

Analysis



Shining a light on home education: five things we learned from the new Department for Education (DfE) data.

July 2023

With the number of home educated young people rising steeply since 2016, Career Connect welcomes the DfE's release of new data on home education in England.

There are now an estimated 86,200 home educated young people in England (May 2023), up from 37,500 in 2016.

Data on home educated young people – why it matters.

The DfE have released their first data set on young people who are elective home educating in England - <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education>.

From May 2023 onwards, this data will be collected and reported termly.

Since 2016, information on the number of home educating young people in England had been produced through an annual survey of local authorities conducted by the [Association of Directors of Children's Services \(ADCS\)](#). The DfE data expands on this and provides us with a more detailed understanding of what is a growing issue.

From ADCS surveys we know that local authorities have been reporting a rapid growth in the number of young people that have de-registered from school.

In 2016, there was estimated to be 37,500 home educating young people, increasing to 81,196 in 2021. This has raised concerns about the underlying causes and about the quality of education being provided to this growing group.

The DfE data reports **an estimated 86,200 home educating young people in May 2023.**

Our own research in [December 2022](#), highlighted the fact that many families have taken the decision to home educate in response to pressing problems such as the mental health of their child, issues with bullying, and learning challenges that they felt weren't being addressed. Very few saw the decision as being a positive one.

At Career Connect, we are concerned by the absence of professional careers education, information, advice, and guidance (CEIAG) being provided to the growing number of young people that are home educating.

Until young people are 16 years of age, statutory careers provision is delivered through schools, with the Gatsby benchmarks providing the framework for good careers guidance. Provision outside of school can be limited to online information and there is little facilitated access to this. .

We strongly welcome the collection and provision of this data by the Department for Education.

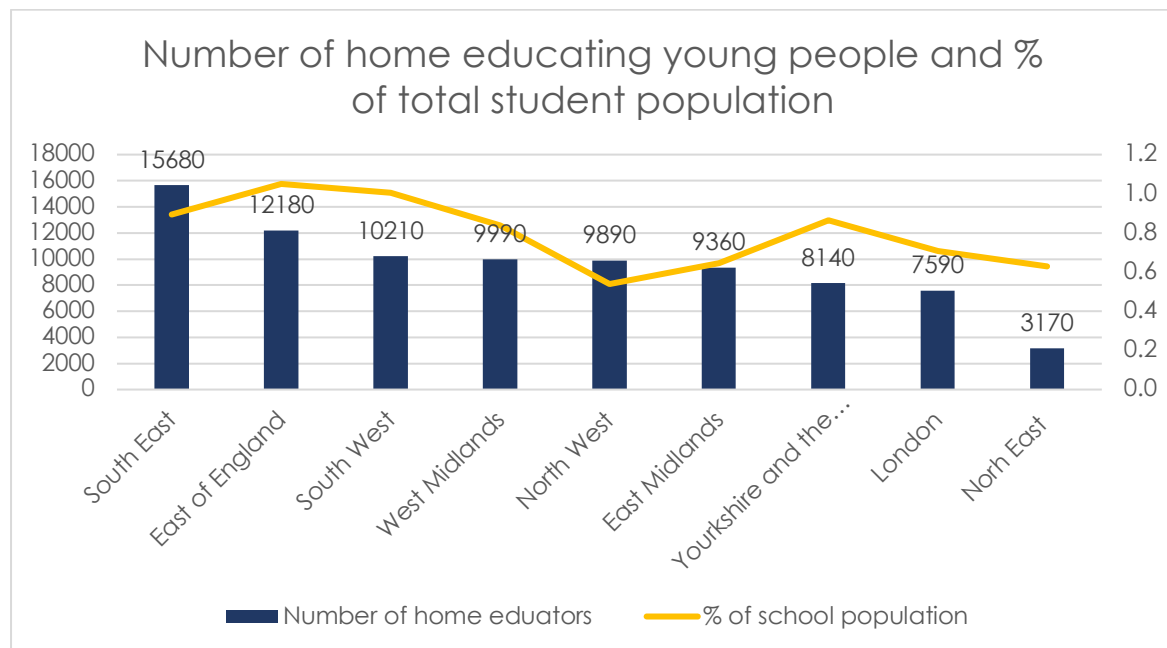


Here, we highlight five things we have seen in the data as we continue to research this emerging picture.

