

SUBMISSION TO SCRUTINY

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on **Early Years Education/Provision.**

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REGISTERED

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3 - 4 year-olds

I will start with this age-group, as currently it is the most contentious.

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Who needs Nursery Provision?

One could argue that Nursery Provision is needed by all parents for the benefit of their children's social development, but there are some (a few) who would not see this as essential.

However, because of Jersey's incredibly high cost of Housing, **our economy is based on both parents earning in the vast majority of households.** I am not talking about the lower paid; the families in which both parents **MUST** work for family survival include those who earn well above the average income. There was a time when the second income was a bonus, but for most it has become essential, and it is those parents who **NEED** Nursery provision, rather than just use it because they consider it a good experience for their children.

So what have Education provided? For those parents who either do not need to work or can miraculously juggle their working hours to fit, there are **FREE** places at many of the Islands Primary Schools. The hours are generally from around 9.00am to 2.45pm, with no provision at all in the school holidays; clearly these arrangements are totally inconvenient for the parent working normal hours, and I doubt whether there are many employers willing to accommodate 10 – 2 as a working day. Consequently unless there is extensive family help the **FREE** provision is not an option, and Nursery provision must be paid for at a Private Nursery, with a cost of in excess of £200 per week. In other words, one parent is probably working for next to nothing in order to give their child a social education and a head start for school.

On the other hand, the family with sufficient income to allow one parent not to work – i.e. could presumably easily afford Private Nursery fees – and therefore available for the late start and early finish of the School Nurseries, can avail themselves of the **FREE** places. I suspect Robin Hood would have handled the situation differently!!

In summary, those that can afford to pay get 38 weeks of 30 hours Nursery provision FREE, while those who MUST work have to pay a Private Nursery for 52 weeks of 50 hours a week. This cannot be fair – or right.

Unless the Nursery provision at the Primary Schools can be extended to run the normal Nursery hours of 8.00am – 6.00pm there has to be some balancing of the financial burden. At the moment working parents **DO NOT HAVE SENSIBLE ACCESS** to the free places, which is discriminatory.

Possible solution

I would suggest that parents are offered Nursery Vouchers which can be used either at a Primary School Nursery or at a Private Nursery, the latter being able to claim the value from the Education Department. The number of hours and weeks for which Vouchers are offered will depend on the available finance. If, for instance, the figures of 38 weeks of 30 hours are used, then at least all parents will have been treated the same. If this cannot be sustained on the grounds of finance, then reduce it for all, and require those attending Primary School Nurseries to pay towards the cost. Again, all parents will have been seen to be treated the same.

Birth – 3 years

This is a different matter altogether because currently there is no free provision. For many working parents the Maternity Leave arrangements satisfactorily cover the first few months, after which it is decision time. While most families accept that they will need to pay for child care at this stage, the charges could be incorporated in the Social Security arrangements – the ones that have been deferred until next year! Again a voucher system would work, but based on means, not equality. A sliding scale with more vouchers for the poorest and none at all for the most well-off could alleviate the problem for many working mothers, and enable the local work-force to be maintained. Good news for the housing situation, I would have thought, as this obviously reduces the need for imported labour.

You will see from the above that I am passionate about the discrimination of the first group, and less so about the second, seeing this as a social service rather than righting a wrong.

I do not understand why the Primary School Nurseries are staffed by people on the same terms as schoolteachers. Why are they not employed on the same terms as Nursery Staff, with their hours of work and conditions of service? Presumably the staff in Primary School Nurseries are required to have the same training as those in Private Nurseries, and one would have imagined they would have expected to work the normal Nursery hours, which are generally from 8.00am until 6.00pm. It is not the same job as that of a schoolteacher, so why is it being treated as if it was? You would do well to investigate this; you may even find that some trained teachers are being employed as Nursery Staff, which I believe would not be permitted in the Private Sector.

I hope the above is clear, and that you will consider it in your deliberations. You may contact me if you should require any clarification.