

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Monday 11 January, 2021 at 5pm

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This agenda gives notice of items to be considered in private as required by Regulations 5 (4) and (5) of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

1. **Apologies for absence.**
To receive any apologies for absence.
2. **Minutes**
To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2020 as a correct record.
3. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations of interest from members relating to any item on the agenda, in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Conduct and/or S106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
4. **Additional Items of Business**
To determine whether there are any additional items of business arising which should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency.
5. **Reset and Recovery Plan**
To consider an update presentation on the reset and recovery plan.
6. **Sandwell College - proposed changes to vocational qualification**
To consider a presentation to inform the Board of the changes to the vocational qualification.
7. **Elective Home Education Working Group**
To consider an update report on the work of the Elective Home Education Working Group.

David Stevens
Chief Executive

Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury
West Midlands

Distribution:

Councillors Preece (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Chidley, Costigan, Z Hussain,
McVittie, Millar, Phillips and Shackleton.

Co-opted Members:-

Charlotte Ward-Lewis (Church of England Diocese representative)
Vacant (Roman Catholic Archdiocese representative)
Tahira Majid (Primary School Governor representative)
Vacant (Secondary School Governor representative)

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk

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Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Apologies for Absence

The Board will receive any apologies for absence from the members of the Board.

Minutes of the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**16 November, 2020 at 5.00 pm
Virtual Meeting**

- Present:** Councillor Preece (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Ashman, Carmichael, Chidley,
Costigan, Z Hussain, McVittie, Millar, Shackleton
and C Ward-Lewis (Co-opted member).
- Apologies:** Councillor Phillips.
- In attendance:** Councillor Underhill Cabinet Member for Best Start
in Life;
Lesley Hagger, Executive Director Children's
Services;
Chris Ward, Director Education, Employment and
Skills;
Sue Moore, Group Head Education Support
Services;
Ramsey Richards, Attendance Service and
Prosecution Manager;
Mark Tobin, Head of Service, Adoption@Heart.

18/20 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 21
September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

19/20 Chairs Announcement

The Vice-Chair announced that an additional item would be added at the end of the published agenda, to provide feedback from the Joint Health and Adult Social Care and Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board meeting held on 2nd November 2020, at which Mental Health Support in Sandwell was considered.

Relates to minute 15/20 Reset and Recovery Stage 1 update 21 September 2020.

The Board received a presentation from the Executive Director of Children's Services to provide a progress update relating to the reset and recovery plan for the period September 2020 to date.

The Board noted the following reset and recovery activity since September 2020, when children had returned to school following the summer break:

- All services had been busy since the start of term and were back in schools working with children and supporting schools both educationally and in relation to Covid matters.
- Services were responding to daily change and needs to support schools. Staff had been volunteering to assist the response functions.
- Staff absence levels were incredibly low, and the commitment of the work force had been amazing. Some staff who were self-isolating had continued to work, the Executive Director encouraged staff to look after themselves as well;
- Business as usual was on track, including new schools being built;
- Levels of contact and scrutiny from DfE and Ofsted were continuing 2-3 times weekly. Eleven schools had been Ofsted visited;
- Due to the second lockdown the Ofsted Assurance visit to Children's Services had been paused and was expected to take place at the beginning of 2021;
- Referrals in Children Social Care and assessments for children were starting to increase, particularly young children where there may be a development delay or where they may need an assessment for a special educational need or an Educational Health and Care Plan. Some had been delayed due to restrictions and not being able to have the contact with them that was required.

The Executive Director outlined a number of impacts that Covid had on young people:

- Disrupted formal education;
- Home learning in strained environments;
- Exams and Qualifications;
- Jobs and training shortages;

- Lack of safe space and trusted support;
- Loneliness and isolation, including fears about their future;
- Online pressure and risk;
- Risk of harmful behaviours;
- Disrupted family services and psychological support; challenging family relationships;
- Increase in domestic abuse;
- Low personal risk of direct Covid in terms of health and wellbeing but high long term social and economic pressure, resulting in an increase in eligibility of pupils for free school meals of 17.5% and rising (now 29% of pupils).

In terms of Schools and Early Years Board noted the following:

- There had been Excellent engagement from schools, academies and early years providers with the Local Authorities. Schools had fed back positively about the support provided;
- All schools were open, there had been a few short-term closures due to it not being safe to open and the need for pupils and staff to self-isolate.
- Most schools had experienced the need to consider whether to close or self-isolate, in these cases support had been provided through the support telephone line and incident management team meetings, to help them make the decision what action to take;
- Remote learning, catch up activities and tutoring were available.
- There had been some sticking points relating to the number of devices the DfE had made available to schools, the number of devices had been reduced significantly, that issue was being pursued with the DfE;
- Staff had been provided with tools to help with their health and well-being;
- Schools attendance rates had been good across the Borough;
- There had been a significant increase in requests for elective home education, which would be considered later in this agenda;
- Pupil assessment, testing and examinations for 2020/21 was still being considered and arrangements were unknown yet;
- Increased costs for schools had been identified and brought to the attention of the DfE. It was hoped that there may be additional funding to help schools meet the additional costs relating to the pandemic.

In terms of vulnerable children, the Board noted the following:

- The Vulnerable Children Officer Group met weekly to ensure children were being checked on, in terms of welfare and support and making sure they could thrive;
- In relation to guidance on shielding and protecting children and young people whose parents or carers were clinically extremely vulnerable there was some confusion about the criteria for ‘Clinically Extremely Vulnerable’ and parents were being advised to check with their GPs;
- Detached youth work had continued to operate throughout lock down, to support and work with young people;
- Vulnerable children were being provided with laptops and dongles to help them carry out their work at home;
- Data returns for Sandwell were showing the trends expected and mirrored national trends;
- Surge planning was working well, partners were working together to identify services and put support in place, and where a specific need had been identified the Strategic Commissioning Partnership had managed to put the necessary services in place;
- Corporate Parenting Board had started to meet again and was a good forum to hear the views of young people;
- The winter grant announcements had highlighted that the arrangements would not be the same as for free school meals during summer holidays. The guidance was due to be published late November to go live on 1st December, so this would be a short turn-around time.

In terms of Brexit Planning, the Board noted the following:

- Preparations for Brexit on 31st December 2020 were underway. The change of regulations relating to a number of arrangements were being worked on to make sure the right arrangements were in place around:
 - admissions, teachers work permits, food suppliers, medicine for children, trips abroad and data;
 - families from the EU, employment of staff from the EU, the families in EU settlement scheme and the need to ensure arrangement concluded before 31st December 2020;
 - Matters relating to EU children in care and care leavers status and the cross-border child protection arrangements;
- A Council ‘Brexit Working Group’ had been formed and officers were working across services to ensure preparations and arrangements for Brexit were moving forward and that they linked

up. There was a Brexit risk register in place to highlight and monitor these matters.

In terms of Communication and Information, the Board noted the following:

- Regular meetings continue to be held - Sitrep meetings with Sandwell Children's Trust, Reset and Recovery Board and Vulnerable People Cell meetings;
- There was a lot of activity to communicate with partners and DfE, and active participation in regional and national meetings to join up work;
- The Council has continued to meet with children, young people and families to consider if their needs were being met and to establish a good understanding of what life is like for them;
- The Council has commenced staff meetings, conferences and other support to keep staff spirits up, in recognition that this has been a really challenging time for all.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions:

- In terms of support to vulnerable children at home, the Council had challenged the DfE decision to reduction the number of devices provided to schools. There were 2 conflicting pieces of information from the DfE, which:
 - one was that the DfE themselves were struggling to source all of the devices they need;
 - also, that DfE had done some re-assessment of what they thought local need was.
- The Board noted a recent school request for devices where a school bubble had to self-isolate and the DfE response was to issue one device for the whole bubble. The Chair highlighted the need to continue to challenge the DfE on this matter and the Executive Director agreed to send the response to the Chair and to discuss the matter outside this forum.
- In terms of support to school staff, there had been general messages to staff about supporting each other, tools to help them to manage their wellbeing, how to manage the pressures (normal and Covid) and the Charter mark. Managers had signposted staff to information - how to seek support, where to look for crisis support, the wellbeing return project and trauma

training. Schools could dip into a whole range of blended learning and there was the 'healthy minds for teachers' programme, which was zoom delivered. In addition, formal referrals to organisations that could support staff could be offered.

- Information about additional funding pressures to schools during the pandemic had been sent to the DfE already and would be shared with the Board.
- The Board would not meet again until post Brexit transition as such the Chair requested that the Brexit risk register be circulated to the Board and Members send any questions arising to the Executive Director.
- When cases of Covid were identified the decision to close a school was a jointly made through a collaborative system. Ultimately it was the school's decision, however, there was a process whereby they could contact the advice and support line:
 - The school provided the information and had a conversation with public health trained staff.
 - If there was a view that a school must close, there must be a conversation with a senior representative from Public Health and the Education Services to talk through mitigations and risk assessments.
 - It was important to reach a joint decision. Services needed to work together to make the difficult decisions and ensure that every avenue had been explored and that schools were doing everything they could to stay open.
- In terms of supply teaching staff, there was awareness of a national issue but not of any local shortage of supply teaching staff. There had been occasions when a shortage of staff available to operate school premises and to supervise school lunchtimes had required a temporary closure for health and safety reasons, because without them in place it was not possible to safely open the school and to guarantee the safety of children and staff on the school premises.
- In relation to Winter Grant arrangements there was work to do once guidance was published to clarify how the Council identified vulnerable children and families. There were several schemes available to support children and families including schemes for under 4's, food banks and free school meals. The Board requested updates relating to Winter Grants arrangements.

- Schools were carrying out home learning in different ways. Some primary schools had issued work books and held whole class sessions, others logged in differently. In secondary schools there were more resources available for pupils to log into. Teachers could also monitor who logs on and what they log into. Teachers could contact pupils who were not logging on. It was noted that senior school pupils may miss out on classroom based activities, such as practical science sessions, but schools were doing everything possible to catch up when children were in school.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Service Director and Executive Director of Children's Services for the comprehensive update and for all the additional work that they and their services were doing.

Resolved:

1. That the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive the reset and recovery update.
2. That further information be circulated to the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board relating to:
 - a. funding pressures to schools
 - b. Brexit risk register
 - c. Winter Grant funding

21/20

Adoption@Heart Annual; Report 2019/20

The Chair welcomed the Head of Service from Adoption@Heart. The Executive Director Children's Services provided a brief introduction to the report. She advised that adoption services in the Sandwell were contracted via the Regional Adoption Agency - Adoption@Heart, and that the Head of Service for the organisation worked to ensure that adoption services function well in the region.

The Head of Service provided the Annual Adoption@Heart report 2019-20 and a 6-month performance update. The Board noted that all Local Authorities had been required by Government to integrate adoption agencies and provide a regional adoption agency (RAA). The RAA in this region included Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and

Wolverhampton, it went live on 1 April 2019 and been operating for 18 months.

The Board noted the presentation which highlighted that:

The integrated service was established and the identity of the Adoption@Heart had been built and developed with a partnership working feel to the contractual arrangement.

