

Overview of the ADCS Survey on Elective Home Education – May 2016

The Association's Educational Achievement Policy Committee has revisited the topic of elective home education (EHE) several times over the last 12 – 18 months. The Department for Education (DfE) does not collect data in this area and no clear picture of this cohort of learners exists nationally. A small working group from the committee looked at this subject in greater detail and devised a survey to provide a 'state of the nation' snapshot of the EHE landscape.

In January 2016 ADCS issued this survey to all members in LAs. It was timed to coincide with the completion of the annual School Census on Thursday 21 January 2016. A series of 30 questions were asked of all 152 top-tier authorities in England and a total of 73 valid responses were received from LAs across all nine regions comprising of a considerable mix of unitary, county and London boroughs.

The questions were designed to provide an overview of the make-up and characteristics of this cohort of learners, to understand how authorities across the country are supporting home learners and gauge how resources are being deployed in this area.

1. Cohort characteristics

1.1. How many children in total are electively home educated in your LA?

All 73 respondents answered this question. A Northern unitary had the smallest EHE population of 17 while a large rural county in the South had the largest population of 943 known EHE learners. Several LAs specifically noted that their total figures included learners both above and below the statutory school age. In total the 73 LAs reported a recorded EHE population of 18,042. From this figure it could be inferred that there is somewhere in the region of 37,500 children and young people in England being home educated at this time.

"The rapid growing numbers of EHE is a huge concern to us. The number has grown by about 80% in four years."

"We are currently experiencing a growth in numbers, with an increase week on week. This is our highest ever number of EHE."

1.2. Breakdown of learners by key stage and gender as captured on school census day 2016

There was some variance in the recording of this information. 63 authorities were able to provide this information in the format requested. A total of 15,780 EHE learners were known to these 63 LAs. For both males and females there is a significant jump in numbers from KS1 to KS2, then numbers seem to remain fairly steady. There is a slight gender imbalance, 53% of home learners were male while 47% were female. A number of LAs noted that their Key Stage 4 and 5 numbers are expanding rapidly.

Male KS1	Male KS2	Male KS3	Male KS4	Female KS1	Female KS2	Female KS3	Female KS4
1064	2423	2538	2153	849	2093	2292	2226

All Key Stage 1	All Key Stage 2	All Key Stage 3	All Key Stage 4
1913	4516	4830	4379

Please note the above numbers do not add up to 15,780. This is because a small number of LAs expressly highlighted that they knew of some early years / reception age pupils as well as older learners, too. Others reported that the exact age of a small number of EHE learners in their area remains unknown.

“A significant number of our students continue to be year 11, currently 18% of the total EHE population. Significant numbers of these become EHE at the end of year 10 and into year 11. This is a concern to us in terms of challenges for EHE parents to arrange exams, limitations of post 16 access to college with no qualifications and high risk of becoming NEET.”

1.3. Any additional information about the characteristics of this cohort e.g. ethnicity?

50 separate responses were received to this question and the level of detail provided by LAs varied greatly. Some authorities reported they do not record this information while others provided a very comprehensive breakdown of the local cohort by the main categories of ethnicity. Overall White British (WBRI) was the most common group recorded, Gypsy Roma Travellers (GRT) and White Irish Travellers (WIRT) were also frequently mentioned though numbers are proportionally much lower than WBRI. It is worth noting that all responding authorities disclosed that a proportion of parents had chosen not to share ethnicity information with them - a large rural authority in the South noted that this was the case for over 50% of EHE learners known to them, for example.

A unitary LA in the North West noted that around a third of its EHE population was of GRT heritage while a unitary in the South noted that 23% of its EHE population was GRT.

1.4. Most common reason(s) given by parents / carers for choosing to home educate, as captured on school census day

69 respondents answered this question. From the list of six options provided, philosophical or lifestyle reasons was cited by 15 LAs, 10 LAs reported the most common reason was ‘unknown,’ as parents had chosen not to share this information with them. 35 respondents (or 50% of responding LAs) selected ‘other’ and provided additional information.

Many authorities reported that parents feel they can meet their child’s educational needs better at home, a general dissatisfaction with the school system was also noted, at times this related to bullying or SEND but this was not always the case. Anxiety, school phobia, emotional or behavioural difficulties and the use of EHE as a short term intervention were all mentioned multiple times by multiple LAs.

Several LAs reported knowing that children in their area were being educated at home to avoid exclusion or non-attendance penalties, several LAs also reported children were being educated at home whilst waiting for a place at their preferred school.

