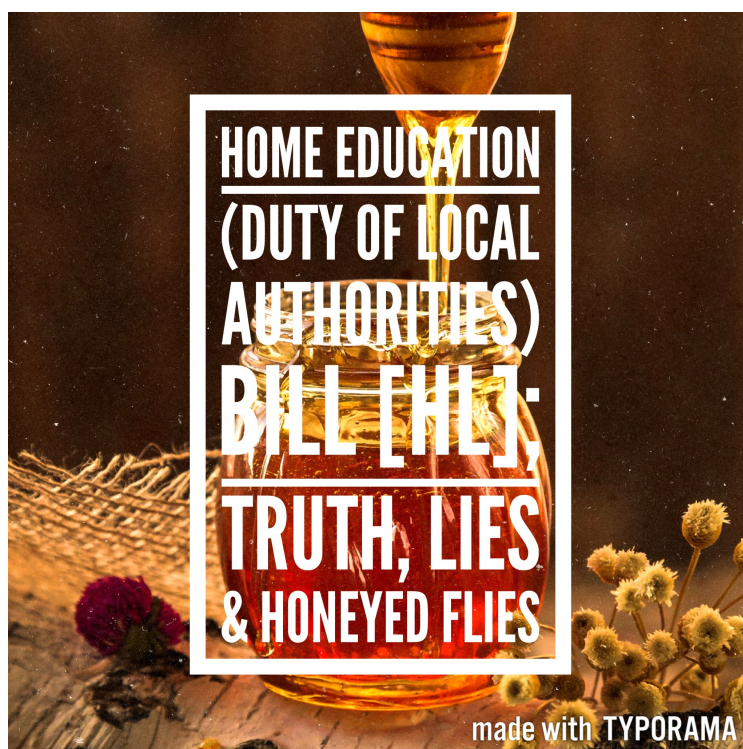


Home Education Bill; Truth, Lies & Honeyed Flies

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admin

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Who knows **what is best for your children**? Do you need a professional to inspect your parenting decisions? Lord Soley, a Labour peer in the House of Lords, thinks you do. He is backing a Home Education Bill to ensure third-party scrutinisation is normalised. A disturbing [poll](#) by TES goes even further, suggesting that [home education](#) should be illegal. (At the time of writing, 3,075 votes had been cast with 71% against making it illegal.)

I can't even begin to list the inherent fallacies. If we're going for kneejerk reactions, let us not forget the legacy of children such as school student [Daniel Pelka](#) and homeschooled [Dylan Seabridge](#). The presence of multiple professionals in their short lives only served to highlight how little society truly cares. Instead, let us **look at some interesting statistics**.

Home Education Bill; Homeschool Statistics

There are **no accurate homeschool statistics**. Let me be upfront and tell you that immediately. There's only conjecture and the trivial numbers recorded by Local Authorities.

In [mid-2016](#), the Office of National Statistics recorded 9,571,047 children aged 5 to 19 in England. The Department of Education's [January 2016 school census](#) says 8,559,540 children attended school in England. Subtracting schoolchildren from comparable children gives a **rough estimate of 1,011,507**.

Of course, the actual [compulsory education age](#) in England is the term after a child's 5th birthday. (Compulsory education continues until the last Friday in June, if the student is 16 by the end of August.) However, if you take the figures with a **pinch of salt**... that's still a rough estimate of 1 million homeschoolers in England. (Most children aged 4 to 18 are at school or homeschool.)

According to a newspaper [article](#) in April 2016, "Responses from 134 of England's 153 local education authorities list 30,298 children as receiving home education in 2014-15." There's a significant gap between 30 thousand and 1 million. Yet, you can see that not all LAs provided information. Also, it is the previous school year and only includes recorded students. (Students are recorded only if they previously attended a school.)

Home Education Bill; School Statistics

The Department of Education has some interesting statistics about schools themselves. January 2016 saw a net increase in the number of state primary and secondary schools (an extra 32). It also saw a **net decrease in the number of schools**. The number of PRUs decreased by 9 and the number of private schools decreased by 46. Or, to put it another way, there are now fewer schools for students with special challenges. Fewer private schools also mean more competition for free state school places. The schools that remain are larger than ever as they cope with the volume of students.

Whether it's 30 thousand or 1 million, it doesn't matter. There are not enough school places for every homeschooler in England.

Home Education Bill; Facebook Statistics

Two of the largest UK home education Facebook support groups have [16.5](#) and [24.5 thousand](#) members. Avocado Social [estimates](#) that 60% of the 2016 UK population used Facebook. The larger homeschool Facebook support group may extrapolate 40.8 thousand home educators in the UK. Adding the groups together suggests 68 thousand. (Of course, it is likely that some people are members of both groups.)

Again, this is **playing with numbers**. Neither particularly accurate nor meaningful.

Home Education Bill; Visibility Statistics

The loudest voices, tinged with hysteria, usually cry homeschoolers are unseen. (Think of the children! Simpsons character **Helen Lovejoy would be so proud**.) This is simply untrue and, in any case, does not affect their safety. Daniel and Dylan have proven that visibility does not guarantee safety.

Looking at the number of children, aged 5 to 19, [registered](#) with a GP practice, I can see there were 9,247,475 in October 2016. Bearing in mind that relocation and other issues

cause fluctuations in registration, then 9.2 million is reasonably close to 9.6 million.

Think of other organisations with which children are routinely registered. If visibility is all that is required then almost every child in the UK is visible to a range of professionals such as doctors, dentists, health visitors, librarians and so on.

There are good parents and bad parents. **Third-party scrutinisation is not going to change human behaviour.** There is truth in the adage that you catch more flies with honey than vinegar. If you want to motivate people to engage with authorities and provide useful measurable information, you need to offer honeyed carrots, not sour sticks.

Do you know about the free [Bounty](#) goodie bags you can get when you're pregnant? You have to register your pregnancy with your local midwife and then you get your goodie bags at different stages. This is a good model. You aren't penalised for not registering. However, you are rewarded for engaging. (Healthcare in the UK is opt-in.)

There are **multiple reasons why homeschoolers refuse to register** with Local Authorities if they are under the radar. (Children who previously attended a school are known to the LA, whether or not their parents want to engage.) I won't focus on some of the more negative reasons. But, one very good reason is that **LAs have nothing to offer homeschoolers.** There is no information service or free goodie bag. In fact, some LAs actually refer new home educators to the Facebook groups mentioned earlier. That's not something exclusively gained by voluntary registration, let alone mandatory enforcement. I don't get a warm, fuzzy feeling from a third-party official getting paid to refer people to my free volunteer networks.

Home Education Bill; My Final Thoughts

I don't know if this bill will get passed. If it does, the British home education community will deal with it. They will continue to be lawfully abiding citizens. However, I do not expect it to make a positive impact on children's lives. It's **red tape that serves no real purpose.**

The House of Lords would better serve the community by thinking about what could actually assist homeschoolers in their everyday lives. And, if they truly have no idea, let me be the first to tell them the non-secret. Home educators want easy **access to exam centres and afterschool activities.** Some of them are even willing to pay for it. Years spent serving the community have always turned up the same questions: where can my child sit their exams and what activities can they sign up for? Open up schools and community centres to home educators and **you might see voluntary cooperation** with arbitrary check-ups. After all, I'm not sure the government can afford for homeschoolers to throw in the towel and potentially demand school places for a million children. Brexit is going to be expensive enough. What do you think?