- There was a stable workforce of around 70 staff across the partnership, many had been Taped into their posts from the four authorities and hardly any had left Adoption@Heart.
- For many children moving through the care planning process adoption was the last resort. Staff had made significant progress in oversight and tracking the progress of the individual child's journey.
- Not enough people were coming forward to become adoptive families for children in the region and work was ongoing to reach people both in and outside of the region.
- The adoption support offer provided statutory authority for the RAA to adopt any child in the region, this had been a focus for the RAA to work with families. Adoption@Heart was also involved in the National RAA development work, working with 31 other RAA's sharing practice and innovative developments, which was beneficial to this region.
- Services had adapted to virtual ways of working during Covid-19 which was working really well and many of the benefits from it would be retained. Staff absence rates had been very low.
- Performance data headlines presented a positive picture for Sandwell:
 - 62 Sandwell children had been placed in 18 months which was a 20% increase on children placed on previous year.
 - There had been increased Early Permanence usage 20 in 2020/21, 5 of which were Sandwell children. By placing children in foster care, with a view to adopting, also called 'Foster to Adopt, delays for the child were avoided, and the regulation could be used to place a child to mitigate against the delays in the court system.
 - In September 2020, there were 23 children on a placement order waiting to be placed, 11 were in active family finding. This compared with March 2020 when 48 children were on placement order and 20 in active family finding. There was a levelling out in terms of children waiting within Sandwell.

- 50% children were still being placed inter-agency, if a place with A@H could not be found, a placement would have to be purchased from an external agency, it was preferable to place the child in the region.
- 31 children had been adopted in 2019/20, many would have been placed with adopters before adoption @Heart was established. 13 had been adopted in 2020/21. There was a national trend that the number of children placed was decreasing and there were long court delays with applications.
- 2 key DfE indicators:
 - A10 the total journey (from when a child comes into care to when a child is placed with a family), Sandwell was performing within the threshold.
 - A20 (the time from receiving the placement to the matching for the child), Sandwell was above the threshold. There was more work to do to improve A20.
- Performance relating to adopters:
 - 51 adopters were approved in the first year, initially there were transitional challenges, but things have moved on significantly now.
 - Progress in 2020/21 year looked promising, 34 adopters approved in first 6 months. The challenges of Covid would have an impact on year-end total, difficulties during Covid included getting appointments for medicals and face to face meetings. A@H were likely to need to place 130 children in total across the partnership, but it was already clear that they would not hit the 40% target. However, reasonable progress was being made.
 - There was a 31% increase of adopters making adoption enquiries and there was a spike in adopter enquiries during the Covid pandemic. More challenges could impact on the adopters being approved such as income and employment position, which may impact sustainability.
 - There was a clear marketing strategy to encourage adopters across the region, A@H were working closely with communications teams in local authorities and partners, which was seeing good progress. There was, a national campaign was underway, 'You can adopt', to encourage people who have not been successfully reached in the past, particularly BAME communities.

The Board noted the following comments and responses to questions relating to the presentation:

- In terms of locally placed children in Sandwell, data was not available at the meeting, but this could be provided by A@H.
- The key objective of regionalising adoption was to place children in the region. If placing interagency, A@H looked regionally first to place children in the Midlands area. There were huge advantages of them growing up in the region where their wider family were.
- At the time A@H went live there were significant numbers of children waiting on adoption orders that had not been matched or placed. There had been a year on year increase in Sandwell compared to neighbouring authorities, but now A@H was seeing a drop-in numbers year on year, because more children were going into other forms of permanence, other than adoption.
- In terms of the ethnicity of the 62 children placed and who they were placed with, data was not available at the meeting but would be provided.
- The regulations were clear that If the RAA did not have adoptive parent(s) who were a full cultural match to the child, then the RAA is required not to create any delay in placing the child with a view to finding a full cultural match. The Board noted cultural match was not the only requirement in matching a child. There was currently an interesting national debate about finding the right cultural match.
- In relation to the national ‘You Can Adopt’ campaign there were pilot campaigns in the region to talk to people, with a focus on recruiting adopters from BAME groups, this was mainly focussed in Birmingham. The Covid-19 pandemic had changed the way the pilot was carried out, the pilot adopted a virtual approach, rather than the plan to reach out via street ambassadors in churches and community Centres. An organisation ‘Home for Good’ was leading the pilot and DfE driving the initiative, there was a lot of interest in the campaign.
- Councillor Z Hussain suggested that local Councillors could help to reach out and engage with communities and getting the word out about the campaign.
- A@E agreed to look at the ethnicity data of the 62 children and families they were placed with in Sandwell and circulate the data to The Board.

- Councillor McVittie suggested a breakdown of annual information may be helpful, into months or seasonally, to provide context about how the organisation moved forward and the challenges and trends through the year. A@E were developing the template for the report and would take on board this comment.
- In terms of children with disability who were placed. A@E advised there were several children with complex clinical need, they tend to wait longer to be placed. This data could be factored in alongside ethnicity and other characteristics and provided to members.
- The Board noted that there was a challenge for adoption agencies when children had complex needs and when it was known that that child would experience delays. RAA would like to do more earlier in profiling the child and searching for adopters. The frustration faced was that the Courts required RAA to wait until there was some certainty around granting legal orders in terms of identifying characteristics. The earlier RAA could start the process the better for the child. The debate was whether the court delays were child centric or not.

Resolved:

1. That the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board receive the Adoption@Heart annual report 2019-20 and note the performance update provided.
2. Information be circulated to the Board relating to the ethnicity and disability data of the 62 children and families they were placed with in Sandwell.

22/20

Elective Home Education Working Group

The Chair provided an overview of the progress of the Elective Home Education Working Group. He outlined the key lines of enquiry, the evidence gathering activities undertaken, including a survey which Councillors had helped shape and the focus group arrangements for 25 November 2020 meeting with parents and EHE

teachers.

The Chair referred to the Parliamentary Education Committee Inquiry into Elective Home Education which was established in September 2020 and requested DfE to provide information on the progress of the Inquiry process. He indicated that evidence from Sandwell's Elective Home Education Working Group could provide evidence to the Governments Inquiry.

The Group Head Education Support Services and Attendance Service and Prosecution Manager provided an update relating to Elective Home Education.

The Group Head indicated that since the last meeting of the Scrutiny Board, the working group had met twice and had two very productive sessions.

Scrutiny activity included:

- Meetings to consider background reports, data and case studies, there was a lot of information being processed about the current offer and areas for more in-depth scrutiny identified. It was a very positive process.
- a survey for parents and children had been drafted, Members provided suggestions of how to phrase the questions. The final version was circulated on 2nd November.
- The next meeting would be a focus group meeting with parents, children and EHE teachers to hear their views about the current offer.

The Group Head presented a data chart which highlighted a steady increase in EHE cases over four years 2016-2020, with a significant increase in 2020/21, this figure was part year (up to October 2020).

The increase in EHE was also of interest to HMI Ofsted, officers had prepared a number of responses to questions and data relating to elective home education since March 2020. The data was full and conclusive of an upward trend in EHE numbers. Closed cases indicated the number of children who had either returned to school or left at the end of year 11.

Ethnicity data since April 2020 showed 252 total – roughly half and half male / female, the ethnicity data was not unusual, there were no real spikes or trends other than the largest ethnic group was white British with 77(30%).

HMI Ofsted asked further questions about patterns in the move to elective home education as follows:

- Social Services: there were 2 children moved to EHE since April 2020 totalling 5 children on a CIN Plan;
- SEND Pupils: EHCP 5, SEND 34 with no obvious pattern;
- Number of families where all children in the family are now EHE: the data was not held in a format to respond to this enquiry;
- Covid: The number of parents who have given Covid related reasons for choosing EHE since April 2020 was 90;
- Ethnicity: there was no pattern and nothing to indicate a reason for the move to home education;
- Postcodes: the spread of numbers across the Borough had been fairly even across the wards;
- School referral patterns: no schools had seen significant increase to EHE referrals.

The Group Head advised that data relating to the number of EHE by town was being extended to look at the number but also the percentage of children in EHE per Town. The unknown locations were due the way data was currently stored, a systems change was underway to rectify data storage issues.

The Chair thanked officers for the update presentation.

The Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life thanked officers and the Working Group for the work they had carried out so far to look at Elective Home Education (EHE). She advised that she had suggested the topic after noticing the increasing numbers at a briefing meeting. the work they had been carried out so far to look into EHE. She indicated that the benefits of the review was that the Authority would come away with more information and a better understanding of the issues than was known at the beginning of it.

The Chair highlighted that the Group had got off to a good start and needed to keep up momentum through coming months.

23/20

Joint Health and Adult Social Care and Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board Outcomes

The Chair advised Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board that the Mental Health Support Session had been very

beneficial and that two items had been identified to be included on the work programme for scrutiny in 2021.

- Acute paediatric beds
- Detailed report on CAMHS

Resolved:

- 1) that reports be included on the work programme for Scrutiny Board in 2021.
 - a. Acute paediatric beds
 - b. Detailed report on CAMHS

(Meeting ended at 6.45 pm)

Contact Officer: Deb Breedon Democratic Services Unit 0121 569 3896

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

Declarations of Interest

Members to declare: -

- (a) Any interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting;
- (b) The existence and nature of any political Party Whip on any matters to be considered at the meeting.

SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Reset and Recovery update

Overview since last report to Scrutiny Board in November 2020:

- All services continue to be very busy
- Many staff continuing to volunteer to assist other response functions
- Absence low; staff who are self-isolating generally continuing to work
- 'Business As Usual' on track but pressures emerging eg SEND assessments
- Levels of scrutiny and contact from DfE and Ofsted continue
- Schools have remained open in challenging circumstances
- Ofsted visits to schools (12)
- Ofsted assurance visit programme re: children's services starts January
- Impact - referrals starting to increase and some significant incidents; placement pressures and costs for children in care
- Corporate Parenting Board meetings and Xmas gifts
- Free School Meals over the Xmas period
- Winter Support Grant scheme established



SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Reset and Recovery update

Highlights since last report to Scrutiny Board in November 2020:

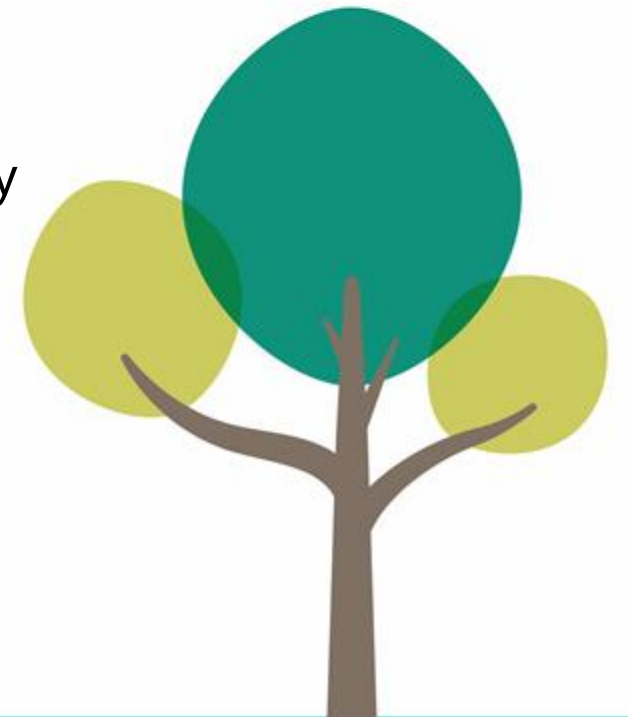
- MJ Awards – winner of the Innovation in Children's Services category for the STEPS Centre
- Finalist in the Children and Young People Now Awards category for Children in Care for the Sandwell Careers Interview Guarantee Scheme and reduction from 24% NEET in 2017 to 6% NEET in 2020
- Member of staff shortlisted for the national NSPCC Award, recognising outstanding practice in the implementation of the Graded Care Profile 2 (Neglect programme)
- Member of staff received the MBE in recognition of work in school inclusion for children with SEND
- Contracts exchanged on Providence Place and feasibility study started for CBSO school in West Bromwich



SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Reset and Recovery update

EARLY YEARS, SCHOOLS AND COLLEGE:

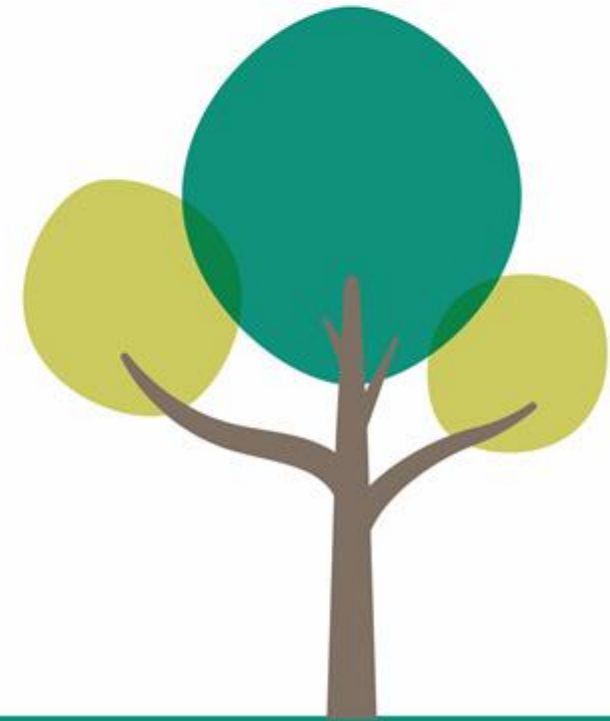
- Excellent engagement between early years providers, schools/academies and Sandwell College and the local authority:
 - self-isolation, remote learning arrangements, attendance, funding, staff wellbeing, managing CEV, Xmas closure dates, Free School Meal arrangements over Xmas, INSET arrangements, end of term contact tracing requirements, information for parents
- Daily updates for Cabinet Members and weekly for all Councillors
- Engagement with Trades Unions
- Meetings with Minister Ford - additional requests from government: early years and childcare (including wrap around, EHE, new operational guidance for FE)
- Mass testing arrangements (aymsymptomatic)



SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Reset and Recovery update

VULNERABLE CHILDREN:

- Vulnerable Children Group meetings continue:
 - SEND, CEV, CME, CSC, AP, EHE, FSM
- Data returns and report from Wave 16:
 - increasing complexity of issues experienced by children
- Ofsted vulnerable children report (3) - children are struggling:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-isolation-having-detrimental-impact-on-childrens-education-and-welfare-particularly-the-most-vulnerable>
- Safe sleeping over Xmas and prevention of suicide posters for schools
- Meetings with Minister Ford - reviews of babies and child protection, family justice and court arrangements, UASC arrangements (and other Brexit matters)
- Vulnerable People's Cell:
 - Winter Support Grant

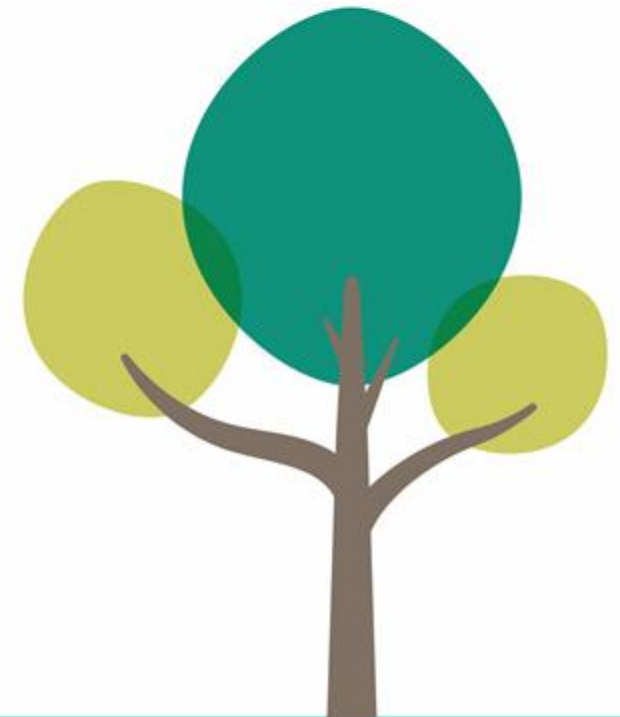


SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Reset and Recovery update



COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

- Sitrep (including Sandwell Children's Trust), Reset and Recovery Board, Vulnerable Children's Group meetings, SIMT, Vulnerable People Cell meetings
- With partners (education providers, safeguarding partnership)
- Several times weekly with DfE and Ofsted
- Regional and national meetings and actions
- Voices of children, young people and families
- Staff meetings and other support, including staff conferences
- 2020 achievements

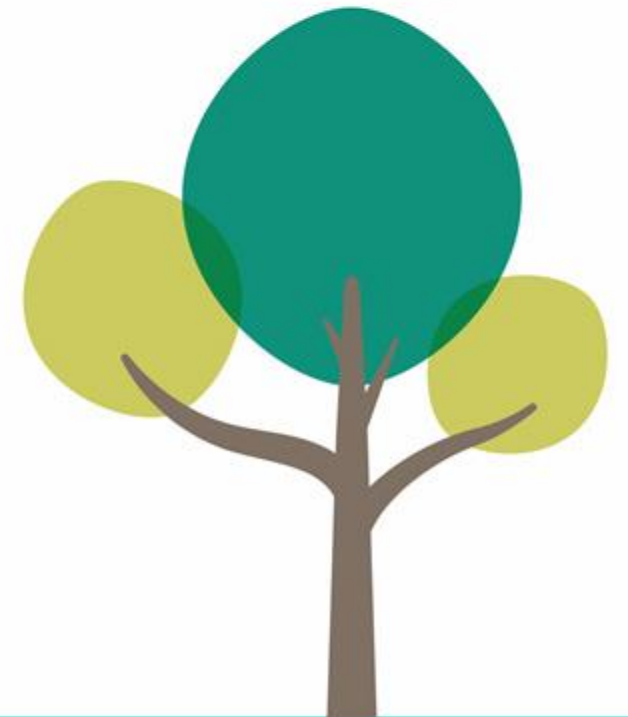


SANDWELL CHILDREN'S SERVICES – Reset and Recovery update



LOOKING FORWARD:

- Updated guidance and interpretation/implementation
- Mass testing for schools
- Tests and examination arrangements
- Planning for Ofsted focused visit – support to vulnerable children
- Planning for full Ofsted inspection
- Induction of new CEO for Sandwell Children's Trust
- Holiday Activities and Food Scheme roll-out
- Consultation on Keeping Children Safe in Education



Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 January 2021

Subject:	Proposed Changes to Vocational Qualifications
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger
Contact Officer:	Principal Sandwell College, Graham Pennington graham.pennington@sandwell.ac.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To consider and comment on the proposed changes to the vocational qualification and draft consultation response.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The response to the consultation informs the review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England which may impact on Sandwell's young people and their college education.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England has reached the second stage of consultation. The draft consultation response from Sixth Form Colleges Association is appended for information.
- 4.2 A presentation will be provided at the meeting from the Principal, Sandwell College.

5 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft consultation response from Sixth Form Colleges Association, December 2020

Review of post-16 qualifications at Level 3 in England: second stage consultation

Draft consultation response from Sixth Form Colleges Association, December 2020

A. Summary: the vital role of applied general qualifications

- We share the government's ambition to create a world class education system that helps all students to fulfil their potential and meets the needs of employers. We also welcome the introduction of T levels and many of our members have already started to deliver these stretching new qualifications. But fundamentally, we do not agree that T levels and A levels should become the "*programmes of choice for 16 to 19 year olds taking Level 3 qualifications*". We believe that the newly-reformed, more rigorous applied general qualifications (AGQs) have a vital role to play in the future qualifications landscape.
- The consultation is very clear that the government is committed to introducing a binary system of T levels and A levels at Level 3, where the vast majority of young people pursue one of these programmes at the age of 16. It is also very clear that AGQs will, at best, have a very minor role to play in the future qualification landscape.
- We believe that these proposals would be disastrous for the economy, employers, young people, social mobility and educational institutions. Instead, the government should retain the current three-route model of A levels, AGQs and technical qualifications. A levels and AGQs have recently undergone a rigorous process of reform, and technical qualifications are being transformed through the introduction of T levels.
- For many young people, an A level or a T level will not be the most appropriate route to support progression to higher levels of study or a meaningful job. Although AGQs are often available in similar subjects, they are a different type of qualification that provide a different type of educational experience.
- However, it is clear that policymakers consider AGQs to be a barrier to increasing the take up of T levels – one of the Department for Education's key policy objectives. As a result, the government is set to embark on a misguided tidying up exercise that will leave many young people without a viable pathway at the age of 16.
- Far from driving up participation in T levels, removing or significantly reducing AGQs is much more likely to increase the number of young people enrolling on A levels. Some will succeed, many will not, and it is possible that some young people will drop out of education altogether. T levels are an important and welcome development, but they should succeed on their own merits, not by reducing or removing AGQs.
- To date, the government's approach to qualification reform has been to focus on what it is *adding* to the system rather than what it is removing. The rhetoric on T levels is compelling (new, stretching, large, employer-led qualifications), but much less has been said about the qualifications that will be de-funded in an effort to clear a path for their introduction. AGQs have a vital role to play in the future qualifications landscape – even one with two routes rather than three – and the case for retaining these qualifications is set out in more detail below.

