

## **Briefing for MSPs, August 2020**

### **Elective home education**

We are pleased to see the Scottish Parliament back in session following the unprecedented lockdown situation.

We now wish to take the opportunity to re-introduce ourselves and provide you with background information in relation to elective home education in Scotland (frequently mis-termed 'home schooling'). We hope that it will be useful for your current and future reference when supporting constituents and engaging with legal and policy matters.

### **About us**

The Scottish Home Education Forum was founded in 1999 as a peer support network and [our website](#) is a comprehensive resource for all those with an interest in home education in Scotland. In recent years, we have expanded our scope to provide advocacy, training and consultancy services, as well as conducting research on issues that affect the elective home educating community. Ours is the largest support network in Scotland with a membership base of around 3,800 and is run by a team of highly experienced home educators.

### **Research**

We believe our most recent research offers elected members useful insight into the needs and concerns of their home educating and home educated constituents.

[Survey: Post-lockdown parental intentions](#) (July 2020)

Our most recent poll of a targeted segment of our membership found that only 8% of respondents were planning to return their children to school in the wake of the Covid crisis. The majority of 'lockdown' parent-educators said they would opt for full-time home education or flexischooling if it could be negotiated.

[Home Truths: an investigation into local authorities' home education policies, practices and relationships with home educators in Scotland](#) (March 2020)

This piece of work is the most comprehensive study ever undertaken of the experiences of home educators in Scotland, and our findings are published in full (110 pages) and in summary (12 pages). We have made 16 evidence-based recommendations to the Scottish Government in anticipation of a revision of statutory home education guidance in order to ensure its compliance with the overarching legislative framework.

[Home educators' experiences of the health visiting service in Scotland](#) (2019)

Home educating families shared with us their concerns over engagements with health visitors, focusing on the quality and accuracy of information and advice offered in relation to childcare, nursery and school options for children, and the lack of openness regarding the voluntary nature of the health visiting service. Our findings sent a strong message to the government, practitioners and regulatory bodies that a main plank of GIRFEC policy is not working for home educators who favour child- and family-centred learning over inflexible institutional settings.

### [Survey: reasons for school-age children being in home education](#) (2018)

Reported reasons for opting for home education were many and varied, from proactive choice to 'no choice' due to problems experienced by children in schools. The majority of respondents cited disability, chronic illness, unmet support needs – especially severe school anxiety and ASD – as key drivers and highlighted lack of access to, or poor experiences of CAMHS. Several were highly critical of schools' unwillingness or inability to address their children's support needs. Nevertheless, the findings suggested that home education remains a popular choice for parents from the outset, and many had researched the options well before their children reach school age, which was often deemed too young for formal education.

### **Consultation responses**

#### [UNCRC incorporation](#) (August 2019)

As a children's rights-based (as opposed to state outcomes-focused) forum, we responded to the consultation in keeping with our longstanding principles that the UNCRC should be fully incorporated in order to eliminate the hierarchy of rights and rights-holders we have seen emerge in relation to minority groups. Our response can be read [here](#).

#### [Review of home education guidance discussion paper](#) (August 2019)

Following a series of meetings with the learning directorate and GIRFEC teams to discuss problematic local authority behaviour in relation to home education, the Forum responded to the government's 'home education discussion paper' in which our concerns were set out formally. These are issues that should concern all elected members as all have home educating constituents. Our submission can be read [here](#).

### **Parliamentary petition**

Our [Petition PE01692](#) (submitted jointly with Tymes Trust), which calls for an independent public inquiry into the human rights impact of GIRFEC policy, has been referred to the Education & Skills Committee for further deliberation. The committee was awaiting publication of our Home Truths research, and progress has been further stalled by the Covid crisis, but the petition raises serious concerns over the detriment suffered by families as a result of unlawful data processing and lack of available redress. Our latest update can be found [here](#).

## Home Education Scotland

We would also like to take this opportunity to introduce Home Education Scotland, the new national membership organisation, whose charitable status is pending. Its work complements the peer support, advocacy and training offered by the Forum and we would be grateful if you could update your records with our respective contact details below.

### Opportunity for discussion

As an MSP you may be (or may have been) contacted by home educating constituents raising the types of concern we have highlighted. Given our unique and longstanding expertise in this area, we hope you might welcome an opportunity to discuss our work and research findings. We are also available to answer any specific questions you have, either individually or with your parliamentary group.

We would be grateful if you could indicate your availability for such discussion and look forward to your response.

Kind regards

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