they have found school to be an unsuitable environment.

The third aspect we considered was the local authority's continuing involvement in home education provision. This, too, is a potential source of conflict between parents and local authorities. This is not helped by the lack of clarity in the law in this area. The law places a duty on local authorities to intervene when they have reason to believe the education provided at home is not suitable, and this applies whether children have been withdrawn from school or have never attended. However, it does not indicate how they should do this or what they should look for. And parents whose children have never attended school are under no
obligation to seek permission to home educate. Differences in opinion over how the law should apply are bound to cause tension between local authorities and parents. Worse still, families may be put under intolerable strain if such disagreement results in the local authority threatening legal action or social work intervention. There is clearly a need to look at reaching a fair balance between the rights and responsibilities of local authorities and parents.

Home education organisations say it is common for parents to experience problems with local authorities when they do not follow the 5-14 curriculum designed for schools in Scotland. Wider research evidence does suggest that local authorities tend to look for school-based approaches to home education. We found that education officers who monitor home education provision generally receive no training in approaches to home education. This heightens the scope for conflict in this area, particularly as parents are unlikely to see school-based methods as appropriate for their children’s needs at home. The home education organisations said that there was considerable variation between the approaches taken by different education advisers even within the same local authority. Such variation can mean the local authority’s overall approach is unpredictable, and this is not likely to help foster positive partnership with parents.

While councils usually had a written policy on their approach to monitoring home education provision, only half had reviewed it, and not many had involved parents in their review.

The next aspect we considered was what happens when things go wrong. In any service, things are bound to go wrong from time to time. The way that problems are handled and the lessons that are learned from them will affect how relationships develop between the service user and provider. In the case of home education, it has been suggested by home education organisations that parents tend to “disappear” from the system when complaints are not handled well.

The local authorities in our survey said they had handled almost no complaints at all about home education during the previous year. This was surprising, given the time spent by home education organisations helping parents to pursue their complaints. On the other hand, some local authorities did tell us about problems parents had raised about the process of consent and about monitoring. It is not clear why these problems did not seem to be recorded as complaints.

Local authorities need to have good mechanisms for recording complaints information, to identify problems. Taking complaints seriously enough to record them properly and use them as evidence to improve services will go a long way towards improving trust and respect. Our evidence suggests that complaints are not being recorded as well as
they should be, which might not be the case if parents were regarded 
as partners.

Finally, we looked at ways of improving the partnership between parents 
and local authorities.

Most local authorities were committed to the idea of partnership with 
parents, and most were able to identify things that would improve 
partnership. A lot of these related to resources, and many of the 
responses to alternative ideas we posed were thought to be difficult 
because of the reporting arrangements schools and local authorities 
had to comply with. If resources and reporting requirements are acting 
as barriers to children’s education needs being fully met, then the 
government needs to address them. Clarifying the law was also seen 
as important to improve partnership.

We asked local authorities for examples of good practice they had 
developed, and were surprised to find that many struggled to find 
examples. Similarly, home education organisations found it difficult to 
identify good examples. There were some, however, and it is important 
that these are highlighted to encourage good practice more widely across 
Scotland. Schoolhouse has found that a number of local authorities are 
interested in a forum where they can discuss their roles, which is 
encouraging.

Overall, attitudes are important to how partnership develops. Some 
local authorities take a negative view of home education, for example:

“The questionnaire assumes that education at home is equal or better 
to that of the local authority. In my experience this is not so. I have yet 
to encounter a socialised youngster educated at home. I have had to 
refer two youngsters to the children’s reporter as their lives had been 
severely disrupted by being “educated at home”. It seems to me that 
the parent exercises choice but the child is given no choice or say in the 
matter. I believe that school is the norm and is the best way of educating 
children.”

Other local authorities are more accepting of parents’ decisions, for 
example:

“Our philosophy is to develop good working relationships with families 
who are educating at home. We do not place any difficulties in the way 
of such parents and try to ensure that the administration is kept to a 
minimum and that quality advice can be given to parents intending to 
embark on this course of action.”

Good relationships between local authorities and parents are important 
for children’s education. Developing a partnership can help this, and
can provide support needed in a child’s education. However, the evidence so far does suggest that the partnership may be too one-sided, with parents experiencing difficulties with local authorities’ approaches. This is not to say local authorities do not experience difficulties, and many have expressed a wish to work in partnership with parents.

It appears from the findings of our study that there are two key obstacles to developing positive partnerships. They are problems to do with attitude, or respecting the decisions that parents make about their children’s education; and problems stemming from a lack of clarity in the law and local authorities’ reporting requirements to central government. We see the need to reassess the approach to home education, with mechanisms that are child-centred and flexible, but based on clear rights and responsibilities, so that the partnership arrangements that are most suitable to each circumstance are free to develop.