B. Key messages

- Our consultation response has seven key messages:
 1. Many students will be better served studying an AGQ rather than an A level or T level
 2. The government's definition of 'overlap' is narrow and unsophisticated
 3. The government has over-stated the degree of 'confusion' within the current qualifications landscape
 4. The government has over-estimated the role that T levels can realistically play in the future qualifications landscape, and the speed at which they can be introduced
 5. There are a range of practical barriers that will limit the uptake of T levels.
 6. Moving to a binary model of A levels and T levels will disadvantage many students
 7. Removing AGQs will hamper social mobility
- These key messages address many of the specific questions posed in the consultation. We have developed our response in this way a. to ensure our key messages are clearly understood and b. because the consultation document focuses on how to implement a policy that we fundamentally disagree with.
- We have focused on the academic route for 16 to 19 year olds. If the government proceeds with its plan for defining qualifications as either academic or technical, we suggest it uses the definitions adopted by Ofqual in its Summer and Autumn 2020 Qualification Explainer Tool. Here, Level 3 AGQs are categorised as follows:
 - Signalling occupational competence (assessed by Ofqual as technical qualifications)
 - Qualifications with a mixed purpose
 - Qualifications used for progression to HE (assessed by Ofqual as academic qualifications)
- In most cases, Qualifications with a mixed purpose (like Qualifications used for progression to HE) received a calculated grade rather than an adapted assessment. The vast majority of Level 3 AGQs delivered by our members fit in these two 'academic' categories.
- 1. **Many students will be better served studying an AGQ rather than an A level or T level**
- For some students, pursuing AGQs (either alongside A levels, or as part of a standalone study programme) will be a more effective way to develop their skills and achieve their ambitions than pursuing an A level or T level-only study programme.
- For example, many students who want to progress to professional practice higher education courses (e.g. public services, nursing and allied professions, pharmacy, optometry) benefit more from the applied/practical learning in an AGQ than they do from the more academic/theoretical learning in an A level. T levels primarily lead to skilled employment rather than higher education and are not available in all subject areas.
- Many students wishing to study at Russell Group universities undertake an applied general qualification alongside A levels, as they develop the practical skills (e.g. presentations, team work, and project-based work) that are highly valued by universities. It is not unusual for students who have undertaken applied general qualifications to find the first year of a university course less demanding than their sixth form studies.
- It is a similar story for students who wish to pursue a career in sport and performing arts – the ideal model sits somewhere between the A level and T level route. Progression routes to elite status in both of these areas (where no T levels are planned) are internationally recognised as excellent – the AGQs are calibrated to strike the right balance of skills development and academic learning. This would be lost by moving to a binary model of A levels and T levels.

- An AGQ in sports science allows students to develop skills with expert coaches and access work experience, which they could not do through the A level equivalent. Students studying applied general qualifications in art and design develop a full portfolio of work to use during HE interviews - giving them a better chance of receiving a university offer.
- There are many other specific AGQs that play a unique role and must be retained. For example:
 - *Applied Science*. There is no A level equivalent, and students who have combined this qualification with A levels have progressed to HE and specialised in careers including radiotherapy and oncology, pharmacy, biomedical sciences, cognitive and clinical neuroscience, and paramedic science.
 - *Engineering*. This gives students an insightful experience of the profession, and study it alongside Physics and Maths A levels provides the ideal knowledge and skills to progress and flourish in degree-level engineering.
 - *Health and Social Care*. Again, a single qualification taken alongside A levels such as Biology provides the ideal preparation for further study in courses such as nursing and midwifery.

2. The government's definition of 'overlap' is narrow and unsophisticated

- The government's definition of overlap seems to be no more sophisticated than qualifications in the same or similar-sounding subjects. It is important not to confuse the purpose of a qualification with its content. T levels are designed to help young people progress to a very specific occupation. AGQs are designed to help young people progress to higher education or the workplace. There is a need for AGQs to sit alongside A levels and T levels and this is true even where there is 'overlap' in terms of content.
- Some qualifications may appear similar, but actually offer a different experience and/or progression route. For example, an AGQ in business can be taken as part of a larger, more diverse programme that compliments other subjects and may lead to further study or employment; the T level in management and administration will be taken solely as a route into business. An A level in PE is primarily classroom study, including theoretical anatomy and biomechanics, while an AGQ in sport science prioritises the application of that theory and experience in leading teams and coaching.
- Qualifications may overlap in content, but do not overlap in their mode of teaching and assessment. AGQs are taught differently (more applied) and assessed differently (more coursework) and this flexibility is vitally important for some students. In many respects, the assessment and teaching style of AGQs is actually more suited to HE, as students are required to plan extended pieces of work for assessment and deliver presentations, for example.
- The IB is an excellent example of a qualification that 'overlaps' with A levels in content and progression route, but offers a different kind of teaching and learning experience. The IB is valued for providing an alternative to A level by offering a broad curriculum across six subjects and requiring that students develop certain study skills alongside their core studies via an extended essay and presentation. This is very similar to AGQs, which also allow students to undertake a broad curriculum via subjects like applied science, but are taught and assessed via a range of tasks including exams, practical demonstrations, presentations, and coursework.
- Both the IB and AGQs (alone or as part of a mixed programme) facilitate entrance to highly competitive universities. So it is unclear why the IB will (quite rightly) continue to be funded, while many AGQs will not. Given that AGQs are disproportionately taken by the poorest students, while IB is mainly taught in private schools, the government's selective use of 'overlap' is not only narrow and unsophisticated, but elitist as well.
- It is also important that highly regarded, specialist qualifications such as those provided by the University of the Arts London (UAL) can continue to play a role in the future qualifications landscape. Despite the superficial appearance of overlap with some A levels (and potentially

some T levels in the future) these are precisely the sort of successful, employer-backed qualifications that the government should be supporting.

3. The government has over-stated the degree of 'confusion' with the current qualifications landscape

- In making the case for a binary model, the government often refers to the "confusion" caused by having 12,000 qualifications approved for funding for 16-19 year olds (although the original case for change document concedes that there are actually 4,700 qualifications in scope of the review). This claim is repeated in the introduction to the stage two consultation (even though the focus is only on Level 3 qualifications).
- Our members have reported very little confusion from a student perspective. There are only 39 AGQ subjects available across the entire sixth form college sector, and a similar number of A levels. So we believe the notion of widespread confusion is, from a student perspective at least, something of a myth.
- There is also little scope for confusion when qualifications are well planned, bedded in and have demonstrable progression routes. Our members are able to share a rich history of AGQ success stories, particularly in STEM subjects and in those areas where a T level will not be available, such as sport and performing arts. One of the biggest risks in moving to a binary model is reversing the gains that have been made in developing AGQ pathways in recent years.

4. The government has over-estimated the role that T levels can realistically play in the future qualifications landscape, and the speed at which they can be introduced

- In 2020/21, 1,783 of the 1.1 million 16-19 year olds in full time education in England are pursuing a T level. Although low numbers are perhaps to be expected during the first year of T level rollout, the last date a student could begin a two-year 'technical' course that is deemed to overlap with a wave 1 or 2 T level under the current proposals would be September 2022. Even if T levels were a replacement for AGQs (and as we have already set out, they are often very different qualifications) the timescale for their introduction is wildly unrealistic.
- Although the government has never set a target for the proportion of students that will ultimately pursue a T level, in a binary model, it is fair to assume that this might one day approach 50% of the cohort. But in 2018 (the most recent year for which data is available) just 4% of 16 to 18 year olds on a Level 3 programme were studying a technical qualification. Even accounting for qualifications that no longer feature in performance tables, the proportion of students pursuing a technical qualification has historically hovered around the 10% mark.
- Given that the requirements for studying a T level are a good deal more exacting than the tech level qualifications they will replace (more information on this is set out below), even a 10% market share may be out of reach in the short to medium term.
- It is worth restating here that we are supporters of, and advocates for, T levels. These stretching, high quality, employer-led qualifications have the potential to be a considerable advance on many of the tech level qualifications that they will replace. But it is unclear why these qualifications are being presented as a viable alternative to AGQs, and unrealistic to present them as part of binary offer with A levels. A more realistic aim would be for T levels to replace tech levels over the next few years as part of a strengthened three-route model.

5. There are a range of practical barriers that will limit the uptake of T levels

Even when T levels are fully rolled out, there will still be a range of practical barriers that will limit their uptake, and where AGQs will be needed. For example:

- **Time.** Some young people need a part time job (to support themselves or others) and this will not be possible for many given the size of a T level programme, even allowing for the recent flexibilities that have been introduced. There are clear implications here for disadvantaged students.
- **Availability.** There are some occupations and locations that T levels will struggle to penetrate, and alternative qualifications will need to be available to cater for these gaps:

Occupations: The 15 T level routes are not exhaustive, and there are some occupations where alternative qualifications will be required. We have already identified some of these, and students that want to progress to professional practice higher education courses (e.g. public services) will need to pursue a route that sits between A levels and T levels.

Locations: There will be some parts of the country where it is not possible to arrange a work placement, either because there are insufficient numbers of employers, or because there are insufficient numbers of employers willing to offer a placement. The recent flexibilities introduced on work placements are very welcome, but many employers in relevant occupations are either unwilling or unable to get involved. T levels will only be available in routes where work placements are available. The local labour market should not dictate the type of qualification that a student can pursue – a young person should not have to relocate to a different area to pursue a particular technical qualification.

- **Work placements.** Work placements of the required duration will be difficult to secure in some sectors. Some large employers already have an effective work placement programme and many SMEs lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to offer the meaningful, 45-day in-person placements which are required for completion of a full T level (and which make the T level special).
- The DfE has made significant efforts to address this, establishing the Capacity and Delivery Fund (CDF) as a pilot for T level placements, and publishing information on the benefits of taking part for employers. So far, these efforts have not come close to bridging the gap between demand for placements and employer supply, as the DfE's own evaluation research shows.
- The process evaluation of CDF by the Institute for Employment Studies found that while implementation in 2018/19, when recipient institutions were required to find T level style placements for only 10% of their technical students, was *"broadly successful," "Many institutions failed to meet their targets. The qualitative research found differences between providers that had previous experience of employer engagement (including pilot providers and large general FE colleges with existing employer links) and those who did not, in particular sixth form colleges."*
- And, as the case study below shows, even large, high-performing, General Further Education colleges with dedicated staff for employer engagement can struggle to generate a sufficient number of placements:

Sandwell College: T level Placement Case Study. In 2020/21, Sandwell - a large GFE college in a major city (Birmingham) with a successful track record in employer engagement - has a target of 390 CDF placements. Between September and October 2020, the college's staff made contact with 807 employers. Of these 807 employers, just 35 offered a placement - a 4% conversion rate.

The college has already overspent its CDF allocation in pursuing these placements and will need to invest significant additional funding in employer engagement in order to come close to reaching its target. As this year's CDF delivery target is 25% of technical students, providing T level placements to all of these students at this conversion rate would require contact to be made with 39,000 businesses (to achieve 1,560 placements). According to 2019 statistics from Birmingham council, there are only 43,950 businesses in the city in total.

And a 4% conversion rate may prove optimistic over the next few years, given the effects of Covid-19 and Brexit on the economy, many of which are yet to be felt. Sandwell's experience (including serious additional investment from a provider with real expertise in employer engagement) shows that even securing T level placements for only those students currently pursuing a technical course will be extremely challenging for most providers.

- Many colleges in rural or semi-rural areas are already concerned that T levels are a city-centric initiative and are hampered by the lack of employers generally, let alone employers willing to

offer a work placement. But as the Sandwell case study illustrates, this remains a major issue even in urban conurbations.

- **Breadth:** T levels are so large, it will not be possible to study other subjects alongside them.
 - The prospect of pursuing such a narrow, all-or-nothing programme from the age 16 could cause some students to disengage from education. The same is true in areas where only a limited number of T levels are available. If the only alternative was A levels, this would have a negative effect on skills development and social mobility.
 - T levels will be right option for students who have a very clear and specific idea of their career path at the age of 15 or 16 and where a local college is offering a T level that meets this requirement. But the era of having a job for life is now over, and young people in the 21st century will change careers multiple times during their working life. In that context, access to a broad, flexible education will become even more important in the future.
- AGQs enable progression to adjacent employment areas or HE rather than preparing a student for a specific industry. For example, health and social care allows students to go into care, as well as multiple healthcare areas such as physiotherapy and radiology. The healthcare T level will not do this, requiring students to choose one tightly focused specialism such as optical care or pharmacy, and with no course content on social care.

