

A (Very) short report on a Local Government
Association conference on home education and
radicalisation outside of school provision 14th June 2018



This one day meeting included about 60 or so representatives of various local authorities, representatives from OFSTED, The Campaign for Real Education, and several members of the home education community. Amber and myself were asked to deliver short talks and to sit on a panel for a Q&A session.

This report is not a blow by blow account, I didn't keep detailed records and it was quite fast moving. Many of the best, most interesting exchanges came not as part of the formal conference, but in a series of informal encounters during the breaks. In fact, I was so busy talking to people I had no meaningful break all day, LA reps were very keen to engage home educators to discuss the quite complex issues we raised.

It was always going to be a difficult meeting from the perspective of being a home educator delivering two talks to a room full of LA representatives, and I hardly expected them to broadly agree with what I had to say. The basic thrust of my talks were that parental rights were essential to children's rights and should not be diminished and that the reason that the relationship between home educators and local authorities is so poor is principally down to a lack of trust based, at the least, on the perception of an anti-home education prejudice in at least some LA's. As part of this discussion both myself and Amber repeatedly stated our opposition to monitoring.

OFSTED's representative, who also delivered a talk, was extremely keen on pointing out that they were in no way targeting home educators, in fact they were not remotely interested in home education at this time. HE is not part of their remit. Their concern appeared to be entirely to do with concerns about welfare and radicalisation in unregistered schools. Though he did point out that there was an interface with home education due to the parents sending their children to these 'schools' often claimed to be home educating.

Local authority reps discussed research they had undertaken on the home educators they were aware of. Some of this indicated that significant numbers of families were already known by their local SS departments as being very vulnerable families. I didn't get to see this research in detail, but it goes counter to research we have previously been aware of. However, I'm hoping to get the chance to see this in the future and will make it more widely available when I do. Central to their argument is the perception they have that there has been a relatively recent change in the profile of families beginning to home educate, perhaps in the last 3 to 5 years. They believe this to be widespread.

Several LA's talked about how aware they were that schools were encouraging the deregistration of children whose families were not performing well or were in some way challenging. While LA's have been aware of 'forced' deregistration for some years, I think they are now more aware of how widespread this is. I heard of no plans however to deal with that. I did suggest that our support structures may be able to contribute to identifying where this was happening.

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From the floor, other home educators raised the issue of the treatment of children with SENDs. Particularly how difficult it was to access the services they needed, to get schools to interact so that children's lives in school is enhanced rather than intolerable. We also discussed the problem of delays in assessments resulting in many children's needs not being recognised. As this can have legal implications if the child, for example, finds school so intolerable that s/he can't go. LA's should, at the very least, act with caution when threatening fines for parents for truancy and such families should rather be offered support than legal sanction.

Towards the end of the day I got several impressions. At least some few representatives took on board the need not to damage parental rights. Many LA's insisted that their policies were favourable to home education and that they were sensitive to their needs, some detailing the efforts they were taking to be supportive. Nearly all of them stated a desire to improve their relationships with their local community of home educating families. My advice was to open conversations with their local groups. Develop quality links and begin discussions. I impressed upon them the importance that initial contacts and basic offers of support to groups that made no attempt to identify families, since those families they most needed to contact will not take part if they fear it's a rouse to locate them. Instead, before a deeper relationship can even be considered, the LA must show itself to be one that can be trusted. I offered to pass on offers to any people local to them that I had.

I also offered possible assistance in identifying unregistered schools. I have never seen it as being in the interest of the home education community for us to shelter such institutions. This may form a part of the ongoing conversation.

There has also been some discussion within the HE community around why is there no forum where LA reps can talk directly with home educators. Such a group would need careful consideration for everyone's safety and care. I mentioned this during the meeting and it was thought that it would be an interesting topic of further consideration.

I certainly left with the feeling that this meeting was the beginning of a conversation. As far as I'm aware we've not had much previous contact with the LGA. They seemed to see this meeting as useful and productive. I got the impression that they understood there was a steep learning curve. All sides of this debate need to understand the thoughts of the other, otherwise we'll be continuously locked in the state of conflict we've been locked into since the 1960s.