Home educators from traveller communities most commonly state cultural reasons for choosing to home educate.

"The numbers of EHE pupils is increasing yearly. This year since September 2015 there have been 39 new families to EHE within the authority. The LA has also assisted some EHE families to gain school places where requested and there have been instances of young people moving to EHE from schools for reasons such as school place not available and will EHE until a place within a chosen school is available. This causes pressure on the service that is not necessary and takes away a vital resource dealing with families who have chosen EHE appropriately."

"Increasingly, there are unresolved issues usually related to dissatisfaction with the school and academy response to children's anxiety levels, poor self-esteem or behavioural concerns."

"Variety of predominant reasons. Mainly risk of permanent exclusion, bullying, parental choice, dissatisfaction with school system. Also used as respite for medical illness and to avoid attendance prosecution."

"This data is not recorded as there is no national list of reasons for EHE to measure against. A family may cite bullying as a reason, but LA Officers have no way to validate if the parental perception of bullying matches the definition of bullying. As EHE generally requires a letter from parents to withdraw a child from school, the only reason that LA Officers can evidence is 'Parental Choice'. The range of reasons for EHE is wider than the options suggested in the drop-down list here. Examples include: a family may be about to move area in October; a family dissatisfied with the academies agenda, or family believing that summer-born children are too young for education."

1.5. Percentage of EHE learners with a statement of SEN or an EHC plan on school census day?

71 respondents answered this question. Three LAs (or 4%) said none of their EHE learners had a statement of need, 64 LAs (or 90% of respondents) said up to 10% of EHE learners had a statement of need and four LAs (or 6%) said 11 – 20% of their total EHE population had a statement of need.

"There are an increasing number of KS4 students becoming home educated - close to 50 students since September 2015 - the highest recorded to date. There has also been an increase in the numbers of extremely vulnerable students at all key stages. Many of these students do not have a statement or EHCP but still have significant needs."

1.6. Percentage of EHE learners eligible for free school meals (if known) on school census day?

58 LAs answered this question; of this number 37 (or 64%) did not know how many learners were eligible for free school meals (FSMs). There is no reliable way of determining this information at this time and authorities may only become aware of eligibility if the child had previously attended school at some stage.

Of the 21 who were able to provide this information two authorities said none of their home learners were eligible for FSMs, two LAs said 1 – 10% of their total EHE cohort; seven LAs said 11 – 20%; two said 21 – 30%; six said 31 – 40%; one said 41 – 50% and another said 51 – 60% of EHE learners were eligible for FSMs.

1.7. Does your authority contact parents / carers to request a home visit or a meeting in a neutral venue in order to discuss the education arrangements in place for their child?

Of the 72 respondents that answered this question, 71 (or 99%) of LAs requested, and undertook wherever possible, home visits, only one LA did not.

"We check with our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub whether any new referrals are known to Children's Social Care prior to contacting parents / carers for visits."

1.8. If yes, what percentage of families agree to a home visit by local authority officers?

Of the 71 LAs that carry out home visits, 23 (or 32%) said 81 – 90% of families engaged while 20 authorities (or 28%) said 91 – 100% of EHE families engaged with education or welfare officers. Eight authorities reported 50% or less of their EHE families agreed to a home visit.

"It is very hard to reconcile parents being prosecuted and fined for taking their children on a holiday [in term time] when parents are able to home educate with no statutory powers by the LA to know who is doing it and how well."

"Parents who don't want a home visit, will meet our EHE officer at the Civic Centre library or café."

1.9. What is the percentage of families who refuse direct access but provide evidence in other ways e.g. a report, samples of work, independent home tutor report or other appropriate source?

70 LAs answered this question. 50 authorities said less than 30% of families refusing a home visit provided samples of work or a report from an independent tutor to evidence the provision of a suitable educational experience at home.

"The laws on EHE lack precision and do not allow EHE monitoring to be effective. It is too easy for parents to simply refuse to provide evidence of what their educational provision is. We are unable to verify what is going on even when we have suspicions that little or no education is taking place."

1.10. What percentage of children are present at the meeting the local authority holds with parents?

66 responses were received to this question and 12 LAs (or 18%) reported that they did not hold this information. 32 authorities reported that in 80% or more of cases children and young people were present during their welfare visit.

"We have significant concerns about the nature of existing guidance and the degree to which children can become invisible despite our attempts at intervention."

"Revisiting consideration of a mandatory registration scheme would assist local authorities and the DCS in ensuring all children are safe, accounted for and their educational and developmental needs are being appropriately met. There are too many occasions where EHE is used to mask or avoid addressing underlying issues for a child – how can we be sure under current regulations that their voice is being heard and their wishes understood?"