6. Moving to a binary model of A levels and T levels will disadvantage many students

- The Department for Education's impact assessment is arguably more flawed than the consultation proposals it sets out to defend. Blind faith in the benefits of T levels (despite being operational for less than a term, the assessment confidently predicts that students will be *"more likely to find employment and receiving higher earnings when they do"*) is combined with very cautious assessments of any potential downsides (e.g. it is estimated only around 4% of 16-19 year olds will be unable to progress to Level 3 after the proposals are implemented).
- The impact assessment does concede that the government's proposals mean that it is *"inevitably likely to make it more challenging for some students to achieve level 3"*. For these individuals *"there is a risk that they may be worse off in terms of labour market outcomes and progression."*
- However, the response to this prospect is far from reassuring. The impact assessment points to the T Level Transition Programme and says DfE will explore the idea of *"a new form of transition [which] could support students looking to progress onto level 3 programmes other than T levels"*. This transition support has yet to be defined, planned, or piloted with students and teachers. Given that it will need to be available by 2023, a timeframe which would be ambitious even if there were a clear plan in place to develop the programme, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the government is not serious about supporting the students that its own impact assessment concedes will be worst affected.
- The consultation also raises the possibility that these students could instead study a further Level 2 qualification. This is an astonishing proposal - reducing the terminal qualification levels of lower-achieving students - and is entirely at odds with the government's stated commitment to 'level up' opportunity.
- Three groups of students in particular are identified as having most to lose from the government's proposals:
 - Students from Asian and Black ethnic backgrounds *"could be disproportionately negatively impacted"* given their current over-representation on Level 3 AGQs.
 - *"Those from SEN background are more likely to be affected [...] this could lead to these students being more strongly negatively impacted by being unable to achieve level 3 in the reformed landscape."*

- *“The proposals are anticipated to particularly affect students who previously received FSM, as they are more highly represented on qualifications we expect to no longer be offered, than those expected to remain”.*
- Again, the government must do much better than simply asserting that those who are able to achieve Level 3 will be pursuing qualifications that will deliver *“better skills and job market currency”*. Rolling out these proposals but only *“exploring potential mitigations against these negative impacts”* borders on the reckless.
- The only way to mitigate the negative impact on students (particularly those in protected groups) is to ensure that students have the option to pursue AGQs rather being forced to pursue an A level or T level at Level 3, or an alternative qualification at Level 2.
- Instability in the provider base will inevitably have a knock-on effect on students. Many providers will be surprised to read that the main benefit to them will be a reduction in the costs they incur deciding on their qualification offer: *“the complexity of the qualifications market providers are faced with will be reduced, in turn minimising the recurring costs associated with deciding which competing qualification a provider wishes to offer”*.
- As there are only 39 AGQ subjects available across the entire sixth form college sector, institutions will be more concerned about the loss of these qualifications and related progression pathways that have been developed and refined over many years. The impact assessment is less than reassuring about the risk of financial unfeasibility: *“in practice we would not expect this risk to be significant, as we would expect providers to successfully adapt their offer instead. We would anticipate a low likelihood that providers could go out of business, though a quantitative assessment cannot be undertaken at this stage.*

7. Removing AGQs will hamper social mobility

- As we identify above, the government proposals will particularly disadvantage some groups of students - 11% of students on courses that will no longer be available are FSM recipients, and 24% are from the most disadvantaged fifth of areas.
- SFCA's own analysis mirrors the national picture: our AGQ and mixed-programme students are poorer and achieve lower GCSE scores than their A level peers. At and below an average GCSE of grade 6, the majority of our students follow AGQ-only or mixed programmes.
- The higher levels of retention and progression to higher education by A level students overall are sometimes taken as evidence of their higher level of challenge compared to AGQs. When we look at outcomes, however, we see that for *modestly-qualified* students, the reverse is true: they actually perform *better* when they study AGQs. AGQs enable this group of students to encounter greater challenge in the form of continued participation in further education, and then in the form of access to higher education.
- Data from the Six Dimensions project (undertaken by Nick Allen of Peter Symonds College in Winchester and drawing on information provided by all SFCA members) shows that students with prior attainment below an average GCSE grade of 5.2 are more likely to stay in education through both years of sixth form on an AGQ-only programme than an A level programme. Students with prior attainment between 5.2 and 6.1 are more likely to be retained on a mixed programme than an A level programme.
- Six Dimensions also tells us that students on a mixed programme with prior attainment below 5.2 are more likely to enter university than those on an A level only programme. This is perhaps unsurprising, given the higher attainment of students with low prior attainment when they study an AGQ or mixed programme: for average GCSE scores below 5.8, the strongest route towards achieving the equivalent of three A level passes is applied general.
- At average GCSE scores below 5.8, mixed programmes are also a stronger route than A level to the equivalent of three passes, by around five percentage points. At GCSE scores below 4.7, students starting an A level programme have a less than 50% chance of success. In an applied general only programme, a student's chance of success by this measure is 70%.

- This quantitative evidence supports what we hear from our members who deliver AGQs: that lower-achieving students are frequently those who have gone to poorer schools, often in poorer areas, and therefore have lower levels of content knowledge and poorer study skills when they begin sixth form study. Others have simply, for whatever reason, underperformed in exam conditions – often resulting in a very real anxiety about future exams.
- Because AGQs are modular and incentivise explicit instruction in the variety of examination methods used, they allow these students to gradually, but rapidly, improve in a way that the linear A level does not. They are, in short, that rare thing in education we spend so much time looking for: a course of study that allows low-income students to alter their previous trajectories and ‘over-perform’ their statistically-determined destinies.
- Of course, almost any higher education allows students to attain higher earnings. However, even when we look only at the most selective universities, the evidence is encouraging. More than one in ten of students that progressed to Russell Group universities in 2020 from the Outstanding New College Doncaster did so after studying a mixed A level and AGQ study programme. These students had an average GCSE point score of 5.67, versus 6.85 for A level only students.
- This shows that AGQs allow students to access the most stretching courses even with relatively low prior attainment. Some of these students might have thrived on an A level only programme; but some, as is clear from the Six Dimensions evidence, would never have completed sixth form at all, let alone realised their potential by studying at a top university.
- However, the role of AGQs in aiding progression to higher education is not something that policymakers regard in a positive way. It is increasingly clear that the government believes too many young people progress to university and many AGQ students would be better served pursuing a Level 4 or 5 technical course instead
- This view is problematic in many ways, particularly for a government committed to ‘levelling up’ opportunity. For example, there are huge regional variations in the rate of progression to higher education. We know that 42% of young people in England progress to higher education by the age of 19. But this national average masks wide local variations – from 25% in Knowsley to 64% in Westminster. We also know that just 19% of students from the state sector progress to the most selective universities compared to 56% of students from the independent sector.
- And it remains to be seen if take up of the government’s high status, technical alternatives to university will be just as high in Westminster (the London borough, but perhaps also the independent school) as it is in Knowsley.
- We also know that achieving a Level 3 AQQ confers a range of benefits, even if the student does not progress to higher education. Government research shows that the lifetime benefits of attaining a Level 3 BTEC are estimated at between £44,000 and £63,000. The same report notes that *"Vocational qualifications such as BTECs which focus on providing learners with general transferable skills as opposed to occupational skills have the highest rates of learner progression, particularly to Higher Education, as compared to other vocational qualifications such as NVQs or City and Guilds and RSA programmes."*
- This research is based on the less rigorous QCF qualification; it is likely that RQF qualifications will deliver even greater benefits. Unfortunately, RQF qualifications have not been in place long enough for this research to be conducted. It would be short-sighted in the extreme to withdraw them now when we only have access to an evidence picture on AGQs which in fact refers to an entirely different suite of qualifications.

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

11 January 2021

Subject:	Elective Home Education Scrutiny Board
Director:	Executive Director of Children's Services, Lesley Hagger Director of Education Skills and Employment, Chris Ward
Contact Officer:	Group Head for Education Support Services, Sue Moore Sue_moore@sandwell.gov.uk Democratic Services Officer, Deb Breedon Deborah_breedon@sandwell.gov.uk


1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To receive a progress update from the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Working Group.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The Children's Services and Education Board requested regular update reports relating to the work of the Elective Home Education Scrutiny Working Group.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At previous meetings, this Board agreed the purpose and scope of the review, and received scene setting report about Elective Home Education (EHE) in Sandwell.
- 4.2 Nationally, there has been a very significant increase in the number of children being educated at home. Elective Home Education numbers over the last 5 academic years has risen in Sandwell. The review aims to gather evidence to understand the have, needs and wants for Elective Home Education in Sandwell and to raise awareness of the limitations placed on the Local Authority (LA).
- 4.3 At a meeting of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families and Directors of Children's Services (DCS) in September 2020, off-rolling and increases in numbers of children in elective home education were discussed. Some Local Authorities (LAs) had seen an increase in EHE. It was considered that the pandemic had heightened the risk that some children may be inappropriately withdrawn from school for EHE, either because parents have reservations about sending children to school, or because they are encouraged to do so by schools. There was a general view that LAs need greater powers and that parents may not understand fully the longer-term implications of EHE.
- 4.4 In November 2020 summary analysis of the ADCS Elective Home Education Survey 2020 was published (appendix 1). The annual elective home education (EHE) survey captures the number and characteristics of children and young people who are known to be

home educated. The survey also aims to understand the reasons behind a family's decision to electively home educate, how LAs across the country are supporting these families, and how any available resources are being deployed in this area.

- 4.5 This year's survey also included a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic and how this has impacted upon the number of children and young people electively home educated. The survey findings show that the number of children withdrawn from school for elective home education had soared by 38 per cent in the past year – jumping from 54,656 to 75,668.
- 4.6 The Working Group had found that Sandwell's increase in EHE is higher than the 38% National average. As at 30th October 2020, Sandwell had received 220 new EHE referrals (including 90 citing Covid as the primary reason) representing an increase of 49% in comparison with the previous academic year.
- 4.7 The Working Group has carried out a survey aimed to learn more about EHE in Sandwell and why families were choosing it as an alternative to school. The survey was distributed on 2 November 2020 to all home educating families registered in Sandwell, which represents 561 young people. Parents and children were invited to fill in separate surveys.
- 4.8 The Working Group received analysis from 15 adult surveys and 19 children surveys, some families had included all of the children in a single survey. The low response rate was disappointing, but the feedback received was very positive about EHE support in Sandwell and provided some useful comments. Analysis and data provided will feed into the final report.
- 4.9 Since September 2020, Ofsted has been carrying out assurance visits to local authorities to consider if they are making the best decisions for children in care during the pandemic. There had been eleven satisfactory visits to Sandwell schools by mid-November.
- 4.10 A Schools Week press release in December had highlighted that Ofsted has 'rapped a council' after discovering potential off-rolling of children in care, with the number of pupils educated at home shooting up more than 20 per cent. Analysis found that nine of the ten children's services visits

conducted since September mentioned a rise in the number of children being home-educated, although, the watchdog recognised many councils had effective processes in place to track such changes. The Working Group has found that Sandwell processes are working very well.