1. There is a substantial regional variation in both the number and proportion of the total student population that are home educating.

Differences in the number of home educating young people across regions will in part reflect regional variations in the total size of the student population. Because of this, it is more helpful to look at home educating young people as a proportion of the total number of students in each region. We did this using 2021 Census data on school population by region.

South East, South West and East of England all have around 1% of the student population that is home educating. The prevalence is lower (around 0.5%) in the North West, North East and East Midlands. Differences in recording practices across local authorities may be a factor in this and it will be interesting to see if variance across regions reduces over time, as this data becomes more routinely reported.



2. Points of transition are a key factor in school de-registration.

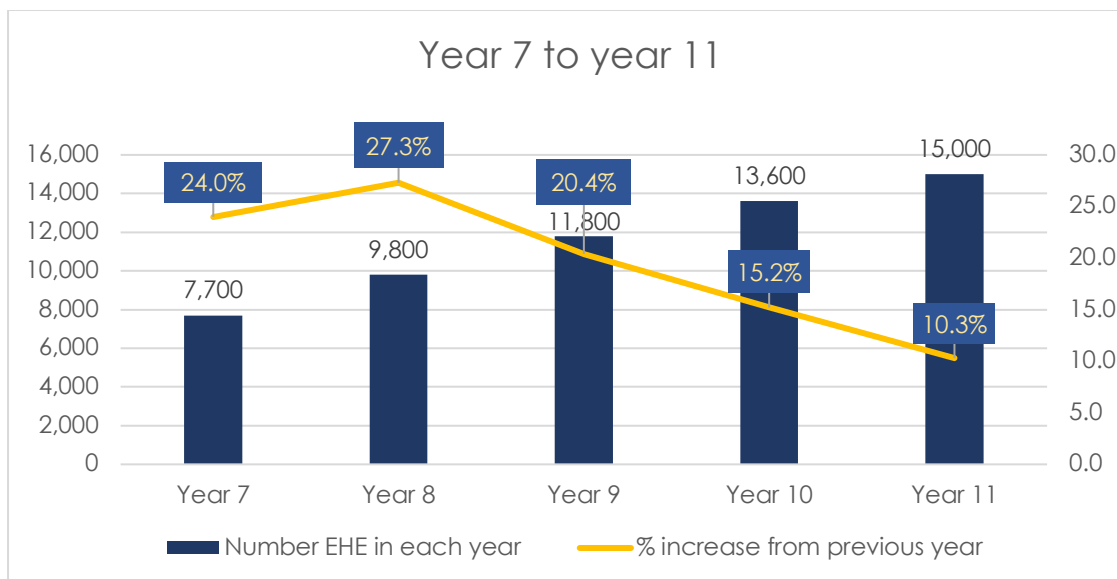
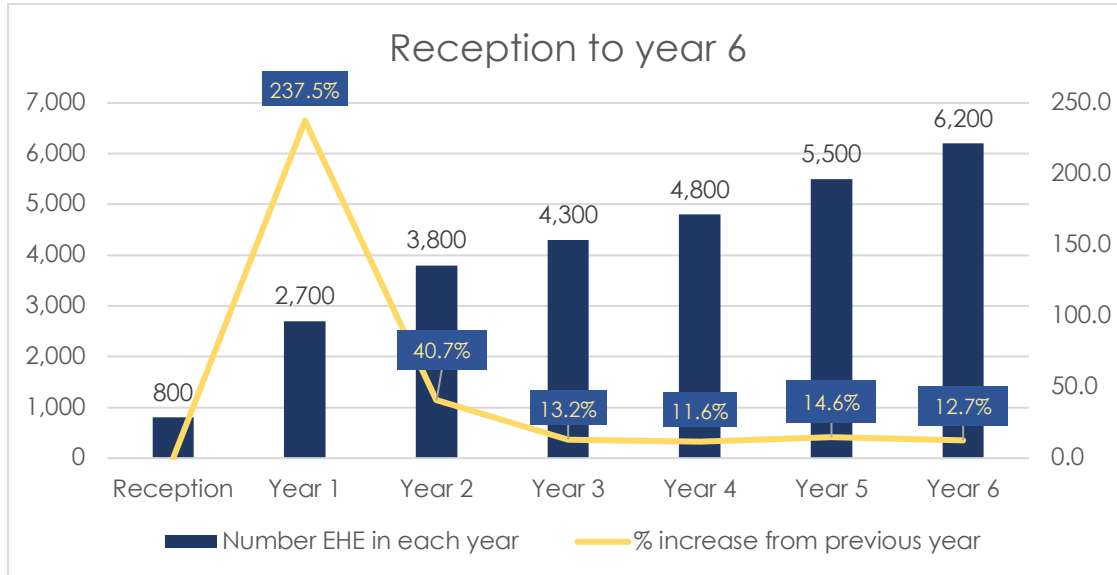
The number of home educating young people increases across school years, with almost twenty times the number in year 11 as there are in Reception.

