

**Minutes
Liaison Meeting
Between
National Council of Home Educators NZ and Education Review Office
ERO office in Wellington, Tuesday 12 July 2011.**

Present: Chris Close of Auckland Home Educators (AHE); Audrey Wells of NCHENZ & AHE; Nina Wright of Canterbury Home Educators (CHE); Paulette Fawcett of Christian Home Educating Families (CHEF); and Craig & Barbara Smith of Home Education Foundation (HEF). Jenny Clark, National Manager Public Affairs, ERO; Rob Williamson, Senior Review Officer, ERO; Ralph Lane, Senior Advisor, MoE.

Apologies: Penny Bilton of NCHENZ; Graeme Stoop, Chief Review Officer, ERO.

Jenny Clark opened the meeting at 11:01am by welcoming us all, offering cups of coffee and tea and passing round a plate of biscuits to accompany the water already on the table. She explained that Ralph Lane was there as an observer only. Mr Lane said he was happy to interact, take notes and discuss any issues he needed to with his MoE colleagues later on (and presumably get back to us).

Questions:

We home educators had previously submitted a number of written questions for the agenda, and these were addressed first of all. Here are the questions, straight from the agenda with *commentary added in italics* according to the ensuing dialogue:

ERO issues :

1. Summary of reviews over the past year

Rob informed us that in the past 12 months only 16 reviews had taken place, despite being contracted for 30 reviews. 3 in the Nelson area, 3 in the Wanganui area and 10 in the Auckland area. The Auckland reviews comprised of only 3 families, one of 5 children, one of 4 and one of 1 child (adding up to 10). Of these, only one was found to be "not taught as regularly and well as in a registered school," and this was in the Wanganui area. Reviews are only done upon request and all the requests come through Ralph Lane. They always send two reviewers around to do the review. Rob & Ralph both said they do point people who are being reviewed to local support groups.

Comments from Rob Williamson: ***He said the issue prompting the review is often a lifestyle issue more than a concern over academics. He reminded us of how broad the academic standards can be "since home educators are not required to follow the national curriculum." When we reminded Rob of how there were no blanket reviews (just like today's situation) from 1994 to 1999, he said that Brian Donnelly brought the blanket reviews back in at that time due to a need for some accountability for the home schooling allowance being paid out.***

Comments from Ralph Lane: ***That most complaints sparking a review came as a result of a marriage split. He gets the complainant to write down all the information they can to make a case. Then he asks himself, "Is it urgent?" Then he'll pass it on to the ERO. They can get referrals from Child, Youth and Families, but they only want educational information from them. Unless the complainant can come up with specific educational issues, Ralph tells them in effect to "go away."***

2. Christchurch Situation.

- how do things stand for Christchurch post-earthquakes? ***Rob said the ERO are not doing institutional reviews (of schools) unless the school is doing well and can cope given the post-earthquake situation.***

- where they ERO at with physical location and reviews in Christchurch?

- what staff are covering our area currently?

- how serviced are Christchurch home educators?

- how many reviews have been done in Canterbury over the past year? ***Rob said there were recently two requests for reviews of home educators in the Canterbury area. He would encourage anyone having a review to agree to do it rather than refuse, for then he would need to put in a***

negative ERO Review Report, and "We really don't want to put in a negative report."

3. How will the merger of ERO with NZQA affect the review process - are the people being retained the ones with the knowledge and experience of reviewing homeschoolers?

MOE issues

1. Christchurch Situation.

- are Canterbury exemption applications being fast-tracked?
- what is the current turn around time?
- any increase in number of exemption applications recently?
- how firm is truancy surveillance in Canterbury at present? ***It was confirmed that truancy was back in full force in Canterbury: yes, children needed to be in school, if aged 6 or over, before parents submit an exemption. The Canterbury home educators present seemed to think things were clicking along nicely at present, earthquake issues notwithstanding.***

2. What if parents change from what they originally wrote on their exemption applications? (***Rob made some brilliant comments: "The application really is an intent. And that's fine." He mentioned how people will change from one approach to another, from one resource or curriculum to another, and said, "That's what a good practitioner does." "It's low risk."***)

3. Are there any specific subjects that we need to include to make sure we get the exemption? Occasionally a parent will ring to say they were told they need to include 'Social Studies' or 'Technology'. ***Ralph Lane said an MoE officer might suggest such topics should there appear to be a rather wide and significant gap in the curriculum as described in the application. It is his opinion that to teach "as well as in a registered school" means to touch on a similar topic base.***

4. We understand that home educators may continue to be considered as home educators by the Ministry of Education when they go beyond their 16th birthdays, as long as they are still being 'taught at least as regularly and well as in a registered school', and that they may continue to receive the home education allowance, and that this may even include taking one or two papers a year with the NZ Correspondence School. Would all of this still hold true if, instead of taking papers with the NZ Correspondence School, the young person took classes at the local Polytech? Or with The Open Polytech? Or at a NZ University? ***This was a policy issue which Ralph Lane would need to look into.***

5. Will the proposed overhaul of the MOE affect homeschoolers, and if so how? ***Jenny Clark said that they couldn't really say, as these kinds of changes take place all the time. Just "wait until you hear" was her advice.***

Miscellaneous

1. Purchasing tuition from the NZ Correspondence School for homeschooled teens, as Young Adults, from Term 1 of the year they turn 16, instead of on their birthday. ***There was some round table discussion on this question. Again, this is in the realm of policy which no one person can determine. Home educators were urged to present their ideas to the Correspondence School and the MoE. One of the ideas was that maybe home educators could even pay a proportion of the NZ Correspondence Fees. The fact that home educators were in a small class of their own, being exempted from both enrolment and attendance at registered schools, may be an angle of approach to create new policy in this area, especially since any policy change would only apply to this small group and not open the flood gates of the general population.***

2. Retaining / securing affordable access to NCEA for home educated teens. ***Positive mention was made of how the Correspondence School had put NCEA material up on their website for access by earthquake affected people, and in fact all people. No one was sure if it was still available in this way. But to have it permanently available to home educators would be a policy decision Te Kura (The Correspondence School) would have to make, perhaps at the suggestion of home educators.***

National Evaluations

Jenny Clark had copies of recent publications to hand out: "Literacy in Early Childhood Services: Teaching and Learning"; "Framework for School Reviews"; "Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews". She suggested these documents would help home educators understand how the ERO approaches the Review process and the kind of thing they're looking for. She also mentioned a document that was to be posted on the ERO website shortly titled, "Directions for Learning" which was looking at the NZ Curriculum and exploring the idea of "teaching as enquiry." She thought this also might be of some interest among home educators.

General Discussion.

1. A home educator brought up a question on the exemption application about timetables. Ralph Lane said they were after some indication of one's programme in terms of a "timetable", "however you want to explain it. What's the plan for delivery?"
2. Chris Close said that in Auckland they do annual evenings with the MoE wherein people such as Steve McGregor and his manager Clare would explain the exemption process for enquirers.
3. Audrey Wells thanked the MoE for the statistics available on the Education Counts website.
4. Chris asked Ralph Lane if there were any questions or comments the MoE might have for us home educators. "Not that I can think of...Sometimes the applications are on the thin side." He said the numbers of applications coming in do fluctuate according to the time of year. A couple of things he said he'd like to see on exemption applications are some indication of longer-term plans and an attempt to match progress with National Standards. Then Ralph Lane said it would be good if exemption applicants would contact people such as us first so that their exemptions could be accepted first time around, without the MoE having to send them back for more information.

The meeting broke up very amicably right on 12 noon.