**Recommendations**

1. **The government should facilitate a review of the continuing role of local authorities in home education.**

   This should aim to achieve clarity about local authorities’ and parents’ rights and responsibilities, should address the needs of local authorities and parents in a fair and balanced way, and should above all be child-focused and seek to provide guidance on a system that meets children’s education needs. Issues that hamper the development of partnership and positive relationships between local authorities and parents need to be addressed.

2. **Local authorities should provide parents with copies of reports written about their education provision.**

   Less than half of the local authorities in our survey sent parents copies of reports written about their home education provision. While others made them available on request, some maintained that the reports were confidential to the local authority. Parents must have access to information written by the local authority about their children’s education, not least because they should be able to challenge the local authority’s view if it is not a fair reflection of the education provided at home.

3. **Local authorities should make sure their advisers are trained in home education and the law.**

   Reliable advice is crucial to parents at a time when they need to make important decisions about their children’s education. It is also
important in shaping the continuing relationship that develops between local authorities and parents. Inconsistency of advice provision needs to be tackled.

4. **Local authorities should make sure their written information for parents is impartial and based on an understanding of home education methods.**

   Too much of the written information for parents that we saw was disappointing, and in some cases quite misleading to parents considering home education. The quality of written information for parents needs to be taken seriously, to be impartial and reliable.

5. **Local authorities should publish clear information about their approach to home education.**

   Some aspects of the law about the local authority’s continuing involvement in home education are not clear. There are arguments to support local authority discretion. However, it is only fair that they should at least set out clearly how they approach their continuing involvement in home education, and that this should be clearly based on consultation with home educating families. Councils should publish this information and make it readily available to parents who may be considering withdrawing their children from school. Poor information contributes to deteriorating relationships.

6. **Local authorities should make sure they monitor dissatisfaction related to home education and have a way of using this information to improve their service for children’s benefit.**

   Complaints information is an important element of managing a service well. It is useful for pinpointing areas of service provision that may need to be improved. Moreover, recording and using complaints information demonstrates that the service provider takes consumers seriously.
Annex 1 Questions asked in the postal questionnaire, and how the local authorities responded

The following questions are those from the questionnaire we sent local authorities. In addition to these questions, local authorities were asked for further information where it was relevant to do so (such as to explain what was included in when they chose “other” from a list of options in a question).

Beside each question is the number of councils who chose each option. The number of councils who responded to a question is given below each one. This is given in the format “N=27”, which means 27 councils responded to that question.

SECTION A: ADVICE FOR PARENTS

1. Who responds to requests for advice about home education?
   
   Please tick all that apply
   
   The member of staff receiving the request 2
   Designated officers – education 25
   Designated officers – social work 0
   Designated officers – other departments 0

   N=26

2. Do these members of staff receive training about home education and the law?
   
   Yes, on a regular basis 0
   Training provided as required 13
   No specific training 13

   N=26
### 3. How many requests for advice about home education did you respond to during the last 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requests</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=26

### 4. Have requests for advice about home education increased, decreased, or remained the same over the last 5 years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remained the same</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=25

### 5. Do you have written information for parents and young people who enquire about home education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in preparation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=26
6. Do you refer parents and young people to other agencies for information and advice on home education?

- Yes, to local advice agencies: 8
- Yes, to national organisations: 18
- No reference to other sources of information and advice: 6

N=26

SECTION B: CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL FROM SCHOOL

7. How many requests have you received from parents to withdraw their children from school in order to educate at home?

- In the last 5 years: 304 (n=24)
- Of which, in the last 12 months: 103 (n=27)

8. How many of these requests have been granted or refused by the local authority?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Granted</th>
<th>Refused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the last 5 years: 277 (n=23)</td>
<td>6 (n=23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which, in the last 12 months: 88 (n=25)</td>
<td>3 (n=22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Do you have a written policy on consenting to withdrawal from school for home education?

- Yes: 21
- Currently in preparation: 0
- No: 6

N=27
10. **What is the time-scale for notifying parents of your decision, from the time a parent formally requests withdrawal from school for home education?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-Scale</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 6 weeks</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 weeks to 3 months</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 6 months</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 9 months</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 months to a year</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than a year</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=26

11. **How do you involve parents when deciding on consent to withdraw a child from school to home educate?**

Please tick all that apply

- Regular correspondence / written information for parents  
  - Count: 22
- Informal meetings between parents and officers  
  - Count: 17
- Formal meetings held with parents  
  - Count: 16
- Other ways  
  - Count: 4
- Parents not really involved at this stage  
  - Count: 0

N=27

12. **Do you review your process of granting consent?**

- Yes, regularly  
  - Count: 4
- Yes, from time to time  
  - Count: 11
- Have not done so yet  
  - Count: 12

N=27
13. Are parents’ views sought as part of the review exercise?