2. Supporting EHE families

2.1. Does your authority provide support for EHE learners to undertake exams? If yes, what support is on offer to learners?

Of the 72 responses to this question, 39 LAs (or 54%) provided exam support and 33 (or 46%) did not.

49 respondents provided additional information about the advice and support provided to EHE families, this includes:

- Advice about contacting exam boards, where to sit exams, college placements etc via phone, email, in person, online via a website or a LA produced booklet
- Promotion of the DfE college offer and support to use DfE funding with Nova accredited training providers
- Exam centres
- Financial contribution towards the cost of sitting exams
- Provision of invigilation for exams
- One LA has commissioned a local college to provide support service for EHE families with a requirement that students undertake a minimum of five GCSEs.

“The DfE funding stream for college entry is a useful and supportive move. It is hoped that this is sustainable in the long term. It would be enhanced by access to a 'support fund' for the small number of EHE students who, if in school, would be eligible for free school meals and transport.”

2.2. Do you hold a list of schools or FE colleges which allow EHE learners to undertake exams there?

69 respondents completed this question, 29 LAs (or 42%) hold a list while 40 (or 58%) do not.

2.3. Do any schools or FE colleges in the authority provide support for EHE pupils in controlled assessments?

64 responses were received to this question, of this number 10 LAs (or 16%) are aware of local schools and FE colleges supporting EHE learners to sit controlled assessments while 54 (or 84%) said they were not aware of this support on offer in their area.

2.4. How many pupils or learners are known to have sat formal exams in the 2014/15 academic year?

Of the 67 responses to this question 41 reported that they do not hold or record this information, those who provided a figure often noted that they could not be sure this was accurate as officers rely solely on parental disclosure. Numbers of known exam entrants in individual areas ranged from one to 27 in 2014/15. In the latter case the LA has a known EHE population of 517; this included 160 learners studying at Key Stage 4 (GCSE level).

“Only two children that we know of as neither the parent, or the school or FE college who accepts external candidates, are obliged to inform the LA.”

"We have experienced a sustained upward trend in EHE referrals since 2012. The majority of new referrals within each academic year are Year 9, 10 & 11 students. The overwhelming majority of students return to formal educational provision for post 16."

2.5. Where families that home educate move to another LA do you have a policy to enable information to be shared with the new LA?

71 answers were received to this question, 64 (or 90%) reported that they did have such a policy in place, the remaining seven (or 10%) did not.

"In the academic year 2014-15 there were 90 new cases opened as EHE. 59 referrals were made via other agencies (not parents voluntarily informing) including health; supplementary schools; neighbours / members of the public; MASH; and other boroughs. 42 of these referrals were investigated and opened as EHE."

"On receipt of information regarding an EHE pupil, we aim to home visit within 3 months (usually within 6 weeks). We then make a further visit within 6 months to ensure everything is going well and then we undertake a minimum of yearly visit once EHE is established. A written report is provided to the family to confirm suitable education."

3. Ensuring learners are safe and receiving a suitable education

3.1. How many school attendance notices were issued by the LA in relation of EHE in 2014/15?

Of the 69 authorities answering this question, 41 reported that they had not issued any notices at all in the last full academic year. Within this number several authorities reported that while they had not formally pursued a notice they had actively discussed the possibility of taking this course of action or had even gone as far as starting the legal process only for the family to subsequently produce the necessary evidence. In the remaining 28 authorities the volume and frequency of notices varied quite significantly from a single notice up to 28. Again, some additional commentary was provided by respondents:

- A LA in the East Midlands issued seven notices for five families in 2014/15
- An authority in the South West issued two notices in 2014/15 but noted that as of school census day eight have been issued in the current academic year
- A London borough issued five notices, four went to Stage 1 and one to Stage 2.

"When an Adviser visits and the education is assessed as unsatisfactory we refer to Family Service and the Fair Access Team who work with the schools, parents and young person to secure a school place. This explains why we do not have any attendance notices related to EHE in [county authority]."

3.2. How many of these notices resulted in the child returning to school?

Again the picture was mixed and the commentary provided by respondents illustrates this:

- Neither of the two notices issued in a London borough resulted in the children returning to mainstream schooling. In the first instance the parents cooperated with EHE process and

provided suitable evidence and in the second case the LA discovered that child had been on roll at an independent school for some time

- Seven of the 28 notices issued by an LA in the North East resulted in the child returning to mainstream education
- A LA in the Eastern region issued seven notices, in all cases the children returned to school.

