

GCSEs for Home Educators

There is no funding either locally or from national government to support home educating parents in researching, resourcing or paying for examinations. However, it could be argued that it is impossible to put a price on the value of a young person achieving success in GCSEs – especially in English and Maths – as these qualifications provide a passport to future opportunities in employment, education and training throughout the rest of a person's life. It can be seen as an investment and thus money well spent.

Most employers and further education providers look for 5 passes in GCSEs including English and Maths. One advantage of home education is that you do not have to prepare for all of these exams at once. You can work at your child's own pace and according to their interests then enter them for each exam or group of exams when they are ready.

The Lewisham EHE Team cannot vouch for any courses or tutors. We can signpost you to resources of which we are aware, including some which have been recommended to us by home educating families we meet with. This is the purpose of this leaflet, which we hope will be useful.

GCSE Exam Courses

Perhaps the easiest way to prepare your child for GCSE examinations is by following commercial online courses. In most cases you will pay a set fee for each subject with the option of a discounted rate if you select 2 or 3 more subjects at the same time. Generally you can also pay in instalments.

In most cases, the cost will include tuition via course books and online lessons as well as access to an online tutor. You will be given an examination centre and examination certificates once your child has taken the exams.

Make sure you have everything in writing before you pay any money and ask about any additional costs which may not be obvious (e.g. make sure that the cost of the final certificates are included). Ideally go with personal recommendation. Do your research.

Below are some links to online providers which appear to be live and still active. We can't tell without registering. Please note that we cannot make judgements about any of these sites or verify their quality.

<http://www.oxfordhomeschooling.co.uk/> Tel: 0800 0111 024

[Oxford Homeschooling programme is the one most recommended to us by home educators following online GCSE courses]

<http://www.interhigh.co.uk/>

[We are aware of families using this programme who are pleased with it]

<https://www.nec.ac.uk>

[Also recommended to the team]

www.structuredhomelearning.com/

<https://www.icslearn.co.uk/courses/gcse-and-igcse/>

Selecting courses

If you are “going it alone”, choosing the right course is very important. Careful research before you begin can save much time, energy and expense later on. If possible, talk to others who have followed the same course.

Once you have selected a subject for study, look at the courses offered by each exam board to decide which one suits you best.

The 5 boards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are:

- Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) - <http://www.aqa.org.uk/>
- Council for Curriculum and Examinations Assessment (CCEA) - <http://ccea.org.uk/>
- Pearson Edexcel – <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html>
- Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Exams (OCR) – <http://www.ocr.org.uk/>
- Welsh Joint Examinations Committee (WJEC) – <http://www.wjec.co.uk/>

All parents/ tutors/ candidates should read the Specifications for each course (on the exam board's website) very carefully. The Specifications will provide the exam entry specification codes and explain the way the examination is structured. Candidates should also look at the Private Candidate guidance sections of the relevant exam board website. A good decision-making question - is there a good textbook you can follow?

It is worth considering the national schools' agenda in selecting subjects; for example, currently many schools are encouraging students to take the subjects making up the so-called 'English Baccalaureate'. You need to consider what your candidate's next steps are, e.g. if you are aiming to go to a sixth form college after passing GCSEs, look at their entrance requirements.

Examination Centres

Exams must be taken at a registered examination centre. Each registered centre will have a centre number which will be recorded on all examination certificates. Every centre has an examinations officer: an extremely useful person to know!

Oxford Home Schooling <http://www.oxfordhomeschooling.co.uk/> holds a database of centres (which grows and changes all the time) of around 500-600 other centres who may be able to help you.

Exam entry is entirely the responsibility of the parent / candidate. Most centres will not accept liability for late, wrong or missing entries. The local authority has no influence over centres, including whether they will accept you or what they charge.

You may be lucky and find a centre very close to where you live, but you should be prepared to make lots of phone calls and to shop around as prices and availability vary enormously.

Again, make sure you have everything in writing before you pay any money and ask about any additional costs which may not be obvious (e.g. make sure that the cost of the final certificates are included). Ideally go with personal recommendation. Do your research.

Below are local examination centres commonly used by Lewisham EHE families. Please note – centres may stop taking private candidates with little or no notice.

The Tutorial Foundation

www.thetutorialfoundation.co.uk

76 Freelands Rd, Bromley BR1 3HY
020 8460 0181

Educational Excellence and Wellbeing

www.educationalexcellence.org.uk

112-114 High Street, Croydon, CR0 1ND
020 8688 8665

Catford Excel Centre

www.catfordASC@gmail.com

115 Rushey Green, London, SE6 4AA
020 3651 2032
info@excelexamcentres.co.uk

Pascals College - Beckenham

www.pascalscollege.co.uk

137-139 High St, Beckenham BR3 1AG
020 8663 6733

Best Tutors

info@besttutors.co.uk

1-19 Wakefield Street, Edmonton, London, N18 2BZ
020 8807 4170

Croydon Metropolitan College

admin@croydonmet.org.uk

30-32 Southend, Croydon, CR0 1DN
020 8688 5777

London Learning Consortium

Christopher Wren Yard

119 High Street, Croydon, CR0 1QG

m.lyder@londonlc.org.uk / 07510 930 303

As a general rule, if you want to sit exams in June, you must have found an exam centre and booked your exams by the end of January. Late entry fees apply after approximately the first week of March and they are excessive. Timetables are easily found online via an internet search.

