

STATES OF JERSEY



ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2009 (P.113/2008): TENTH AMENDMENT

Lodged au Greffe on 2nd September 2008
by the Deputy of St. Ouen

STATES GREFFE

PAGE 2, PARAGRAPH (a) –

In paragraph (a)(iii) after the words “pages 16 to 18” insert the words –

“except that –

- (a) in success criterion (i) in Objective 1 on page 16, after the words ‘take account of Scrutiny Report’ there shall be inserted the words ‘and working with the Council of Ministers, the appropriate funding identified and provided for in the 2010 Business Plan in order to provide an integrated and equitable early years education for all 3 to 4 year-olds’; and
- (b) after success criterion (i) in Objective 1 on page 16 there shall be inserted the following success criterion (with the subsequent success criteria renumbered) –
 - ‘(ii) spending reductions identified in the Comptroller and Auditor General’s report entitled “Emerging Issues” presented to the States on 19th May 2008 achieved in order to fund an equitable early years education for all 3 to 4 year-olds from September 2009;’ ”.

DEPUTY OF ST. OUEN

REPORT

Part (a)

The aim of the above amendments is to ensure the delivery of a fair and equitable entitlement to quality Early Years education and care commencing in September 2009.

The Scrutiny report on Early Years presented to the States on 29th April 2008 (S.R.5/2008) concluded that the present system of providing free Early Years education and care for children in the academic year in which they turn 4 is inequitable. This is also the view of many parents and other agencies, including the Jersey Child Care Trust (JCCT), who want both; equality in opportunity of Early Years education for 3 to 4 year-olds coupled with choice and flexibility.

Despite many reports and a great deal of time spent looking into this issue, the States of Jersey still does not have a clear, integrated and equitable Early Years strategy.

I am therefore pleased that, as a result of the Scrutiny Panel's work, the Minister is proposing to review existing strategy, taking account of information contained in that report.

What is not clear is what happens next?

The Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel identified a number of issues in its report which need to be resolved before a strategy is implemented. The Panel identified that there has been a lack of planning for the implementation of this service and, as a result, funding has yet to be identified. Also, due to the lack of flexibility offered together with wraparound care, the needs of both the children and working parents are not being properly addressed.

In response to one of the recommendations contained in the Scrutiny Panel's report a consultation exercise was commissioned by the Minister, which was undertaken by the JCCT in July. Following the consultation, a report has been compiled and was published in August this year.

One of the first issues the report raises is that the consultation study was itself limited because there is an absence of detailed cost implications for the options considered.

The issue of funding was raised too by the Scrutiny Panel. Their Key Finding 3.2.11 reads: "The Department of Education Sport and Culture has not identified funding to deliver a free entitlement of Early Years education for all three and four year-olds."

The conclusions contained in the JCCT report published in August this year raises a number of points of which I believe States members should be aware.

These are –

- The favoured option is considered to be a private/public partnership which best meets the needs of all 3 to 4 year-olds.
- Fair nursery places for all 3 to 4 year-olds, not only means access to all but should also link good quality.
- Establishing an hourly rate with private providers should involve some open discussion with all stakeholders.

In the final paragraph they state "This consultation exercise has shown that those stakeholders concerned with the issue of nursery places for 3 to 4 year-olds are willing to engage and work together to create a fairer system. The Early Years and Childcare Partnership would offer an appropriate forum for these recommendations to be implemented by the Education, Sport and Culture Department in time to meet the timescale set by the Scrutiny Panel."

Clearly the JCCT recognise that much work still has to be undertaken to provide the favoured option. This view is mirrored by the success criteria contained in the Education, Sport and Culture section of the Business Plan, which itself highlights the need for further work. There is clearly an expectation that the proposed review to be undertaken by the Department will address the issues.

It is my opinion that reviews are unlikely to succeed unless appropriate, detailed costings are undertaken, allowing for the required funding to be fully identified and allowed for.

This is the reason for my amendment; I believe that, if approved, the inclusion of these words will help to ensure that the appropriate funding is secured and included in the 2010 Business Plan and beyond.

Part (b)

Part (a) addresses only part of the solution to funding the delivery of free entitlement of Early Years education to all 3 to 4 year-olds.

The intention of this amendment is not to *reduce* the budget of the Education, Sport and Culture Department, but to enable the Department to reprioritise allocated expenditure to help fund the provision of a more equitable Early Years education for all 3 to 4 year-olds.

As the school year and timescale attached to the Scrutiny report does not fit with the Business Plan timetable, the issue of how to fund the provision of Early Years education in 2009 needs to be addressed. To meet the timescale set by the Scrutiny Panel, and supported by the JCCT, funding is required in time for the start of the new school year in September 2009.

It is therefore important to consider how funding could be provided within the 2009 cash limits as proposed by the Council of Ministers and agreed by the States last year.

In the recent Comptroller and Auditor General's report entitled "Emerging Issues" short-term spending reductions were identified in the Education, Sport and Culture budget, these amounting to a total of £690,000. It should be noted that most of the spending reductions contained in the report were as a result of Chief Officers' involvement.

This indicates that if the spending reductions *were* achieved by the Department over the next 12 months sufficient monies would be made available to fund the cost of Early Years education for 3 to 4 year-olds from September 2009 until the end of the year.

Although I accept that spending reductions are sometimes difficult to achieve, this would be one way of the Department taking the lead in order to help finance a more equitable service by reprioritising its expenditure. At the same time, it would practically demonstrate the Department's determination to play their part in delivering fair nursery places for all 3 to 4 year-olds. In part, this determination is already apparent in the Objectives and Success Criteria included elsewhere in the Department's business plan.

Under Objective 2, Success Criteria (iii) it states: "New funding formula implemented for Highlands College." This reflects one area identified by the Comptroller and Auditor General in his report, where opportunities exist to reduce surplus funding for the College to a more realistic level.

In my opinion, the combination of reprioritising the Education, Sport and Culture budget, together with the appropriate additional funding being secured and included in the 2010 Business Plan will help to guarantee that, at last, the States would be able to offer a fair and equitable Early Years education for all 3 to 4 year-olds commencing in September 2009.

If successful, this proposal will also ensure that the planned additional work is undertaken in the certain knowledge that a commitment has been made by this Assembly to identify funds to be available for September 2009 onwards.

Financial and manpower implications

There are no additional financial or manpower implications anticipated in 2009 as the cost of introducing a fair and equitable Early Years education for all 3 to 4 year-olds will be covered within the Education, Sport and Culture Department's proposed 2009 net revenue expenditure as described in Summary Table A.

If all spending reductions identified in the Emerging Issues report are achieved by the Department an amount totalling £690,000 will be available to be used to fund the ongoing provision of the improved service. Additional financial resources for 2010 and beyond can only be fully identified when the proposed review to be carried out by E,S&C has been completed. However based on figures identified in this year's Business Plan the additional amount could be circa £1 million.