- 4.11 At the last meeting the Chair requested an update on the Education Select Committee's Inquiry of EHE. The DfE Senior Case Lead for this area was unable to join the meeting but has since advised that the call for evidence, for the Inquiry, closed on November 6 and a further update has been requested from the parliamentary team.
- 4.12 The parliamentary policy team has indicated it would welcome Sandwell Councils EHE Working Group evidence to help inform the national picture, especially as the views of children, families, and teachers were being gathered.
- 4.13 There may be further opportunity for representatives from Sandwell to re-engage with Westminster and the All Party Parliamentary process as previously attended by the Service Manager in his capacity as a member of the Association of EHE Professionals.

5 The Current Position – Working Group

- 5.1 The EHE Working Group has met three times since the last update:

9 November 2020: to consider a scene setting report, case studies and to receive an update on surveys

24 November 2020: Focus Group with Parents, children and EHE advisory teachers

2 December 2020: considered analysis from EHE surveys, feedback from the Focus group with parents, children and advisory teachers, the cost of home education in Sandwell and how EHE is funded

- 5.2 The current estimated cost of EHE support in Sandwell is based on a team resource as detailed below:

Role	Hours	£ with on-costs
EHE Advisory Teacher	37	48,800
EHE Advisory Teacher	32.5	42,800
Outreach / EOTAS* worker	37	38,600
*Education Otherwise than at school		130,200

Please note that the above costings do not include additional resource or administrative support or any costs associated with the line management / supervision of the above posts.

- 5.3 The government have stated that:
- the Local Authority will be responsible for setting a local schools funding formula for 2021/22.
 - that later this year they will be putting forward plans to move to a “hard” national funding formula in the future, which will determine school funding allocations directly, rather than local funding formula.

Ultimately this means that when this becomes effective there would be a need to invoice schools for those services provided by the LA via the De-delegated and education functions budgets. The government may in the future change the funding rate and what it covers.

- 5.4 Education Directorate funding at present is based on several funding streams including:

1. De-delegated budget / Delegated schools grants
2. Education Functions budget
3. Central School Services budget
4. Penalty Notice Income - suspended post March 2020

As there is no dedicated budget, the future funding for Elective Home Education presents a degree of uncertainty and questions remain about the sustainability of existing and future EHE services. This is most concerning given the statutory need to ensure that all children in Sandwell receive "efficient full-time education appropriate to their age, aptitude and special educational needs".

- 5.5 The Working Group agreed at the last meeting to extend the timelines for the review to June 2020 for the following reasons:
- To add a focus group with teachers and headteachers from primary, secondary and special schools, including PRU teachers, to hear evidence from a school perspective.
 - To monitor trends, increase/ return to school rates, into 2021.
 - To observe the progress of the Education Select Committee Inquiry- Home Education, to include the response of DfE re – resources and regulations for EHE.
- 5.6 The Working Group highlighted that social workers have access to homes that the Local Authority would not when dealing with children who are not on a school roll. The Working Group has invited the Group Head Front Door SCT to attend meetings to strengthen collaborative working and raise awareness of home education and safeguarding.

6 Next steps

- 6.1 From the evidence gathered to date the Working Group has identified that Sandwell EHE support is strong and that parents value the commitment and passion of the advisory teachers, there are several matters for further investigation which the Council could consider:
- Spaces where HE groups can meet to educate and socialise in their HE communities. These would be safe spaces where children sign in and could include facilities for class space with IT, exam space, sport hall/field for events, swimming bath booking, seasonal concert;
 - A Home Education resource hub available to parents/ children to donate and access books, DVD, arts/craft and other educational materials;
 - A social network for EHE children, perhaps link to Just Youth – what's on for young people in Sandwell via the youth service;
 - Negotiating competitive rates for HE groups;
 - Closer working with SCT on the Front Door to safeguard children;
 - Investigate process for assessments for EHE children in relation to SEN/ EHCP;
 - To monitor progress of the Education Select Committee Inquiry - Home Education.

6.2 The Working Group scheduled meetings:

- 27 January 2021: Focus Group with Teachers/Head teachers;
- 12 February 2021: Evidence gathering/ findings table;
- 15 March Children's Services and Education Board – update;

Other meetings to be scheduled as necessary to consider the recommendations and draft report.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 The working group have conducted two surveys to consult with Parents and children who are educated at home.

8 Alternative Options

- 8.1 The purpose of the review is to consider current support for Elective Home Education and if it meets the needs of young people and parents, findings will inform if the Council should consider alternative options.

9 Implications

Resources:	There is no dedicated budget for EHE. There continues to be increasing demands on the EHE service due to increasing numbers of children being educated at home.
Legal and Governance:	There is a statutory requirement to ensure that all children in Sandwell receive efficient full-time education appropriate to their age, aptitude and special educational needs.
Risk:	Scrutiny will consider risk implications, including any safeguarding measures
Equality:	Scrutiny will consider implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty
Health and Wellbeing:	Good education and attainment levels increase the wellbeing of children and young people and contributes to them having the best possible start in life.

10 Appendices

Appendix 1 - summary analysis of the ADCS Elective Home Education Survey 2020

11. Background Papers

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board [20 July 2020](#)

Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board [16 November 2020](#)



Elective Home Education Survey 2020

November 2020

Executive summary

Since 2016, ADCS has undertaken an annual elective home education (EHE) survey to capture the number and characteristics of children and young people who are known to be home educated. The survey also aims to understand the reasons behind a family's decision to electively home educate, how LAs across the country are supporting these families, and how any available resources are being deployed in this area. This year's survey also included a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic and how this has impacted upon the number of children and young people electively home educated.

133 LAs responded to the 2020 survey, our highest ever response rate. Based on the data received, we estimate that a total of **75,668** children and young people were being electively home educated on the first school census day, 1 October 2020. This is **an increase of 38%** from the same school census day in 2019 (3 October). Of this number, we estimate that approximately 25% became EHE after 1 September 2020. Further, during the 2019/20 academic year, we estimate that the total cumulative number of children and young people being home educated was **86,335**. This represents **a 10% increase** since the 2018/19 academic year, despite schools being closed to the majority of pupils from 23 March 2020.

Feedback from responding LAs clearly indicated that health concerns over Covid-19 was a primary reason for parents or carers choosing to formally home educate their child this year. However, some parents or carers noted that their positive experience of educating their child at home during the partial school closures was a contributory factor.

Clearly Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the number of children and young people who are EHE. A number of LAs noted in their survey responses that many families intend on enrolling their child/ren back in school once their concerns over the virus are alleviated. However, prior to the pandemic, the EHE population was growing by approximately 20% each year for the past five years as previous ADCS EHE surveys have shown. Further, LAs have consistently highlighted the fact that they cannot be certain of the true size of this cohort given that there is no statutory register of EHE children and young people.

LAs have a duty to establish whether a suitable education is being provided but do not have a role in assurance of this. Survey responses show that LAs remain extremely concerned that they cannot know all children and young people who are EHE in their local area. Every child has the right to a high-quality education in a safe learning environment and ADCS is concerned that without powers to see both the child and their place of learning, we cannot know that these children are safe from harm or exploitation. LAs can only safeguard children who are known to them and without a mandatory register, there is no way of knowing the full extent of this cohort. ADCS awaits the outcome of the Department for Education's *Children not in school* consultation which proposed duties on LAs to maintain a register of children who are electively home educated and to provide support to parents who educate their children at home. While a voluntary register can only ever be partially effective, LAs have generally welcomed the proposed new duties in the absence of any indication that government has an appetite for a national mandatory register. However, ADCS is clear that the government must fully fund these duties, especially when the size of the elective home education cohort is increasing year-on-year.

Summary Analysis of the ADCS Elective Home Education Survey 2020

Key findings

- On school census day, 1 October 2020, a total of 66,648 children and young people were known to be electively home educated (EHE) across 133 responding LAs. It is therefore estimated that **75,668** children and young people were being EHE across all 151 LAs in England. This represents an increase of approximately **38%** from the same school census day in 2019 (3 October)
- 16,926 children and young people have become EHE since 1 September 2020. It is therefore estimated that **19,510** children and young people have become EHE since 1 September 2020. This represents **25%** of the total estimated number being home educated on school census day, 1st October 2020
- During the whole of the last academic year (2019/20) 73,757 were known to be EHE. Therefore, an estimated cumulative total of **86,335** children and young people were being home educated across all 151 LAs during the previous academic year. This represents an increase of **10%** from the 2018/19 academic year
- The most common reason cited by parents for home educating their child/ren was due to health reasons directly related to Covid-19
- Approximately **9%** of children and young people being home educated are known to children's social care, both historical and/or current. **14%** are known to wider children's services, both historic and/or current.

1. Background

Since 2016, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) has issued a survey to all 151 local authorities (LAs) in England on elective home education (EHE). The aim of the survey is to capture the number and characteristics of children and young people who are known to be home educated, the reasons behind a family's decision to home educate, to understand how LAs across the country are supporting these families, and how available resources are being deployed in this service area. The number of children and young people who are home educated is not currently captured via a statutory national data return.

This year's survey also aimed to capture the impact of Covid-19 on the number of children and young people being home educated. Anecdotally, it has been suggested that the number of families choosing to home educate their child/ren has increased dramatically and this has therefore stretched the capacity of LA children's services teams that work with EHE families. To reduce the burden on these teams, the 2020 EHE survey was shorter and focused on the numbers being home educated and the ways in which the pandemic has impacted this.

2. Understanding the cohort

2.1 Total number of children known to be home educated on Thursday 1 October 2020

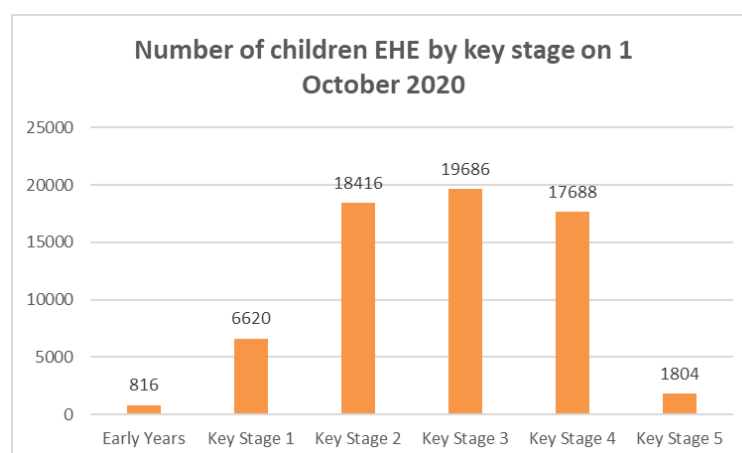
Across the 133 responding LAs, a total of 66,648 children and young people were known to be home educated on 1 October 2020, the first school census day of the 2020/21 academic year. It can therefore be estimated that there were 75,668 children and young people being home educated across all 151 LAs in England on this date. This represents a significant increase of 38% from School Census day on 3 October 2019. The largest reported cohort in a single LA was 3,167 young people

while the lowest number reported by an LA was four. The mean average across all 133 LAs was 501, a 33% increase on the average reported in 2019.