Equally as interesting are the points at which we see high increases in the number that are home educating.

Transitions between school stages seems to be a key factor in this.

There is a **237%** increase in those that are home educating between Reception and Year 1 and a further **40%** increase between year 1 and year 2. For the remainder of primary, year-on-year increases are between 12%-15%.

This goes back up to **24%** at the transition between Year 6 and Year 7 – Primary to Secondary school - and is **27%** between Year 7 and Year 8, before heading back down to 10% between Year 10 and Year 11.



3. We still do not know the reasons why many choose to home educate, but the indication is that, for many, it is not a philosophical or lifestyle choice.



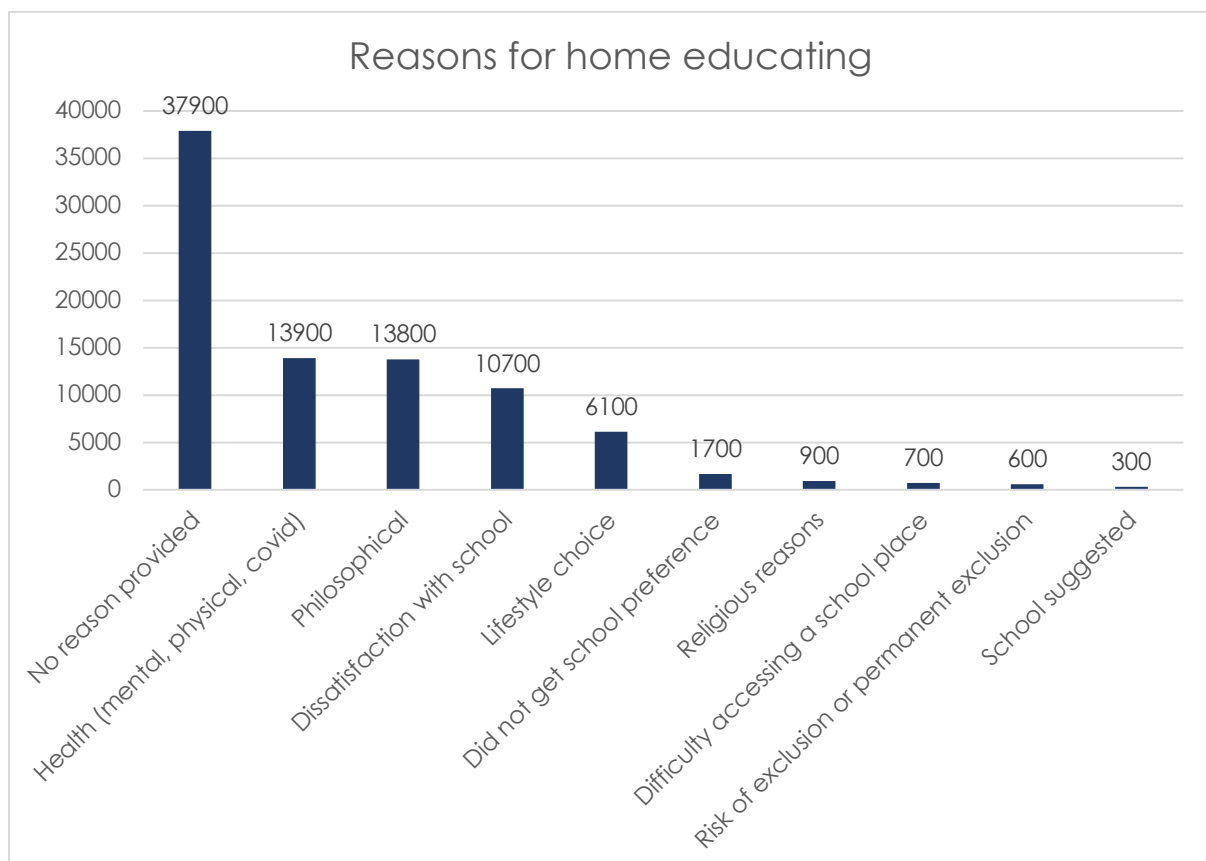
For 37,900 out of 86,200, the reason for home education is not known.