3.3. What percentage of EHE learners are receiving early help; have a child protection plan; are a child in need or a child in care, as captured on census day?

	Early Help	Children in Need	Child Protection Plan	Children in Care
0%	16	15	28	53
1 - 10%	41	42	34	5
11 - 20%	2	2	0	0
21 - 30%	2	2	0	0
31 - 40%	0	1	0	0

3.4. How many Section 17 Assessments, Section 47 enquiries and Child Protection Plans were completed for EHE learners during 2014/15 academic year?

66 responses were received to the Section 17 question and 10 LAs stated that the EHE team either did not know or did not collect this data. A total of 514 Section 17 enquiries were carried out in the remaining 56 LAs - 12 respondents reported that no Section 17 enquiries had been carried out in the last full academic year in relation to home learners, figures provided ranged from 0 – 84.

65 responses were received about numbers of Section 47 enquiries undertaken in 2014/15, seven respondents noted that the EHE team either did not collect or was not aware of this information. A total of 151 Section 47 Enquiries were carried out in the remaining 57 LAs – 17 respondents reported that no Section 47 Enquiries have been carried out in relation to home learners. Figures ranged from 0 – 22.

68 responses were received about the numbers of EHE learners subject to a Child Protection Plan, four respondents reported they either did not know or collect this information. A total of 103 Child Protection Plans were put in place in the last full academic year for children educated at home. Figures ranged from 0 – 8.

Some examples of responses received:

- A unitary LA in the West Midlands undertook 12 Section 17 Assessments for nine children in the last full academic year. Two Section 47 Enquiries were carried out for two separate children and one EHE child became subject to a Child Protection Plan in 2014/15. The LA's EHE population on school census day was 206.
- A county LA in the East Midlands undertook 22 Section 17 Assessments and 18 Section 47 Enquiries in 2014/15, no EHE learners entered care. The LA's EHE population was 511 on school census day.

- A Southern county undertook 50 Section 17 Assessments, 14 Section 47 Enquiries and five children became subject to a Child Protection Plan in 2014/15, its EHE population on school census day was 709.
- A unitary in the Eastern region undertook 18 Section 17 Assessments, five Section 47 Enquiries and placed two EHE learners on a Child Protection Plan in 2014/15. The LA's total known EHE population of school census day was 306.
- A unitary authority in Yorkshire and Humber reported that no Section 17 or Section 47s were undertaken in 2014/15. However, the respondent noted that five had Child Protection Plans and that three of those children became looked after at the time they were home educated. The authority's EHE population was 114 on school census day.
- A London borough undertook 23 Section 17 Assessments of 15 children in 2014/15. 14 Section 47 Enquiries were undertaken and fewer than five children were placed on a Child Protection Plan. The borough's known EHE population on school census day was 98. The respondent provided some additional information in their survey return:

"[London borough] rate per 10,000 section 17 assessments in their lifetime = 363 in whole population. In EHE population, section 17 assessments per 10,000 = 3163."

"[London borough with EHE population of 127] carried out eight Section 17 Enquiries in the last full academic year, as of school census day we have done 15 in the current academic year."

"[Unitary in South East with EHE population of 93] 7.6% of EHE learners are open to early help / have a child protection plan / are a child in need or are in care."

3.5. Are you aware of EHE learners attending tuition centres in your area? If yes, do you have any concerns about these settings (safeguarding, health and safety or suitability of educational experience)?

69 responses were received to this question. 39 LAs (or 56%) were aware of EHE learners attending tuition centres in the local area (or in a neighbouring borough in a small number of cases) while 30 LAs (or 44%) were not aware of this practice. It is possible the term 'tuition centre' has been interpreted differently by survey respondents:

"It is hard to determine and identify the groups of EHE parents who share teaching in one another's homes with varying numbers of children and rotating a timetable around the family homes."

25 of the 69 respondents shared an overview of their concerns in relation to local tuition centres. Several noted that EHE families get together on a regular basis for young people to participate in variety of activities and experiences together but this is not via tuition centres. The LAs that actively knew of EHE learners attending tuition centres, education centres or unregistered schools tended to be in key city regions, particularly in the Greater London area:

"On census day [London borough] had 23 children registered as home educated who are receiving education in Education Centres in [London borough] and other boroughs arranged by the parents, some in the belief that they were actually registered schools. We advise parents that these Education Centres are not registered schools. Ofsted could consider a mechanism for inspection of Education Centres."