This year, LAs were asked to provide the number of formal requests for elective home education that had been made since 1 September 2020. 131 LAs responded to this question and provided a combined figure of 16,926. It can therefore be estimated that, since 1 September 2020, 19,510 formal requests were made for elective home education across all LAs, this represents approximately 25% of the total number of children and young people being home educated on school census day, 1 October 2020.

Feedback from survey respondents clearly showed the impact of Covid-19 and the partial closure of schools. When schools were partially closed during the first national lockdown in March, the number of formal requests made to home educate was significantly lower. Indeed, across responding LAs, only 5,678 children and young people began to be electively home educated from the period of 23 March to 31 August 2020 (an estimated national figure of 6,646). During this period, the majority of school children were being educated at home whilst remaining on a school roll and receiving support and learning materials from their school. However, since schools fully re-opened in September the EHE population has risen significantly as demonstrated by the numbers reported in the survey and comments provided by LAs:

LAs were asked to provide a breakdown of their EHE cohort on school census day by key stage. 131 LAs responded to this question and the findings from this year largely reflect that of previous years. The largest increase in the number of EHE children and young people from 2019 was in Key Stage 2 (6,427) followed by Key Stage 3 (4,750). However, the largest percentage increase since 2019 was in the early years (85%).



“The majority of new EHE applications relate directly to Covid, however, not all through fear or anxieties around returning. For some, the experience of lockdown was a positive one and, with more families working from home, they wish to continue educating their children.”

“We were expecting more students to go EHE between March and August however due to Covid-19 and the national lockdown students stayed on school rolls.”

“We have seen an increase across both primary and secondary schools, with more young people who are eligible for free school meals and with previous social care involvement at some time in their life and more recently from BAME communities. Since September we are seeing more family groups becoming EHE, rather than individuals.”

2.2 Relative size of the cohort

To gauge the relative size of the EHE cohort, LAs were asked to compare this to the wider school age population. 128 LAs responded to this question and a majority (80) reported that between 0.5% - 1.0% of their school aged population was being home educated on 1 October 2020. 26 LAs said that

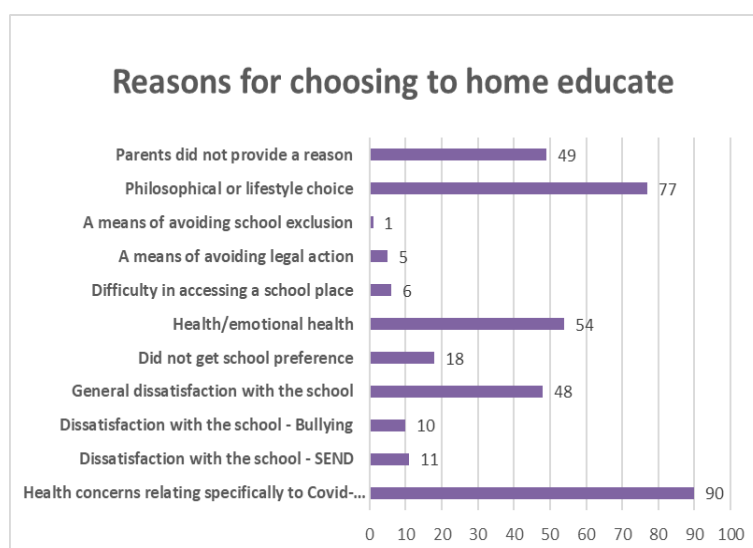
the proportion was between 1.1% - 1.5% and 15 LAs said that the proportion of their school aged population being home educated was less than 0.5%. Only two LAs reported this to be more than 4%.

2.3 The cumulative total of home educated children and young people in 2019/20

As with previous surveys, LAs were again asked to provide the cumulative total of children and young people known to be home educated at any point during the 2019/20 academic year. 129 LAs responded to this question reporting a combined total of 73,757. It is therefore estimated that 86,335 children and young people were being electively home educated nationally at some point during the 2019/20 academic year; an increase of 10% since the previous academic year. This increase is made more notable by the fact that schools were closed to a majority of pupils for much of the 2019/20 academic year when families were able to keep their children at home without formally removing them from the school roll.

2.4 Most common reasons given for choosing to home educate

LAs were asked to select the top three reasons provided by parents or carers locally for choosing to home educate their children. 130 LAs responded to this question and “health concerns relating specifically to Covid-19” was the most common reason, being cited 90 times. “Philosophical or lifestyle choice” was cited 77 times and “health/emotional health” was the third most common reason provided by parents or carers, cited 54 times.



Respondents generally noted that the number of EHE referrals dropped from March to August 2020 despite a general increase prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. When schools fully re-opened in September, the number rose dramatically. LAs attributed this to the concerns of parents over the health of their child/ren associated with Covid-19, however, the positive experience that parents had during the partial closure of schools was also cited, albeit less frequently. Further, in many instances families chose to home educate their child/ren with the intention of this being a short-term measure until the threat of the virus has receded. Consequently, in these instances, the decision to home educate is made much more quickly with less discussion with the school prior to removing the child or young person from the school roll.

“Parents are anxious about the health and safety of their children at school and opting to home educate to avoid challenge over non-attendance. Parents routinely state that their children would be in school if it were not for Covid-19 and that they plan for their children to return ‘when it’s all over’.”

“During the partial school closures a lot of contacts were received from parents enquiring about the EHE support available from the LA with curriculum and learning materials. Parents did not fully

understand the difference between remote learning (during partial school closure) and elective home education and acquired misplaced confidence.”

“The disruption that children, parents and schools experience when they have to send a ‘bubble’ home has led to frustration with some parents not willing to continue and submitting formal de-registrations to take responsibility of their child’s education at home. LAs do not receive any government funding to support with home education and the LA now has the equivalent of a full primary school being home educated.”

“The increase that we have noted indicates that parents are not removing one of their children from a school roll to home educate them (as would have previously been the case) but are in fact removing all of their children from their respective school rolls due to their anxieties relating to the pandemic.”

2.5 Type of schools

This year, LAs were asked whether any specific types of schools have seen a noticeable increase or reduction in the number of their pupils becoming home educated. Most commonly, responding LAs noted the largest increase amongst children of primary school age becoming EHE. Most respondents found there was little difference between maintained, academy schools or independent. School governance was only mentioned on three occasions where the LA had concerns over one or more academies suspected of off-rolling.

“Prior to Covid-19, the biggest rise in children being removed from school to be home educated was from years 9-11 and often related to behaviour, attendance, with the highest numbers leaving relating to schools [with an Ofsted judgement of] ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’. This academic year has seen children of all ages from all types of school (selective, mainstream, faith), leaving school due to concerns over Covid, as well as the usual numbers for the start of term that relate solely to year 7 school offers.”

3. Safeguarding, welfare and special educational needs

3.1 Special educational needs

As in the 2019 and 2018 surveys, LAs were asked for the percentage of children and young people who are home educated and have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) on 1 October 2020. 131 LAs provided a response to this question with 104 saying that less than 5% of their EHE cohort has an EHCP. However, 26 LAs reported that between 6% and 10% of their EHE cohort has an EHCP. These figures largely reflect responses from last year’s survey. Within the feedback provided by LAs, very few noted an increase in children and young people from special schools or with an EHCP being home educated. However, a small number of LAs noted that some families chose to home educate their child with an EHCP while they wait for a placement at a special school.

3.2 Size of the electively home educated cohort known to children’s social care and/or wider children’s services.

LAs were asked to provide the percentage of their EHE cohort that is known to children’s social care, both historical and/or current. 126 LAs responded with a mean average of 9% known to children’s social care representing a 4% decrease from 2019. However, some LAs said that they do not have historical data meaning that this figure could be higher. Responses ranged from 0% - 44%.

99 LAs provided the percentage of those being home educated that are known to wider children's services, both historical and/or current. On average 14% are known to wider children's services, again representing a 4% decrease from 2019. Responses ranged from 0% - 70%.

The biggest concern amongst responding LAs was the welfare of those children and young people whom they had not been in contact with, either because the parent or carer refused contact or because the LA lacked the capacity due to the significant increase in the number of electively home educated children and young people. However, LAs have prioritised contacting those who are known to children's social care or where the school has raised concerns.

3.3 Children missing education

LAs were also asked whether they record EHE children and young people who move out of area as children missing education (CME). Of the 128 LAs who responded, 85 (66%) said that they did and 37 (29%) LAs said that they did not. The remaining six responding LAs were unsure. This marks a noticeable increase of 27 LAs recording these children and young people as CME since the 2019 survey.

3.4 Use of unregistered/illegal schools

LAs were asked if they were aware of any unregistered or illegal schools operating in their area. Of the responding 129 LAs, 16 were aware of such settings:

"Many tuition centres do not offer art, music, PE or even have an outdoor area for children to take a break in or take physical exercise. They know the law around home education and are adept at briefing parents in what to say to LAs, for example "parents are offering the remaining curriculum at home." Our concern with Covid-19 restrictions more recently has been with regard to many tutoring services and centres moving their services online and we would welcome the publication of the voluntary accreditation scheme for online schools which would further support parents to identify suitable provision."

This year, LAs were also asked to provide comments on any concerns they may have over individuals or companies offering private tuition to **all** children in their area, particularly in light of the partial closure of schools in March 2020. Many LAs explained that parents are informed of the importance of safeguarding checks if they choose to use a private tutor e.g. DBS or using recommended tutors. However, the majority of respondents expressed serious concern around the lack of regulation or oversight of private tutors or companies providing education who are often unknown to the LA. Where families choose to educate their child at a tuition centre, LAs continue to raise concerns as these are not currently regulated in the same way as full-time education settings. Children are therefore put at risk of safeguarding issues such as radicalisation, online threats or abuse and neglect:

"In light of EHE growth, tuition agencies and individual tutors may well promote their services in this area and it is concerning that there is no central responsibility for monitoring the credentials of these tutors. A register of all self-employed tutors and tuition agencies who offer tuition services to any family would provide some assurance. They should be required to provide evidence of qualifications, references and confirmation of the necessary DBS checks."

"There have always been concerns about private tutoring and this is purely a parental choice. The concerns are no different in the current situation, except that some parents have discussed EHE believing that the remote learning support offered by schools, celebrities and others during school closures will continue to be available to EHE families."

“There appears to be no or little accountability for such companies and private tutors, this raises concerns around the appropriateness of the work they provide and quality.”

4. Support for electively home educated children and their families

4.1 Offer of support

Findings from previous ADCS surveys suggest that the vast majority of LAs request home visits with EHE families or a meeting at a neutral venue. This is not always due to the LA having specific concerns around safeguarding or unsuitable provision, but as an initial contact to all known EHE families. This will often include an offer of support from the LA.

This year, LAs were asked whether this offer of support had changed due to the pandemic. The vast majority of responding LAs noted that it had changed, although to varying degrees. Understandably, where home visits already took place, these were replaced with virtual visits with the family where possible. This year, many LAs reported having to reset parental expectations around support they would receive with EHE. Some families had assumed that the amount of support received during partial school closures would continue into elective home education, however, this is not the case:

“[The] service was stretched before the pandemic and the huge increase in numbers since means our support is very thinly spread, we have had to draft in additional members of staff to support with processing referrals and updated our website to signpost parents to the EHE guide for parents rather than take individual calls.”