This is perhaps not surprising given that this is the first time that local authorities have been asked to collect and report this data.

Of the 48,700 where a reason is provided, the majority of these – 27,900 – are for reasons other than philosophical, lifestyle or religion.

The most common reason among this 27,900 is health (13,900), the majority (9100) being for mental ill-health and 3,200 with health concerns relating to Covid-19. The second highest is 'dissatisfaction with school' (10,700), which combines issues relating to bullying, SEND provision, and general dissatisfaction. A smaller number did not get their school preference (1700), had difficulty accessing a school place (700), were at risk of exclusion or permanently excluded (600), or were home educating at the school's suggestion (300).

The way that the data is currently collected does not allow us to explore whether reasons for home educating vary by the school year at which the decision is made.



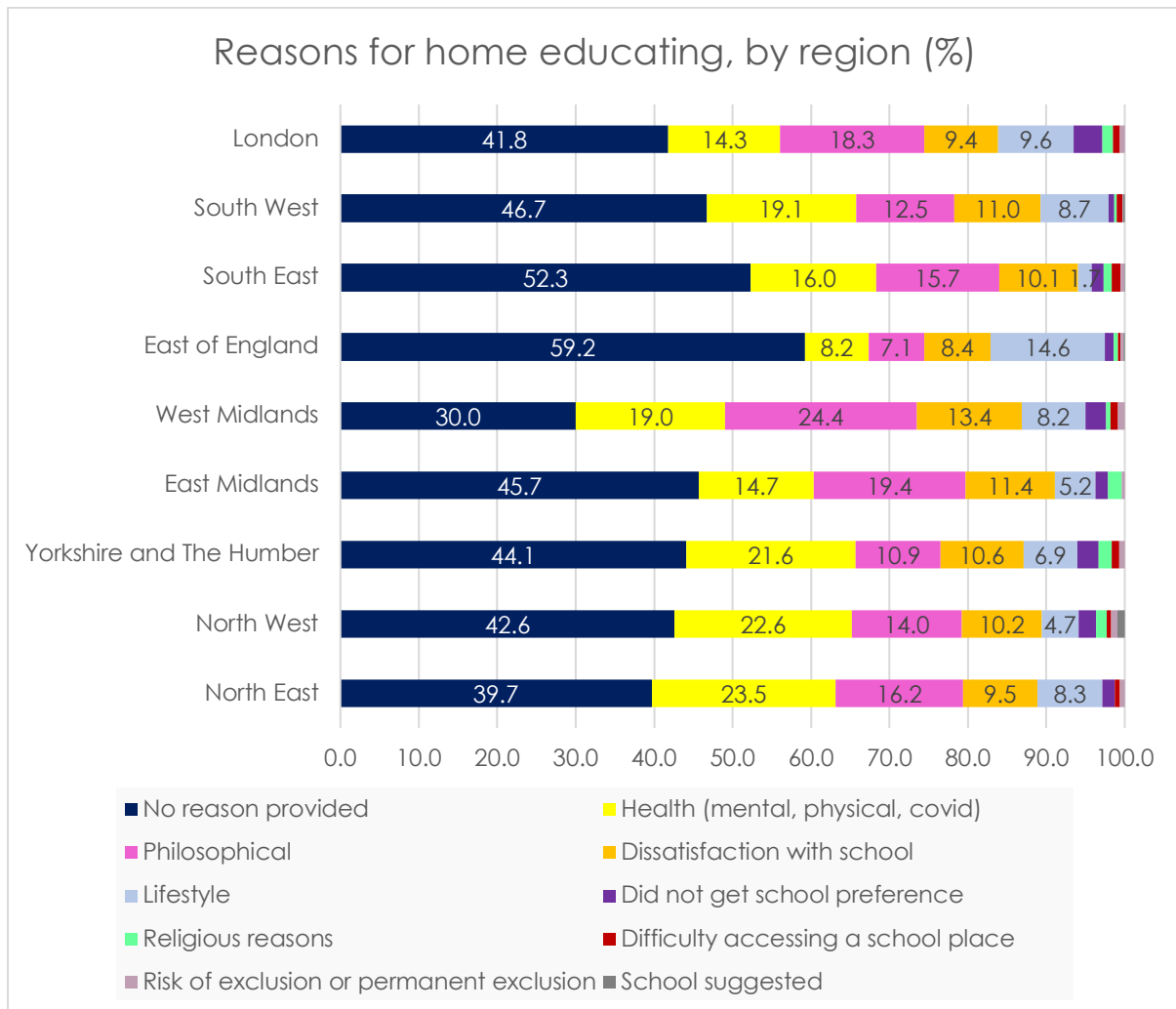
4. The reasons for home educating vary by region.



The reasons given for home educating vary substantially by region, particularly in the extent to which reasons are unknown, ranging from **30%** in West Midlands, to **59%** in East of England.

Although health is the most cited known reason overall, there are three regions – London, West Midlands, and East Midlands – where a higher proportion cite philosophical reasons.

Again, it will be interesting to see what happens to these variations if/when there is a reduction in the proportion for whom the reasons for home educating are unknown.

