

You've received a reply to the letter you write to your MP. Now what?

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Those who have written letters to your MP or the Education Minister about changes in the home education registration process in NSW may have already received a letter in reply or you will soon. As expected the Minister for Education has passed the letters onto the Office of the Board of Studies and they have written the replies.

These letters are not very encouraging. They generally state that the OBoS have recently published a new Information Pack that provides how educators with "greater clarity about the requirements and processes for home schooling," they claim that there are "differing views about the updated Information Package" and they put forward their Questions and Answers web page as clarifying any misunderstandings about the registration process. They claim that the new Information Package has not created "a need to change the approach to home schooling nor has it created less flexibility or made it harder to be registered." Finally they state that they have met with the HEA to discuss the new Information Pack and that they would like to incorporate feedback from changes into the future revisions. Home educators are advised to contact the OBoS if this letter and the Q&A has not quelled their concerns.

Some important points to note.

- 1) The OBoS is maintaining that there are no new policies or procedures and that home educators can continue to operate in the way that they have for the past many years. This flies in the face of the experience of home educators in NSW and their own Information Pack which (as described in the background document previously published by the HEA) reflects quite dramatic changes in home education policy and practice. To understand what is happening a short history of the NSW Syllabus and home education may assist. Prior to 2004 home educators were required to teach their children the six key learning areas of English, mathematics, science, HSIE, PDHPE, creative arts and languages. There were very few requirements on what needed to be taught within each of these subjects. In 2004 the Education Act was changed and home educators (as well as private schools) were required to teach programs in each key learning area that were "Based on, and taught in accordance with, a syllabus developed or endorsed by the Board and approved by the Minister." In practice this change in legislation made little to no difference to how home educators practiced because if families were providing a broad education program for their children they easily covered the NSW Syllabus. Furthermore, the OBoS provided easy to understand summaries of the NSW Syllabus called Foundation Statements. These Foundation Statements were used by many home educators to plan, assess and report on their programs. The APs assessing the programs could examine what families were doing and identify areas of weakness based on their understanding of the detail of the NSW Syllabus. There was no need for home educators to be able to interpret and then plan, assess and report using the detail contained within the Syllabus outcomes. There has not been a change in legislation, yet OBoS has now decided that home educators should no longer be able to use Syllabus summaries but should be required to use the outcomes of the NSW Syllabus in the planning, assessing and reporting of their educational programs. Given the complex language use in these outcomes and the large number of outcomes contained within each subject of the Syllabus this requirement has proved difficult or even impossible for some home educators.
- 2) They seek to mislead home educators that the HEA has been involved in discussions with them about the new policies and Information Pack. The truth is that the HEA met with the OBoS before the new Information Pack to seek some understanding of why members were reporting a change in registration procedures and what the new pack would contain. The HEA was informed that there had been no significant change in policy or practice and that the new Information Pack was not significantly different from the 2011 version. Once the new Information Pack was released the HEA met with the OBoS to express dismay at the changes in policy and practice reflected in the new



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Information Pack and to ask that the new policies and procedures be withdrawn. The HEA made it clear that given the catastrophic impact of the policy changes on some home educating families that the HEA could not consult with the OBoS until such time as the new policies were withdrawn. The HEA has since asked to meet the Minister for Education.

- 3) The OBoS and the Minister for Education's office are maintaining that the HEA and all home educators should discuss their concerns about home education registration with the OBoS. The HEA's request for a meeting with the Minister was met with a reply from the OBoS saying pretty much what everyone else's letter has said and again maintaining that there have been no changes and that home education registration has not been made more difficult.

So, what should happen now?

More letter writing!!!!!! In lobbying like this it is expected that the letters that are received will be discouraging. The hoped-for response to these letters by both the politicians and the OBoS is that we will shrug our shoulders and go away. What we need you to do is not to give up. The impact we are looking for with our lobbying is for political pressure to be placed on the Minister for Education and via him on the OBoS. By continuing to write we let them know that we are not satisfied with their response and that they need to do something meaningful. Your letters are working even though it might appear that they are not. However, before you write your next letter we suggest that you make a telephone call. The letters from the OBoS direct people to discuss their concerns with the OBoS. The Minister's office is also giving the line that people need to discuss their concerns with the OBoS. Thus, in order to take away the response of "You need to talk to the OBoS," we can talk to them and say that we are still unhappy about it.

The letters from the OBoS direct people to discuss their concerns with Anne Keenan. It is likely that if we all call Anne she will get overwhelmed and want to pass the calls onto someone else but we suggest that you don't allow this to occur. If you ring the OBoS and they suggest you speak to someone else we suggest that you say that your letter from OBoS has said that you should contact her and that you only want to speak to her. In your conversations, explain to Anne why you are not satisfied with the response to your letter. Ask her why the OBoS is not admitting to a major change in practice. If you have been home educating for a long time explain how you have seen things change. Ask her why home educators are no longer able to use summaries of the Syllabus such as the Foundation Statements to plan, assess and report on their programs. Have a good old winge and take as much time as you like! Then you can write your reply letter to your MP and explain that you are not satisfied with the OBoS Q&A, with the letter you received back from the OBoS or with the conversation/s you have had with the OBoS.