“We now produce a newsletter to support families who are home educating which includes information on local and national resources and references the local Covid situation. We have seen more parents receptive to offers of support, however this cannot be sustained without increased resource.”

“It’s been of the utmost importance that parents are fully au fait with what elective home education is, as opposed to what occurred during the partial school closures. We must ensure that families are aware that there is no support from schools, either academically or pastorally, and that they are taking on the duty of care to ensure their child’s educational, social, emotional and mental health needs are all being met when they opt to home educate.”

4.2 Difficulty receiving qualifications

To understand better the impact of Covid, LAs were asked to provide feedback on how the cancellations of exams (and move to teacher assessed grades) in 2020 impacted on electively home educated children receiving qualifications. The majority of responding LAs did not collect data on how many EHE children or young people had experienced difficulty in receiving a qualification, however, written feedback suggested that this was generally the case. In normal times, FE colleges will often provide support in their area for EHE Key Stage 4 learners to sit exams and LAs reported that in many areas this has continued. Nevertheless, LAs are already expressing concern over arrangements for 2021 exams:

“EHE children struggled as they did not have teacher assessments to fall back on.”

“Unfortunately, there were several students who were entered to sit external examinations at private centres and who did not have a qualified teacher/tutor to submit evidentiary support on their behalf. Therefore, they were unable to receive a grade for the summer series and have had to defer to the autumn series.”

“We recognise that regardless of the pandemic it is becoming more difficult for EHE pupils to access exams as an external candidate. We would welcome some guidance from the DfE should [teacher] assessment be required in Summer 2021 so we can support families to achieve their goals.”

4.3 Resources

As in previous years, LAs were asked to provide their budget for supporting the coordination of EHE for the 2019/20 academic year. 93 LAs responded to this question reporting an overall average annual budget of £34,000 where a dedicated budget is allocated. This is a significant decrease of £30,000 from 2019. However, there was significant variation in annual budgets allocated and a number of LAs reported that they either did not have a dedicated budget or could not specify the budget allocation, possibly because these services operated in a wider context.

LAs were also asked to provide their actual spend on EHE for which 105 LAs were able to provide information. The overall average spend for the 2019/20 academic year was £35,000. However, 90 LAs were able to provide a figure for both annual budget and actual spend. 18% reported an overspend in their EHE budget and 15% reported an underspend, with the remaining 67% reporting no difference in spend.

4.4 Number of relevant full-time equivalent (FTE) staff

126 LAs provided an answer to this question and reported an overall average of 2.3 FTE members of staff per LA to co-ordinate and monitor EHE provision, an increase of 0.5 FTE from 2019. Many LAs employ staff in this area who also have wider responsibilities within the LA outside of EHE. Further, due to demand pressures put on EHE teams this year, some LAs have drawn in more members of staff to help with the increased number of EHE referrals being received.

5. Additional comments

LAs were invited to provide any additional comments on the national policy context or any specific trends in their locality. Comments touched on the strain LAs are under in trying to contact all families who elect to home educate. Where capacity allows, some LAs have worked with families, offering multi-agency support where required, in order to keep children on roll. . Most commonly, respondents were clear that without a register or a means of seeing the child in their learning environment, LAs cannot be satisfied that the child or young person is being educated in a safe or appropriate environment:

“We would welcome: mandatory registration; a duty on all parents to notify the LA formally of their decision to home educate; increased statutory responsibilities placed on parents/carers with respect to a framework for EHE; a duty placed on parents to make themselves and their child available to meet with an LA officer on a routine basis (minimum annually).”

“When compared with the raft of safeguarding duties placed on schools in respect of their pursuit of non-attending pupils, the ‘light touch’ powers of LAs in relation to EHE children are derisory.”

“Currently, EHE legislation allows for parents to remove their children from school rolls without any meaningful opportunity first to unpick motivation or understanding of how children will receive a suitable and sufficient education from home. A mandatory ‘cooling off’ period would be helpful moving forward and during Covid-19.”

“During the pandemic, there are parents who would like their child to remain on the school roll but for them to access remote learning from home set by the school. This is because they would like their

child to go back to their school once they feel it is safer for them to do so and don't want to lose their space by electing to home educate. If there were an attendance code that allowed for this, schools might be more willing to consider this as an option. This could keep children on roll and reduce EHE numbers in the current climate."

"The trends have seen a significant increase in new EHE cases due to Covid concerns which is having an unrealistic impact on resources to support families new to EHE and to assess the quality and appropriateness of the education provision they are putting in place. There is an increase in vulnerable families moving to EHE which is of local and national concern."

"There needs to be future planning from the Department for Education and other national bodies on what we are going to do post pandemic when parents will be requesting their child's school place back and this is no longer available. We are absolutely going to face an admissions crisis over the next year which will in turn cause further difficulties within EHE, CME and attendance."

"We note that local authorities do not receive funding through DSG for work with EHE children. We estimate that had the 298 current EHE children in the local area been in school, they would draw down annual funding in the region of £2.16 million."

"We offer families a meeting with school, EHE Officer and Education Welfare Officer when parents indicate they are wanting to EHE to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and to try to resolve any issues in school which may be the cause of this decision. If parents deregister their child and decide it is not working within 12 weeks the child goes back on roll at the school they left."

"Prior to Covid, home education requests continued to rise (as has been the trend over the past few years), and cases once again were becoming increasingly more complex, with greater social care, SEND and multiagency involvement. Collaborative work between EHE and CME has been imperative, allowing for greater challenge when dealing with inappropriate home education, as well as liaising with social care and health when children may not have been seen by a professional and there is a safeguarding concern."

Appendix 1 – EHE cohort summary per region

A summary breakdown of key figures for each of the nine regions. Some LAs submitted their response anonymously and are thus not included in the below breakdown.

Region: North East (10 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	2,044	204.4
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	613	61.3
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	92	9.2
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	2,171	217.1
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historical and/or current)	N/A	6.7%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historical and/or current)	N/A	8.2%

Region: North West (18 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	6,661	370
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	1,790	99.4
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	459	25.5
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	7,506	417
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historical and/or current)	N/A	13.9%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historical and/or current)	N/A	18.6%

Region: Yorkshire & Humber (14 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	6,323	452
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	1,751	125
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	430	33
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	7,517	537
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historical and/or current)	N/A	6.9%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historical and/or current)	N/A	12%

Region: East Midlands (8 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	6,442	805
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	1,606	200
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	611	76
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	7,194	899
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historical and/or current)	N/A	10.1%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historical and/or current)	N/A	16.7%

Region: West Midlands (11 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	5,650	514
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	1,507	396
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	396	36
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	6,449	586
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historical and/or current)	N/A	11.4%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historical and/or current)	N/A	18.5%

Region: Eastern (11 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	10,599	964
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	2,401	218
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	831	76
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	12,091	1,099
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historical and/or current)	N/A	4.7%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historical and/or current)	N/A	13.7%

Region: South West (9 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	6,674	742
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	1,268	141
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	641	71
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	8,056	895
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historic and/or current)	N/A	2.3%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historic and/or current)	N/A	5.4%

Region: South East (14 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	11,521	822
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	2,743	196
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	1,205	86
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	14,104	1,084
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historic and/or current)	N/A	5.2%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historic and/or current)	N/A	15.8%

Region: Greater London (29 responding LAs)	Total	Regional average per responding LA
Number of EHE on 1 October 2020	7,231	258
Number of EHE since 1 September 2020	2,311	83
Number of EHE from 23 March to 31 August	878	31.3
Cumulative total across 2019/20 academic year	7,831	280
Percentage of EHE population known to children's social care (historic and/or current)	N/A	12.5%
Percentage of EHE population known to wider children's services (historic and/or current)	N/A	15.4%

Appendix 2 – survey questions

Data

1. On 1 October 2020, how many children and young people were you aware of being electively home educated in your local area?
2. As of 1 October 2020, what percentage of your school aged population are electively home educated?

Less than 0.5%
0.5% - 1.0%,
1.1% - 1.5%
1.6% - 2.0%
2.1% - 2.5%
2.6% - 3.0%
3.1% - 3.5%
3.6% - 4.0%
More than 4%
3. How many children were electively home educated by Key Stage, as captured on 1 October 2020?

Early Years
Key Stage 1
Key Stage 2
Key Stage 3
Key stage 4
Key Stage 5
4. How many formal requests for elective home education have been made since 1 September 2020?
5. How many formal requests for elective home education were made between 23 March 2020 and 31 August 2020?
6. During 2019/20, how many local children were known to be electively home educated at any point across the academic year (the cumulative total)?
7. Please provide any further comments

Cohort

8. What are the top 3 reasons given by parents/carers for choosing to electively home educate, as captured on 1 October 2020?

Health concerns relating specifically to Covid-19

Health/emotional health

Dissatisfaction with the school - SEND

Dissatisfaction with the school - Bullying

General dissatisfaction with the school

Did not get school preference

Difficulty in accessing a school place

A means of avoiding legal action

A means of avoiding school exclusion

Philosophical or lifestyle choice

Parents did not provide a reason

9. What percentage of the total number of children who are electively home educated have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) as captured on 1 October 2020?

0-5%

6-10%

11-15%

16-20%

21-25%

More than 25%

10. Please provide comments on the impact that the pandemic and resulting partial school closures has had on requests for families to electively home educate.

11. If you have any further comments on the type of schools that have seen a noticeable increase or reduction in the number of children becoming home educated, please do so here. (Comment)

Support for EHE families

12. Has your offer of support for children and families who are electively home educating changed as a result of the pandemic? How?

13. How many electively home educating children are known to have had difficulties in receiving qualifications following the cancellation of exams in 2020 due to them being unable to receive an assessment?

14. Please leave a comment in relation to question 13

Vulnerable children

15. Do you routinely record children who are electively home educated and move elsewhere with their families as missing education (CME)?

16. What percentage of your total elective home educating cohort are known to children's social care e.g. are a child in need or have a care plan (historic and/or current)? Please omit the % sign from your answer.

17. Beyond children's social care, what percentage of electively home educating children are known to wider children's services e.g. early help (historic and/or current)? Please omit the % sign from your answer.
18. Are you aware of children who are electively home educated in your area attending unregistered or illegal schools? If 'yes', please leave a comment.
- Yes
- No
19. Do you have any concerns over individuals or companies offering private tutoring to all children in your local area, particularly in light of the partial closure of schools? Please leave a comment

Arrangement of local services

20. What was the budget/actual spend on co-ordinating and/or providing home education support services in your authority in the last full academic year (2019/20)?
- Budget:
- Total spend:
21. How many FTE staff work in this area, co-ordinating and/or supporting home educating families?
22. Please use this space to leave any additional comments you have on the national policy context or specific issues and trends in your locality, particularly in relation to the impact of Covid-19 on this area of work. Please also use this space to share details of local policies or practices you think might be of interest to others.

The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS)

ADCS is the national leadership association in England for statutory directors of children's services and their senior management teams



info@adcs.org.uk



0161 826 9484



The Association of Directors
of Children's Services Ltd
Piccadilly House
49 Piccadilly
Manchester
M1 2AP

www.adcs.org.uk