"Approx 25% of young people on our EHE register are attending a supplementary school or tuition centre."

3.6. Are you aware of EHE learners in your area attending unregistered schools? If yes, do you have any concerns about these settings (safeguarding, health and safety or suitability of educational experience)?

70 respondents answered this question. 12 LAs (or 17%) reported that they were aware of EHE learners attending unregistered or 'illegal' schools in their own or neighbouring authority areas, while 58 (or 83%) were not aware of this practice.

15 respondents provided additional information here. Again, this issue seems particularly pressing in urban areas. An LA in the South East noted that: *"[No concerns] but we haven't physically visited or explored what is being delivered as we don't have the remit or authority to do this."* While an inner London borough reported that: *"We are in continuous dialogue with DfE Independent and Boarding Team about the unregistered settings in our borough."*

"A Letter was sent from the Operational Director of Early Help and Education in 2015 to the proprietor of an unregistered school. This outlined concerns following a visit by the [London borough] LSCB Training Coordinator. Concerns about the setting were, failure to adhere to planning, safeguarding and health and safety rules. A letter was sent by the Education Welfare Service in 2015 to parents with children attending this school advising that [London borough] Council does not recommend that any parent sends their child to an unregistered school. The above concerns are being monitored and followed up by the DfE's Independent Education and Boarding Schools Team."

Other respondents, from predominantly urban areas again, reported concerns about the physical environment of unregistered schools in their area, the lack of checks and balances available to the LA and the limited curriculum which has an emphasis on particular cultural or religious subjects.

4. Resources

4.1. What is your annual budget (and actual spend, if available) for EHE services?

66 responses were received to this question. Budgets varied significantly, ranging from zero up to £202,000. Six LAs reported that there was no dedicated EHE budget and it was part of the wider school improvement budget, for example, or pupil support funding. Several authorities reported they did not have dedicated EHE staff. Instead, this work formed part of a general advisory role. A significant proportion of LAs reported that the budget allocated largely covered staffing time only.

4.2. Number of full time equivalent (FtE) staff working in this area?

63 respondents answered this question. 25 (or 40%) of authorities reported that they had a single member of staff dedicated to EHE and 10 LAs (or 16%) had two FtEs. 24 LAs (or 38% of respondents) said they had less than one member of staff e.g. a unitary LA in Yorkshire and Humber had 0.5 FtE, a London borough had 0.5 FtE coordinator and 0.5 FtE consultant while a unitary in the North West had one FtE advisor and 0.5 FtE administrator. At the other end of the scale a rural authority reported that: *"We have 60 FtE Family Outreach Support Workers who, as part of their job role, have a wide remit, including EHE."*

4.3. Where do EHE support services sit in the overall children's services department?

68 respondents provided information and again the picture was quite varied. Commonly occurring answers included:

- SEN and inclusion / behaviour and inclusion team
- Admissions and pupil services
- Education welfare service / pupil welfare service
- Alternative learning services
- Education and corporate parenting
- Complementary education services
- Learning improvement service
- Vulnerable learners service
- Learning access
- Safeguarding in education team
- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (this role is part of a wider job description).

5. Any additional comments on the subject of elective home education?

40 respondents took the opportunity to provide additional information; a selection of comments have been used throughout the report and general commentary about regulations and powers available to local authorities can be found below:

"This only provides a snapshot at this moment in time of those families we are aware of as EHE. The cohort is constantly changing."

"The numbers of EHE pupils are increasing dramatically and schools have to be challenged at times as EHE is used as an alternative to exclusion from school. Our LA oversight of EHE remains limited by the current constraint of legislation and the fact that parents are under no duty to register their children as EHE or to accept direct contact with LA EHE officers."

"Present legislation does not allow us to ensure all young people receive their entitlement to an appropriate education that meets their needs. We are also concerned that young people without accreditation find it difficult to access Education, Training and Employment opportunities commensurate with their peer group. Those young people the EHE team work with are supported to move into EET, it is the population who are not registered that will have difficulty transitioning at 16 into the world of work or FE."

"For a pupil wishing to enter or return to mainstream school, there is a reluctance from schools to accept EHE pupils as they are viewed as non-attenders and therefore 'hard to place.'"

"We welcome the interest in this area and feel that an open debate about a new way of working can only be positive. We would like a robust system to ensure children are receiving a suitable education and a definition of what suitable means. There are practical things that would help for example online compulsory registration and standardised UK tests for core subjects at regular intervals. The latter would effectively define what a suitable education is."