Yes 8
Sometimes 2
No 5

N=15 / 15

14. Have parents’ views led to changes in the process of granting consent?

Yes, changes have been made 6
No, we weren’t able to make suggested changes 0
No changes were suggested 4

N=10 / 10

SECTION C: MONITORING HOME EDUCATION PROVISION

15. Please tell us the number of children whose home education provision is currently monitored by your local authority?

Children withdrawn from school 212
Children never attended school 74

N=27
16. **Do you have a written policy on monitoring home education provision?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in preparation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27

17. **How often do you normally contact home educating families for monitoring purposes?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>About once a term</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a term</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a year</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a year</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice a year</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=26

18. **Who carries out the monitoring of home education provision?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designated officers – education</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated officers – social work</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated officers – other departments</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27
19. **Do these members of staff receive training in home education methods?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, on a regular basis</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, training provided as required</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No specific training</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=26

20. **How do you involve parents in monitoring home education provision?**

Please tick all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular correspondence / written information for parents</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal meetings between parents and officers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal meetings held with parents</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents not really involved at this stage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27

21. **How are written monitoring reports made available to parents?**

Please tick all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents are always given a copy</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A copy is available for inspection if requested</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The report is confidential to the local authority</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27
22. Do you review your monitoring process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, regularly</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, from time to time</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have not done so yet</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27

23. Are parents’ views sought as part of the review exercise?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=14 / 14

24. Have parents’ views led to changes in the monitoring process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, changes have been made</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, we weren’t able to make suggested changes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No changes were suggested</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=8 / 8
### SECTION D: PROBLEM AREAS

#### 25. How many complaints have you handled in the last 12 months about home education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27

#### 26. What problems have parents raised in the last 12 months about the process of consent to withdraw from school?

Please tick all that apply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time-scale too long</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The law is too complicated</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The law is ambiguous</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of involvement</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy issues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other issues</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No problems raised</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=27
27. From the local authority perspective, what are the problems with the process of consent to withdraw from school?

Please tick all that apply

- Time-scale too long: 1
- Time-scale too short: 0
- Lack of resources: 6
- Council’s view of home education: 2
- Parents’ attitudes: 4
- The law is too complicated: 1
- The law is ambiguous: 7
- Other issues: 6
- No problems: 11

N=27

28. What problems have parents raised in the last 12 months about the local authority monitoring their home education provision?

Please tick all that apply

- Lack of information: 1
- The law is too complicated: 0
- The law is ambiguous: 2
- Lack of involvement: 2
- Criteria for monitoring: 4
- Privacy issues: 4
- Other issues: 1
- No problems raised: 15

N=26
29. From the local authority perspective, what are the problems about monitoring home education provision?

Please tick all that apply

- Lack of resources: 12
- Council’s view of home education: 0
- Parents’ attitudes: 3
- The law is too complicated: 1
- The law is ambiguous: 7
- Other issues: 5
- No problems: 10

N=27

30. Have you served any school attendance orders on home educating families in the last 5 years?

- Yes: 4
- No: 23

N=27

31. How many school attendance orders were served on home educating families in the last 5 years?

- 4

How many of these were served during the process of consent to withdraw from school?

- 1
32. How many school attendance orders were served on home educating families in the last 12 months?

0

How many of these were served during the process of consent to withdraw from school?

0

33. Is your local authority involved in any current legal or court actions about home education?

Yes  2
No   25

N=27

34. How many of these were initiated by the local authority?

2

How many were initiated by home educating families?

2
### SECTION E: IMPROVING PARTNERSHIP

#### 35. Do you have a written policy on working as partners with home educators?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in preparation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N=27**

#### 36. How do you think home educating parents feel about partnership with the local authority?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most welcome it, and think it works well</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most welcome it, but think it needs improving</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most don’t want partnership with the local authority</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No common view among parents</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N=26**

#### 37. What does your local authority think about partnership with home educating parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We welcome it, and think it works well</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We welcome it, but think it needs improving</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not welcome partnership with home educating parents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**N=23**
38. What do you think would help to improve partnership with home educating parents?

Please tick all that apply

- Better information for parents about home education: 10
- Better information for the local authority about home education: 10
- Better information for parents about schools: 4
- If parents were more understanding of the local authority: 5
- More time for face to face contact: 14
- More emphasis by parents on children’s needs: 8
- More emphasis by the local authority on children’s needs: 2
- Clarity in the law about home education: 11
- More resources for parents: 12
- More resources for the local authority: 16
- Other things: 1

N=26

39. We are interested in examples of good practice. Please tell us about aspects of good practice developed by your local authority that have improved partnership with home educating parents.