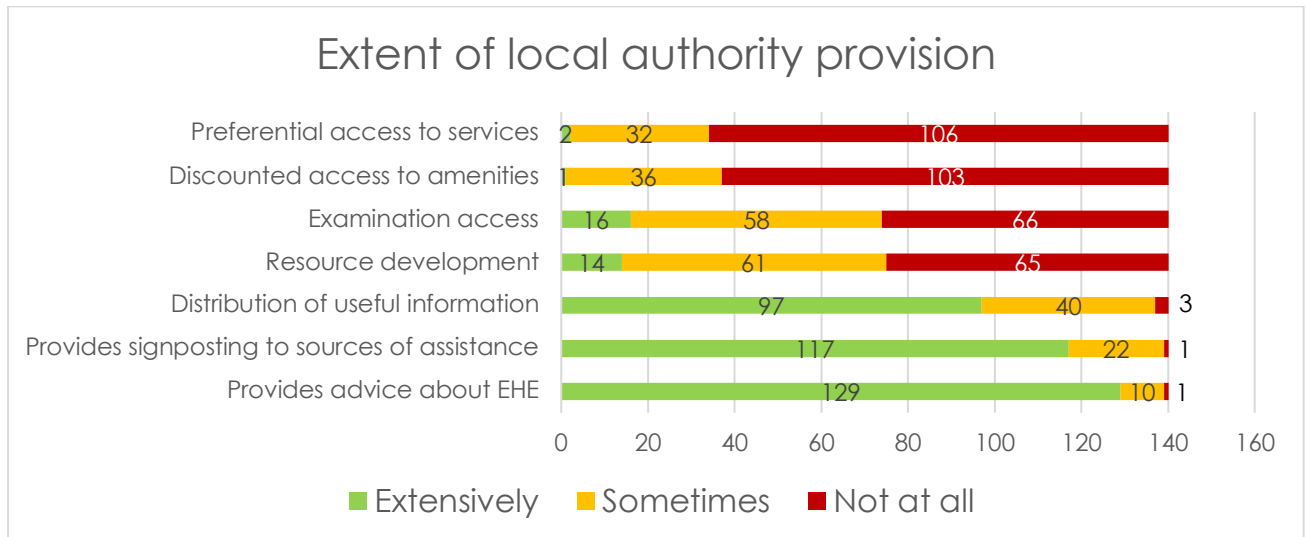


5. It is a norm for information to be provided, but not services.

The DfE collected information on the services and support provided to home educating young people.

While the provision of information and advice is common – most Local Authorities reporting that they do this extensively – few provide direct support.

The fact that only sixteen authorities provide extensive support for access to exams is of particular concern considering that a very large number of home educating young people are in year 9 or above, when qualifications, often required to access post -16 education, training and employment, are critical.



Summary

The new DfE data helps to further highlight many of the concerns that schools, local authorities, and charities have had about the rapid growth in home educating young people.

Critically, it highlights the number of families that are taking this decision in response to other challenges, whether this be ill health, dissatisfaction with school provision, or being unable to access preferred school choice.

It also highlights the extent to which there is limited or sometimes no provision to home educating families.

Until young people are 16 years of age, all statutory careers provision is delivered through schools – which means that many home educated young people are missing out on impartial advice, information, and guidance to plan their futures. Provision outside of school can be limited to online information, and there is little facilitated access to this.

There is a growing need for careers information, advice, and guidance to be extended to the increasing number of pre 16 young people that are outside of school.

Finally, while parts of the picture remain incomplete, it is very encouraging to see so many local authorities now reporting this data, and DfE making it available.

The DfE data, [and our own research](#), underlines the fact that action needs to be taken now to fully understand the needs of home educated young people when it comes to removing barriers and helping them plan their futures.

Read our report: [‘Non-elective home education understanding the rise of reluctant home educators and potential support models for parents and young people’](#), (December 2022)

