

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel

EARLY YEARS REVIEW

On behalf of the Parish of St. Helier Day Nurseries

With reference to your Terms of Reference, we make the following responses;

1. **To consider what is required for the effective delivery of early years education and care, with particular regards to the needs of:**

The Children

In order to meet the needs of these very young children the environment should be safe, happy, secure and stimulating. There is vast research showing the need for attachment and **continuity of care** with a recommended ratio of 1 adult to 8 children for 3 to 5 yr olds. Care and Education go hand in hand – if a child is well cared for, and their emotional and social needs are met by carers who are consistent, sensitive and responsive to the child’s needs, they are more likely to develop cognitive skills. There is much research that shows children who have not had secure attachments in a caring environment have problems in later life, socially, educationally and emotionally so **continuity of care** at this delicate age is vital.

It is not in a child’s best interests to move from one environment to another yet some children have 4 or 5 placements before they even reach school. For example, they may go to a family day carer (childminder), then to a day nursery, then to a nursery class. Some children even move to States nursery classes attached to primary schools that the child may not eventually attend. This means these children experience many different changes, both environment and carers in nursery class, wrap around care and school holidays.

Research into brain development tells us that in order for the brain to reach its full potential children need the opportunity to play freely and have the opportunity to explore and investigate the world around them (Santer et al, 2007). Furthermore, they warn that ‘too formal too soon’ can create long-term problems, particularly in relation to learning and social development. Thus, confirming that the right environment is paramount for effective delivery of Early years Care and Education (ECE).

Furthermore, all children should have equal access to early childhood education regardless of their parents’ financial status.

The Parents

The parents want a safe, happy, secure environment of their choice (not based on cost) confident that their child will experience similar Foundation Stage practices in the facility they choose for their child.

The Providers

Access to funding for the Foundation Stage would enable the private provider to survive the current economic climate.

Providers working together, sharing expertise across all settings would be in the best interests of the children and their families, recognising that children have differing needs.

All providers and practitioners should have equitable access to all training courses in early childhood education regardless of their work setting.

2. To consider the stated aims of the Minister for ESC in providing all 3 to 4 yr olds with 20 hours of early years education for 38 weeks a year:

Cost and resource implications

Research advises that early investment in young children pays dividends later in life, with less behavioural problems, more emotional stability and higher achievement throughout school to adulthood.

The offer of 20 hours for all children is a step forward but does not provide equity as some children will still receive 30 hours of free ECE in the nursery classes.

Funding is an issue as the recommended £1.5 million has not yet been found. Suggestions of charging for the extra 10 hrs (in the nursery classes) appear to have been dismissed as no longer an option. However, this charge would meet approximately half of the money needed to fund the private sector.

At present, the Jersey Child Care Trust has raised money in order to fund children in the private sector for a maximum of 15hrs per week for children in need of support. This funding raising would not be necessary if there was equitable access.

This year ESC have diluted their services to ECE by taking 1 extra child into each nursery class putting up the ratio of 1 adult to 10 even higher whereas the private sector works with 1: 8 ratio and would need special permission from Day Care Registration to go over the ratio. This extra child must have a cost implication that could be spent on equity.

The States could give the money from Child Care Allowance directly towards the ESC funding.

ESC could save money by not employing a co-ordinator for the proposed project as this could be organised through the partnership.

The Parish nurseries already have resources of staff and equipment in place so there would be no further outlay need in that area.

Equity of access

Offering 20hrs is a step forward but cannot be considered equitable as the nursery classes will still offer 30 hrs free unless ESC decides to charge for the remaining 10hrs.

ESC could fulfil their original remit of a free place for every child by offering a part-time place only. Research for the EPPE project (Sylva et al, 2004) found that full-time attendance led to no better gains for children than part-time attendance.

The current position creates political unrest and division between tax payers when some parents have free access and the rest have to pay not only nursery fees but tax that pays for free states nursery places – in effect paying twice!

Equity of access may reduce the number of children currently attending illegal/unregistered care.

Potential Impact of Partnerships

At present there is no partnership between the private and public sector and the expertise within the private sector is often disregarded by the staff in the public sector. Current issues:

- Relevant training for ECE
- Differing staff / child ratios
- Differing standards and regulatory policy
- Definition of quality
- Continuous professional development
- Parental partnerships

The impact of partnerships should improve working relationships and by sharing expertise will create the opportunity for open, honest debate on the many of the current issues and differences, particularly relating to quality.

Expectations and requirements of parents who wish to work

Parents want to go to work knowing that their child is being well cared for in a safe, secure, stimulating and happy environment. The Parish of St. Helier (non-profit making) day nurseries offer these facilities along with flexible hours for parents to support them in the workplace. Unfortunately it is expensive to provide quality ECE, particularly when paying decent wages for qualified, experienced staff, and these costs are passed on to the parent. If the Government wants to encourage mothers back to the workplace to support the economy they should take responsibility and support affordable, accessible child care initiatives.

For many parents the financial stress creates family hardships and some single parents are worse off by taking employment than if they had stayed at home living on welfare. The ESC proposal could help take away the financial stress for some but would not create equity.

With financial help parents would have more freedom to choose the best environment for their child.

The proposal could help merge barriers and prejudices' that have been created by ESC past policy.

3. To consider how the Department of ESC's work on the provision of education and childcare for 3 to 4 yrs olds will fit in with an overall integrated strategy for 0 to 4 yr olds.

A **well planned** integrated strategy could benefit children and their families and the population if it was economically sound. ESC's proposal is a step forward but does not take into account the needs of children under 3 yrs old that are just as important. Unfortunately past ill-thought through political decisions are now coming back to haunt us and we are using a 'sticking plaster' approach to solve current problems. Parents need financial help **now** and we seem to have no other alternative than push forward with the 20 hour proposal. £1.5 million is not a lot of money for the States of Jersey to fund considering all the benefits to children, parents and the island as a whole.

4. To examine any further issues relating to the topic that may arise in the course of the Scrutiny Review and which the panel considers relevant.

The bottom line:

- Past political decisions are now impacting on family life
- ECE is expensive
- ECE is inequitable
- ECE is not accessible
- Public & Private providers of ECE currently divided (should be working in partnership)
- Unregistered/illegal child minding is growing rapidly
- Parental access to State financial help is disjointed and unfair
- Parental access to a States nursery class is a lottery

References:

Santer, J., Griffiths, C., Goodall, D. (2007) *Free Play in Early Childhood*: National Children's Bureau; London.

Sylva, K., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Taggart, B, (2004) *Effective Provision for Preschool Education Project: Final Report*. London: DfEE and Institute of Education, University of London.

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