

Response to Scrutiny Call for Evidence on Early Years

This response seeks to consider what is required for the effective delivery of early years education and care, with particular regard to the needs of the following:

- **The children**
- **The parents**
- **The providers of care and education**

From the perspective of

Historical Background to the Response

When the political decision was taken by the States to support the then Education Committee in its decision to build nursery units attached to primary schools the impact on the existing child care community was not considered. The Committee became involved in this non-statutory education upon the advice of the Early Years Advisor. There was no consultation about this intention. The senior management team of the Dept for ESC is historically from the teaching profession, which does not give the broad skills base necessary to predict and plan for the impact of such decisions. A career civil servant leading this team would ensure a broader and deeper vision that takes account of the needs of the whole community.

The commitment of the Committee to this expensive non statutory education required specialised staffing, at the high salary cost demanded by teachers, and the need to recruit from outside of Jersey. This skill was, and to a degree still is, not within this community so in order not to incur additional expense teachers were recruited from further up the school for the nursery classes and have struggled with understanding the needs of the young child. I can offer evidence to support this claim.

The financial knock on effect of the nursery class policy to the private sector has led to financial despair for many establishments. runs a day nursery for 56 children age 2 to 5yrs. This month all 32 places are full in the 3/4yr old group. However, we have only been in this ideal situation for two months and by Sept 1st there will be only 14 children in this group, with not all attending full time. We will then start again building up numbers over the next year only to face the same exodus to nursery classes, or school at aged four years next year. I am happy to share our nursery accounts in order to demonstrate the financial effect of the exodus that we face every year as 3yr olds move from the private to the maintained sector.

The present situation begs for consultation and debate as to whether these very young children thrive better with care or education, and should have so many changes early in their young life. There seems to be an overriding assumption that education for these children is of greater value

that in a caring and education environment and the terminology Education and Care rather than Care and Education that has appeared in all Ministerial Reports seems to support this.

The Children

It is the view of practitioners at [redacted] that young children need a more holistic approach to their development and need to be cared for before they can be educated, although it is difficult to separate the two.

I can share examples of issues that have occurred where the child has not been the focus of the solution.

[redacted] Our staff have daily contact with schools accommodating children in the Foundation Stage teams. We hold evidence of professional 'protectiveness' that has prevented all people in the child's life from coming together as professionals and parents, because of what appears as professional rivalry, rather than communicating to ensure the child receives the most appropriate care. The school team always seem to assume total knowledge of the child, and will marginalise the [redacted] care team, ([redacted] Again, I am willing to share these examples with you.

This year the youngest child leaving [redacted] Nursery to attend a nursery class has a date of birth 23.08.04; the oldest child leaving us for a nursery class has a date of birth 12.09.03. This gives an age difference of 1 year 1 month. The differences in the developmental levels of these children are enormous, yet the teaching profession will insist that they will be offering the best chance to both children. In the care world, these children would not be grouped together in this way, by insistence from the requirements of registration. Under the terms of our registration this is for reasons of good practice.

The Parents

We have evidence from conversations with our parents that they feel they have no choice other than to remove their child from our day nursery and accept a place in the school nursery class. This is a decision based entirely on financial necessity, and most parents in this situation state that they would prefer to leave their child with the known team of carers and the friends the child has made. Also from conversations with parents, we have deduced that they prefer the emphasis on care to education for their young children. (This is backed by evidence from the thesis of Dr Sandra Mountford)

Parents continually come to us for a solution that will enable them to pay our fees, and they seem desperate for some effective support with child care, even though both parents work to support their family in Jersey.

The greatest concern I have is that the most vulnerable children are not accessing child care on the island for two main reasons; (1) Cultural differences prevent children coming to fee paying day nurseries as the developmental needs of children within the family are of low priority and it is seen as failure to use professional care. (2) The cost of nursery care is much greater than that of illegal care. The child development aspect is not valued as quality care, or is not understood or seen as worthy of commitment.

The providers of care and education

My main concern is that there needs to be an acceptance of the child care professional as an equal, by other professionals in the community.

Within all professions there are effective and non-effective practitioners. The child care profession in Jersey holds qualifications from a basic qualification to Masters level. However, there is an overriding assumption that the teaching profession is more academically qualified, which per say offers a better environment for children. This assumption needs to be disputed.

What is more worrying is that the Minister for Education has publicly reinforced this belief on a number of occasions, and the dismissive approach of the Minister and the Assistant Director, Schools and Colleges seems to perpetuate this myth. The inability of the Foundation Stage Advisor to work collaboratively with the private sector has further kept the two disciplines apart. The actions of the Assistant Director, by giving priority to the maintained sector, has marginalised the private sector despite having responsibility for the standards in both sectors. The vision for early years provision in Jersey found in papers to the Council of Ministers belongs to a chosen few and has not been determined by consultation. I imagine that this is so because the findings from consultation may not agree with this pre-determined vision.

Providers of child care in Jersey require Highlands College, as the only training establishment in Jersey, to offer child care qualifications above Level 3 in order to serve the needs of the community, but Highlands seem to have forgotten this mandate. Many childcare workers come to the profession later in life, they are predominately women so will usually have duties of care towards their own families and cannot leave the island to study. Historically child care workers develop as they work and gain confidence in their abilities, but they need academic courses to support this development, at all levels.

