

# A Sustainable Provision of Early Years for Children Aged up to Five

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## Jesey Early Years Association

### Introduction – The Current Model

The objective of this plan is to provide a vision for a new, fit for purpose, properly funded, equitable, sustainable and accessible Early Years (EY) model for all parents and children up to the age of five to access.

The model must coordinate the disparate range of current providers, which include:

- The Public and Private, Voluntary and Independent (“PVI”) sectors
- Not for profit organisations
- Nursery units attached to private schools
- Child minders
- Full time and term time providers
- Settings catering for differing age group – birth to three, three to five, birth to four/five
- The Jersey Child Care Trust and other relevant charities
- Settings in urban and rural locations

The mission is to provide all Early Years children in the Island the best possible start and prepare them for their launch into Primary Education, simultaneously offering parents the choice of pathway they wish to follow.

The need for a new model requires an urgent readjustment of the Ministerial ambitions to widen the scope of Early Years funding to all children from **birth to aged five**.

In determining the model, EY policy cannot be the sole prerogative of Education. The sector needs a more inclusive Government of Jersey approach encompassing Families and Children, Health, Economic Development, the Children’s Commissioner and maybe others.

The current EY model is a mismatch of:

- Over, and under, capacity of places, depending on the age range
- Provision of service - full time (45 hours a week, 52 weeks a year) and term time (up to 30 hours a week, term time only)
- A post code lottery of locations where unused resources are often in the wrong place
- Discriminatory access to support initiatives such as Pupil Premium funding only available through school nurseries
- Differing and long held ethos of what the best EY provision looks like, put boldly – Education versus Care
- A considerable waste of financial resources in infrastructure and staffing over many years which has resulted in an overcapacity of 170 empty places in the Primary School nurseries and which is set to get much worse as the lower birth rate kicks in
- Patchy access to a hot midday meal

- Differing recruitment requirements, competing salary structures for the scarce resource of new staff
- Staffing ratios

However, the most serious impediment to better quality of service coupled with much greater financial efficiency is that the two elements of current EY provision – public and PVI - are inextricably dependent on each other, but at the same time are set up to compete with each other.

### **Two Competing Models**

There are two incompatible financial models. The PVI sector is entirely dependent on the creation of fee income, with no other revenue sources, while the public sector is Government funded, with, depending on policy, access to seemingly unlimited resources.

The imbalance is exacerbated because one side (the public sector) is at the same time regulator of EY in the PVI sector as well as being its competitor. All this while currently the PVI sector supports 75% of EY demand and the public sector just 25%.

The Government of Jersey can, of course, vote to alter the current model including offering parents financial support.

**However, the PVI sector, which is independent of government and is charged with providing the service, fears the unforeseen consequences of the Minister of Education's current proposals threaten the very existence of Early Years provision in Jersey.**

If a majority of politicians and the Government of Jersey wish to sweep away the entire PVI EY sector, make policy and fund a new plan for all children up to the age of five, then that's their prerogative.

However, if that's not what is really intended then there is an urgent need for change...

### **A New Model for Early Years – Five W's**

**What** is needed?

The Jersey Funding Formula for Schools and last year's Isos Partnership "Round Table" exercise into Early Years help provide the key.

**A clear mission statement, of what children and parents can expect the Island's new coordinated EY system to have delivered in preparation for their best transition to Primary Education, is needed.**

It must emphasise equality of opportunity for all, while allowing parental choice of pathway and be based on best practice provided by a highly trained and progressive workforce in the appropriate environment.

The statement will be the blueprint under which the public and PVI sectors can be coordinated, funded and developed – two systems working as one – more productive and efficient and less expensive.

**To continue the role of CEYS as regulator of EY in the island but with a new expanded role and impartial reporting lines that see it sit within a ministry separate to that which provides the Public Sector Early Years offering. (Two ministries currently exist – the Ministry for Education and Lifelong Learning and the Ministry for Children and Families, it therefore**

**appear perverse that the Minister with responsibility for regulating 75% of EY provisions is also responsible for providing the remaining 25% of EY care and Education.**

Key tasks will include:

- Balancing the implementation of Government policies within the financial and practical availability of the wider EY framework
- The close monitoring of supply and demand for all EY places, to eliminate the current over and under supply of places
- Overseeing the recruitment, training and retention of all EY employees. (See below.)
- Primary point of contact with the Government of Jersey, encompassing Families and Children, Health, Economic Development, the Children's Commissioner outside agencies and relevant charities on all relevant EY issues

**Who** will deliver and **Where**

**It is envisaged that delivery of the service remains best delivered in a mixture of primary school and PVI specialist settings. The choice currently offered to parents would be maintained.**

With perfect hindsight, the Education policy of the past two decades seeking to build new nursery facilities to every Primary school can be seen to be flawed having taken no account of hyper-local demographics, total capacity (when added to the PVI sector) and changing economic circumstances, now best exemplified by a falling birth rate.

However, the resulting over capacity in school nurseries – which is due to get much worse – affords the exciting opportunity for the establishment of EY “hubs” as recommended in the ISOS report, located in the vacated facilities and potentially funded from the Education Department's claim for £1.5m additional funding this November.

Meanwhile, PVI sector settings are the most adaptable to offer “wrap around” daily and holiday provision. They have been privately funded, designed and registered to meet the special space, safety and other regulations required for birth to two and for three to five years and seek to have an appropriately trained workforce.

**What** does a new workforce look like?

The traditional EY model, as well as one in the future, face two fundamental employment issues-

- i) The immediate short-term need to recruit, train and retain more employees; and,
- ii) To simultaneously transition to a new type of workforce with wider skills and the ability to work in a more demanding and complex EY environment.

Currently the greatest threat to recruitment and retention is the constraints placed on salary packages by the financial model, meaning that EY providers are unable to meet salary expectations of young professionals and as a consequence they are lost to other sectors and government providers who are unconstrained by the same financial model.

Public sector, PVI sector and charities like the JCCT continually recruit from each other to the short-term advantage of one, but the wider disadvantage of all.

**A new, central training organisation working in partnership with both the public and PVI sectors could help to solve these problems and reset the perception of a career in childcare as a new, multifaceted, well paid employment opportunity.**

With a guaranteed starting salary for new recruits set around, or above, the future Living Wage, increasing in line with skills, experience and qualifications to parity with colleagues in primary and secondary education, we would advocate an apprenticeship-style model with training periods in either (or both) schools and PVI nurseries, supplemented by opportunities for experience in more specialist disciplines such as Special Educational Needs.

Funding would come from a mix of Government training budgets and salaries.

A spin off of this initiative would be to persuade parents – skilled in the upbringing of their own children – to use their experience by turning or returning to EY employment.

### **Who pays?**

**The current financial model is broken and in crisis.**

In 75% of EY cases, the parents' fees pay for everything with the exception of the Nursery Education Funding scheme from three to four-year-olds (NEF), targeted Government support initiatives and charitable assistance.

The result is the rapidly escalating cost of EY due to legitimate salary demands (approximately 70% of total costs) and the rapidly changing nature of the sector is mostly met by parents and this is no longer economically nor socially viable.

**A new financial model is urgently required, potentially involving all stakeholders – parents, Government, employers, charities and nursery operators. The collapse of the current EY model will have a profound and devastating on all these groups as well as on the Island's macroeconomic position.**

The need for fundamental change is urgent.