- Good information for parents about home education: 6
- Staff training on home education and the law: 0
- Staff training on home education methods: 0
- Making time for face to face contact with parents: 12
- Good communication with parents: 8
- Provision of resources for parents: 3
- Other things: 1

N=17
40. What do you think about the idea of home-educated children being enrolled with their local school (although they do not attend it)?

Please tick all that apply

- It would improve parents’ accountability 8
- It would improve partnership with parents 8
- It would be too complicated to administer 10
- It would create tension with parents 6
- Don’t know, never heard of it 8

N=21

41. What do you think about the idea of “flexi-schooling”, where home-educated children attend school part-time?

Please tick all that apply

- It would improve parents’ accountability 8
- It would improve partnership with parents 8
- It would be too complicated to administer 10
- It would create tension with parents 8
- It would improve children’s education 8
- Don’t know, never heard of it 3

N=21
42. **Parents in Scotland must wait for the local authority’s decision before withdrawing their children from school. In England and Wales, parents can withdraw their children from school as soon as they have notified the school of their intention to home educate. Would you support a change in Scottish legislation to reflect that in England and Wales?**

Yes 9
No 13
Don’t know 3

N=25
Annex 2 Councils who did and did not respond

Councils who responded:

Aberdeen
Aberdeenshire
Angus
Argyll and Bute
Clackmannanshire (by telephone)
Dumfries and Galloway
Dundee
East Ayrshire
East Dunbartonshire
East Renfrewshire
East Lothian
Edinburgh
Fife
Glasgow
Highland
Inverclyde
Moray
Midlothian
North Lanarkshire
Orkney
Perth and Kinross
Renfrewshire
Scottish Borders
Shetland
South Lanarkshire
West Dunbartonshire
Western Isles
West Lothian

Councils who did not respond:

Falkirk
North Ayrshire
Stirling
South Ayrshire


References

1 Paula Rothermel; research quoted in Education Now, Summer 1999, No. 24

2 Amanda Petrie; *Home educators and the law within Europe* Kluwer Academic Publishers 1995

3 Although local authorities do have a duty to take action if they have reason to believe children educated at home are not receiving a suitable education, including children who have never attended school.

4 Schoolhouse Home Education Association Annual Report 1999

5 From a chapter by Pugh, written in a book called *Parental Involvement: developing networks between home, school, home and community* Wolfendale 1989.

6 By *advice* we mean a more involved form of assistance than the provision of written information.

7 Local authorities are required to appoint a Named Person, to advise and support parents when a Record of Needs is being opened for their child. They are expected to invite parents to nominate someone they would prefer to be their Named Person. There is no particular qualification for the Named Person – he/she could simply be a friend of the parents who is knowledgeable about special educational needs. However, reality is often different from theory. Enquire, the national information and advice service for special educational needs, says “In Scotland there are very few active Named Persons and services that can assist parents or children” (quote from Issue no. 3 of the newsletter bulletin *Enquire Within*, March 2000).

8 *Independent education advice for parents in Scotland.* Scottish Consumer Council 1999

9 The 15 local authorities who sent us their information were Aberdeenshire; Argyll and Bute; Dumfries and Galloway; Edinburgh; East Renfrewshire; Fife; Glasgow; Moray; East Dunbartonshire; Inverclyde; Perth and Kinross; Renfrewshire; South Lanarkshire; West Dunbartonshire; and West Lothian.

10 Schoolhouse Annual Report 1999

11 *Independent Education Advice provision for parents in Scotland.* Scottish Consumer Council 1999
In A Fix: the views and experiences of owner occupiers in Scotland sharing common repair responsibilities with the council. Scottish Consumer Council 1999. This is an example of research that showed the importance of initial information where the relationship between the service user and service provider was going to change. Poor information contributed to deteriorating relationships.

We also asked about the number of requests in the last five years. However, some councils could only provide figures for the last three years since local government reorganisation. The figure they gave (which was 304 among 24 councils), therefore, is probably lower than the true number of requests over the last five years.


Who deals with this? Accountability, complaints and contract monitoring in Scottish local authorities. Scottish Consumer Council 1998

Complaints handling 1997. MORI, for the Citizen’s Charter Unit.

Schoolhouse Annual Report 1999


Paula Rothermel of the University of Durham (reported in ACE bulletin, June 1999)

In A Fix: the views and experiences of owner occupiers in Scotland sharing common repair responsibilities with the council. Scottish Consumer Council 1999