There is evidence from tutors at Highlands College that many students on the Diploma in Child Care have aspirations for a higher academic qualification. Highlands College used to offer a part time Diploma in Child Care and Education to match the needs of the childcare community, but despite strong representation from the private sector to re-establish this course, this request has been ignored.

What is of most concern about training is that TEP has withdrawn funding for mandatory qualifications, that was of great value to the many small businesses in the community that provide childcare to support the growing working population in Jersey.

This dramatic and sudden change in policy has transferred the entire cost for training staff to the provider. It now costs almost £5,000 to train a nursery manager, so the burden of unsupported cost for training is inevitably passed onto the parents.

Response to the stated aims of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture in providing all 3 to 4 year olds with 20 hours of early years education for 38 weeks a year, with particular reference:

- **Cost and resource implications**
- **Equity of access**
- **Potential impact of partnerships between the public and private sectors**
- **Expectations and requirements of parents who wish to work.**

Cost and resource implications

The cost of the Early Years initiative is estimated at £1.5 million. However this would seem to be an optimistic figure as the calculations were done on 2007 prices and the initiative is not due to be implemented until 2009 by which time GST will have affected fees forcing costs in the private sector to be higher than at present.

The other anomaly that will continue to force parents to make a decision based on financial advantage is that schools will be offering 30 hours free care for 38 weeks, not 20 hours.

Schools do not have direct accounting and capital spending is not factored in the running costs of the nursery units, neither are the initial resource costs. All private sector capital investment, which is sometimes enforced by regulation, impacts directly on the nursery costs.

Equity of access

This is difficult to determine. As I understand it, the original thinking behind building nursery classes was the positive effect of early intervention for children who could be described as potential children in need.

It is evident to us as providers of day care that for numerous reasons some parents have not the drive to ensure the developmental needs of their children are supported, and early intervention is seen to encourage language and social development in these children. The number of children that fall into this category would seem to be low in relation to the total number of children that take up places in nursery classes, and these places seem to be randomly allocated. How this happens is not easy to see, as the Assistant Director in ESC department responsible for schools is unwilling to publish the criteria used for selection.

Potential impact of partnerships between the public and private sectors

True, equal and respectful partnerships between the public and private sector can only be positive for the children, but Care and Education professionals and Education and Care professionals have different approaches to working with children. Care workers concentrate on care; teachers seem to be obsessed with direct learning, which is not appropriate for children in their early years. At

present the care workers in the nursery classes are considered to be in a minor role to the teacher (the difference in salaries proves this), so they then take on the mantle of a minor role.

As more academic work is emerging which determines the value of free play in children's development, the more it becomes evident that the school environment cannot meet all the needs of children without changing the cultural mandate of the teacher.

Expectations and requirements of parents who wish to work

The evidence we have from speaking to working parents is that they want their children to be safe and happy in a caring environment, and the quality of care is becoming increasingly important to informed parents, who are now understanding and valuing play as opposed to organised play activities. The view that the sooner the children start school the better the academic outcome is becoming out dated. Much academic research raises concerns that children are institutionalised too early. However, parents need affordable, quality care and financial decisions often override this emerging knowledge.

To consider how the Department of Education, Sport and Culture's work on the provision of education and child care for 3 to 4 year olds will fit within an overall, integrated strategy for 0 to 4 year olds.

Not enough recognition has been given to the development of the private childcare sector in Jersey, and the higher levels of quality when compared to England. We can provide you with evidence from visiting childcare professionals from the UK that we have a very high standard of care in Jersey. This is without a doubt due to the work of the registration team, :

We need to re-register every year and this involves an in depth self-evaluation and audit by an officer. The registration team have a duty to develop areas of weakness that are determined at this annual re registration. This has had a profound effect on the quality of care and raises us well above any UK group that are OFSTED registered. The private child care sector is proud of their standard of care.

The standards have been reached and remained constant because of the positive collaborative approach that the regulation team use. This is entirely the work of the Manager of Day Care Registration, Dr Sandra Mountford, who started the work of raising the standard of child care in the private sector in Jersey in 1989.

What is of great concern is that the Manager of Day Care Registration has been marginalised in all work to date on the Early Years Strategy. She has not been included in any open meetings and it is my understanding that her opinion and knowledge has not been sought and she has not been invited to play a primary role in the deliberations.

As stated in my opening paragraph, the Dept for ESC has become involved in non-statutory education. Teachers in the nursery classes do not teach statutory education and this big difference should allow the nursery classes to offer an all year round service by having different working conditions. Nursery teachers do not prepare lessons, take home marking etc in the way that statutory teachers do, so should be able to learn from experience that care and education are interlinked. It should be noted that nursery teachers are employed months ahead of a new nursery class opening, which is a luxury by anybody's standard and probably one that does not offer a return that balances the expense.

The nursery classes in schools should be viewed as a community resource as they are a very expensive drain on public money and very empty during school holidays. The Head teacher of Janvrin School

understands that the type of opportunities we offer for learning cannot be offered by the teaching profession. Rather than following the structure of the school day we provide opportunities for play that no longer exist due to the impact of modern life on childhood.

What is important in this example is that it serves to highlight that with a balance of professionals who respect each other, and other disciplines, partnerships between the public and private sector can be achieved. This would truly support young children.