Please be aware that exam centres accept Private Candidates entirely at their own discretion and the fact that you have found them on any list is no guarantee that they will accept an application from you. They have to adhere to strict rules re: spacing of desks, etc. and, if full, they cannot just squeeze in another student. They will be inspected via unannounced visits during the exam season and could be deregistered if any violations of rules are found.

Exams Officers

Experienced exam officers tend to look more favourably on well organised and polite candidates who have already made themselves familiar with the specification codes and exam requirements and who apply in good time. Students who are well prepared and flexible will nearly always find a centre to take them.

Below are a few suggestions we have been given about how to improve the chances of booking an exam place and maintaining good relations with your exams officer:

- Once you have registered, follow the instructions sent out to you carefully and make sure that you know your exam board, specification number and any unit codes.
- Try to exhaust other sources of information before calling your exams officer with questions. If exam officers feel under constant pressure they may turn away private candidates in the future.
- Make sure that you provide a reliable contact phone number and a current address. Exams officers who have to spend hours trying to contact a private candidate understandably get very frustrated.
- Always pay your fees even if you do not sit the exam. The exams officer will often have had to do as much work for candidates who have withdrawn as for those who sit their exam.
- Please treat your exams officer with courtesy and respect: many often voluntarily go to a lot of trouble to help private candidates.

Missing an Exam

If a candidate fails to sit an exam it will be recorded as an X and can be internet-searched by a future employer via your unique candidate identifier number (UCI) – it is thus better to withdraw entry.

If you are withdrawing from an exam - or are unable to get there on the day - please make it a priority to tell your exam centre. Exam officers get extremely stressed if they have to delay the start of an exam for their own students while they try to make contact with a missing private candidate. There is a ruling that if candidates arrive half an hour after an exam starts they should be refused entry. However, if there is a legitimate reason and evidence can be provided that they have not been in contact with another student also sitting the same exam, then exam boards can be very accommodating.

Results and Certificates

- Please note that results can only be handed to the actual candidate on exam results day (this is true for all candidates). If the candidate is unable to collect them in person (e.g. on holiday), that candidate must submit a signed letter in advance giving permission for a named other person to collect. If you provide a stamped addressed envelope, the exam officer should be able to post your results to you if you are unable to collect them in person.

- Exam centres issue official Certificates Oct/Nov time. Please find out the date from your centre and remember to collect certificates and keep them safe. In August, you receive a provisional results slip that is accepted by post 16 establishments in securing entry. Certificates are not issued till all appeals have been resolved
- Appeals have to be made via your exams officer within 20 days of results day - this is a chargeable service.
- If you lose or damage your final certificate, you may be able to get a replacement certificate at a cost of approximately £35 per subject.

Candidates needing Special Arrangements

If a candidate has any special needs, finding a suitable centre may be more difficult, however, you must tell your exam centre before they make a booking for you.

In order to secure special arrangements, you will need supporting evidence that is up to date.

All information can be found on the Joint Council for Qualifications

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/aao-access-arrangements-online>

Private Tutors

Many parents employ private tutors to provide extra expert tuition in preparation for GCSE's and A Levels. Please note that there is no register of approved tutors held by the LA since tutors do not have to be Ofsted registered.

It is essential that you check a tutor's credentials to ensure that they are qualified and have a current valid Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate (police check to ensure the person has no conviction preventing them working with children or vulnerable adults). Ask to see evidence and check references with those who have written them to ensure that they are genuine – anybody can claim to be a tutor and documents are easily forged. Personal recommendation of the tutor or of an organised institution is possibly the best way to proceed.

Many of the examination centres listed on page 3 provide tuition services.

Dulwich Tutors are also used by Lewisham families: <http://dulwichtutors.com/>

020 8653 3502 info@dulwichtutors.com

Other sources of support

One online forum "has been brilliant – a lifeline" [quote from EHE parent]:

HE-Exams-GCSE-A AS Levels-OU-Others@yahoogroups.com

The **South London Home Education** Group (**SLHE**) can also put you in touch with other home educating families whose children are taking GCSEs. Their email address is slondonhe@gmail.com The SLHE wiki is at www.slhe.wikia.com This has an overview of activities in the area and links to resources e.g. popular online learning sites with discounts for home educators, information on taking exams as an external candidate, and SEN support.

Post 16 GCSE Courses

We have been told that the Shooters Hill Campus in Greenwich -

<http://www.shootershill.ac.uk/> - offers a 1 year course of 5 GCSE's for young people over 16 years old (Year 12 onwards) which is currently free. Please contact the campus directly for details:

020 8319 9427

admissions@shc.ac.uk