

STATES OF JERSEY

Education and Home Affairs Early Years Review Sub-Panel

MONDAY, 5th NOVEMBER 2007

Panel:

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence (Chairman)

Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier

Dr. C. Hamer (Panel Adviser)

Witness:

Ms. J. Rogers (La Petite École - representing private nurseries)

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian of St. Lawrence (Chairman):

I would like to welcome you, Jane, and say thank you for coming to speak to us. As you know we are conducting a review on early years education and childcare. This hearing is being recorded and a transcript will be made and sent to you in due course so that you can check it and make sure that your words are correctly attributed. That will probably be about next week. It is also a public document and it will be uploaded to the scrutiny website. You have in front of you the terms of reference, I think they are there, and you are covered by privilege as a witness. So you are able to say what you want to say, in fact. I will just start by introducing myself. I am Deputy Mezbourian of St. Lawrence.

Deputy S. Pitman of St. Helier:

I am Deputy Pitman of St. Helier.

Dr. C. Hamer (Panel Adviser):

I am Dr. Cathy Hamer. I am a child educator and an educational health psychologist specialising in early years, with the Early Childhood Unit of National Children's Bureau.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Tim is our officer. I would like to give apologies from Deputy Gallichan because she has been called away to an urgent meeting. It is okay for the hearing to go ahead as we have a quorum here of 2. Dr. Hamer is able to ask questions as well. What we would hope to do is we have some pre-determined questions for you and I think possibly if we start by asking those we might get a debate or some dialogue going about the way you manage your nursery, unless you want to say something specifically

to us.

Ms. J. Rogers (La Petite École):

No. I am happy to answer any questions.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

That is fine. I will make a start then to ask how parents over here find out about childcare provision?

Ms. J. Rogers:

They get given a booklet, I think, when they are in maternity of all the different facilities. Anybody new to the Island usually is told to ring up Education, Sport and Culture so that they can be told what is in their area and what is available for their age group. Word of mouth: friends with children at nurseries and that sort of thing. If you work for the States, in our particular case it should be displayed on a notice board somewhere that we offer a discount to people who work for the States. So all these sort of areas let people know what is available.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Who would advise newcomers to the Island?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We often find people phoning up just randomly from the phonebook. They look in the Yellow Pages, or they are advised by the people they are working for who to phone. If they phone us and we are full we say to phone Education, Sport and Culture to find out the list.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

So you point them in the right direction.

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

On what basis do children attend your nursery: full or part-time or do you have flexible hours?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We have a variety, really. I would say half are full-time and the others are mornings only or afternoons only or we do 2 or 3 days a week. It depends on what their needs are. We try and accommodate everybody's needs.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

So you are flexible for the parents, really.

Ms. J. Rogers:

It suits us as well because it means that we can slot children into different ... so we can have the nursery full, or as full as we can, because obviously it is a business so we have to try and fill it. So if somebody says they are only working mornings then you fill that area and then somebody else wants just the afternoon.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

That works well for you then?

Ms. J. Rogers:

It seems to work quite well. The admin staff work it all out for us.

Deputy S. Pitman:

So you have part-time places and full-time?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes.

Deputy S. Pitman:

How many full-time and how many part-time?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We do not allocate specifically. We have 130 children at the Fort and 45 at St. Mark's. Of those 175 we have probably got maybe just under 100 full-time and the rest are part-time.

Deputy S. Pitman:

What are the full-time hours?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Full-time hours are 7.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., every day except bank holidays.

Deputy S. Pitman:

The part-time?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Part-time is either 7.30 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. or 1.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. but they can do an extended morning, so we will offer 7.30 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. That suits some people as well. If we can manage it we do that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

What is the age range that you cater for?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We go from 3 months old to school age, depending on when their birthday is, 4-plus.

Dr. C. Hamer:

The question really is around children starting school. I would presume that with the start in the September you therefore have a mass exodus every year, do you?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes, a mass exodus from about the end of July onwards. Parents often take that last month off to be with their children before they start school so they start to leave from July. We usually have 20-plus children leaving each year, plus others obviously that go for various other reasons.