Below is a description of the sort of letter you could write in response to a letter back from the OBoS. Feel free to change adjust the letter to suit yourself. If you can put things into your own words that's great!

Begin by thanking your MP for forwarding your letter to the Minister for Education for his consideration. State that you are not happy that your letter, which was complaining about the practices of the OBoS was sent to them to respond. If you had personal information in your previous letter that you had not wanted the OBoS to have and you are scared that you could be victimised by them because of what you said, state this.

State that the Q&A does not in any way alleviate your concerns about the changes in policies in relation to registration for home education in NSW. State that the Q&A conflicts directly with documents of the OBoS including the 2013 Information Pack and the Aps Handbook. State that the claim that there has been no change in home education registration policy and that there is not borne out by your own personal experience (if you can contrast past registration with more recent experience do so) or the experience of



your friends in the home education community (provide examples if you wish). State that the claim by the OBoS that there has been no change in policy or practice and that it is not harder to register for home education than previous is ludicrous/absurd/offensive (choose your own adjective) and is an indication of the contempt with which the OBoS is treating home educators. State how ridiculous it is that OBoS cannot even acknowledge that they have made a change that is hurting home educating families.

Then state that these major changes in home education registration are causing great distress to home educating families. If you know of examples of the impact of these changes describe them (for example, children being very upset/anxious after home education visits, parents needing to spend weeks and weeks preparing for registration, parents being anxious, not sleeping etc, families returning children to a bad school situation because they can't do the paperwork, families deciding to go underground and avoid registration or move states because of the new changes etc). Highlight the impact of the new changes on children with special needs, especially those with mental health issues if you are aware of such cases (the HEA has had several reports of children who were removed from school because of bullying feeling like they were being threatened with return to school and being very stressed as a result).

State that these adverse consequences are a direct result of the lack of consultation on the part of the OBoS. State that effective consultation is recognised as being necessary for the development of good policy and that lack of consultation by OBoS has resulted in bad policy changes that need to be withdrawn.

State that the Education Act directs the OBoS to assess the quality of the education being provided. Describe how OBoS has done this in the past but currently is focussed on the compliance with their new policies and paperwork. Say that you want OBoS to focus on the quality of education being provided. Say that the focus of OBoS on paperwork is unacceptable to home educators because we are focussed on providing our children with a quality education. Describe how in the past home educators were able to meet the requirements of the Education Act in providing an educational program that is based on the NSW Syllabus by using summaries of the Syllabus that were provided by the OBoS such as the Foundation Statements to plan, assess and report on their programs. Describe how the onus was then on the APs to assess using their knowledge of the detailed outcomes of the Syllabus and to identify significant gaps. State that OBoS is now requiring home educators to use the Syllabus outcomes and that this is a major change.

State that you have now spoken with the OBoS (if you have) and describe how long you spoke for (also how many times if there were multiple occasions). State how it is impossible to discuss the changes with OBoS whilst they are maintaining that there are no changes.

Ask your MP to address the issue of the new policy changes. Say that you are aware that the HEA has asked the Minister for Education to meet with them to discuss the issue and ask your MP to encourage the Minister to do so. Explain that the HEA asked the OBoS about changes in registration practices multiple times over the previous year and was told there were none. They have also had two very lengthy meetings in recent months about the changes but were again told that there had been none- the conversation cannot move further without recognition that there have been changes. Argue that the minister should meet with representatives of the Home Education community to discuss their concerns just as he has met with representatives of the public and private school sectors. In the two years he has been Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli has not met once with a home education stakeholder group.

Finish your letter by asking for your concerns to be recognised and validated. Explain that you are not a liar, you are not making this up. The home ed community really is experiencing a crisis and they really need our elected representatives to listen to us.

We must ask again for people not to ask the minister to reduce regulation of home education in NSW. We have had confirmation (from the Minister himself) that any suggestion of this to the Minister will reduce our



chances of having the policy changes withdrawn. We can say that the current regulatory regime is inappropriate and that we want “appropriate regulation” rather than “reduced regulation” The Minister’s office has heard from people who have said that they want no regulation and it has had a negative impact.- it is really bad for our cause.

Refrain from saying bad things about schools or the national curriculum- these are the babies of the Minister’s office the government. We gain nothing by criticising them. If however, your child was removed from school because the education system was unable to meet their special needs it is OK to describe this. Even the most staunch of school professionals understand that for some kids it can be difficult to make school work well.