Five things we learned from the new Department for Education (DfE) data on home education



01

There is substantial regional variation in both the number and proportion of home educated young people

Differences in the number of home-educating young people across regions will in part reflect regional variations in the total size of the student population. Because of this, it's more helpful to look at home educating young people as a proportion of the total number of students in each region.

02

Points of transition are a big factor in school de-registration

The number of home educating young people increases across school years, such that there are almost 20 times the number in year 11 as there are in Reception. There is a 237% increase in those that are home educating between Reception and Year 1 and a further 40% increase between Year 1 and Year 2. For the remainder of primary, year-on-year increases are between 12%-15%.

03

We don't know why many choose to home educate but where known, the indication is that it's not a philosophical or lifestyle choice

For 37,900 out of 86,200, the reason for home education is not known. Of the 48,700 where a reason is provided, the majority of these (27,900) are for reasons other than philosophical, lifestyle or religion.

04

The reasons for home educating vary by region

The reasons given for home educating vary substantially by region, particularly in the extent to which reasons are unknown, ranging from 30% in West Midlands, to 59% in East of England. Although health is the most cited known reason overall, there are three regions – London, West Midlands, and East Midlands – where a higher proportion cite philosophical reasons.

05

It is a norm for information to be provided, but not services

While provision of information and advice to home educating young people is common, few authorities provide direct support. Only 16 extensively provide support for access to exams. A very large number of home educating young people are in Year 9 or above, when qualifications supporting access to post-16 education, training and employment are critical.





To find out more about Career Connect's research into home education, contact Gary Mundy, Director of Research and Evaluation:

gary.mundy@careerconnect.org.uk