Dr. C. Hamer:

How many choose to stay through to school age?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Quite a lot of ours. We do lose some at 3-plus to go to the States nurseries but I think because of our hours we do keep more than perhaps a term-time only nursery that would lose them. I am pretty sure it is the hours that we offer and the fact that we are all year round helps parents out.

Deputy S. Pitman:

How much contact do you have with prospective primary schools?

Ms. J. Rogers:

A reasonable amount. They often visit us and we will go on a visit with the children to them. I know they organise individual visits for the children when they are about to start.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I know when we came to speak to you, you mentioned something about you would like to have more feedback from the schools that the children go on to.

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes. We get very little feedback. It is part of our requirements that we fill out a form by way of like a report saying where these children are, a summative form, and we send those on to each school that they go to but very rarely do we get any kind of feedback from that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

If there was feedback, do you think it would be beneficial inasmuch as perhaps you could change what you were doing?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We assume as we do not hear anything everything must be all right but we would welcome any interaction because it can only be for the benefit of the children. If we are not doing something right we would like to know about it.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I think that leads on nicely to the learning and development opportunities that you offer to the children under your care.

Ms. J. Rogers:

We have them from so young so we are very much their main carers, a lot of these children, from very early. So we adhere to a programme called Birth to Three Matters, which is guidelines for under-3s, and then the Foundation Stage for plus-3s, which is the same as the schools do. We cover the 6 areas in that Foundation Stage, the same as the schools. We also offer for the preschoolers French and music and swimming lessons. So we like to think that we do that little bit extra for them. The preschool area is very much like it would be in a reception of a school. It is divided up into the same sort of areas, like a quiet area and a maths area and a science area.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

In order to deliver these opportunities for the children, is there a minimum standard of qualification that is needed by any of your staff?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes. We are guided by Education, Sport and Culture as well but they have to have a room supervisor which, although she is not teacher-trained, she is trained to level 3 in childcare education and she has to have a team leaders course as well. Then ideally all the rest of the staff would be trained to that level as well but that never seems to work because there are just not enough staff with that level of qualification.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

That was going to be my next question. Do you have any problems with recruitment or retention?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Recruitment is always difficult. There are various factors. A lot of it is the fact that it is young girls coming into work and they move around anyway. They want to go travelling or whatever. But there is generally, I think, a lack of qualified nursery nurses on the Island. I think all nurseries would say that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Are you helped with training at all?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No. We were through the T.E.P. (Training Employment Partnership) but that has just finished now so we have had our last girls through and the grant for those. So from now on the training is down to us and we have now implemented a scheme where the girls, or boys if we have them, will pay half the cost of their training. It shows some commitment.

Deputy S. Pitman:

How could you see recruitment improving?

Ms. J. Rogers:

I think if the salaries were higher we would attract more people. It is notoriously badly paid. We try our best but it is the same throughout the private sector. I think if we were to pay them their true worth nobody would pay the fees, really. So that is part of it. The long hours, if we could try and reduce the hours, but then we are trying to cater for the parents and in order to cater for those parents we have got to do the long hours otherwise I think we would lose children.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Do you ever have any contact from employers who might like to help in some way towards the childcare provision for their employees?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We have a bank that they guarantee certain places, so they encourage their staff to send their children to us. Basically the fees are just the same. They just want to make sure that there are the spaces because they have a problem with their staff finding nursery places, so we keep like 10 full-time places for them. We have also had another company just inquire about that, whether there is any scheme. The problem with that is that they have to pay. If they want spaces kept they have to pay for it and that becomes expensive if they do not fill them. I think companies are very reluctant to offer it as a perk of the job to provide nursery education.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

We know that Yasmine Thebault is a co-ordinator but Dr. Mountford is the regulator. Can you tell us about the regulations that you have to adhere to?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We have quite specific and strict regulations that we have to adhere to, ranging from environmental health to fire regulations to the amount of qualified staff, the amount of child per staff, depending on the age group. That is all written down in the document that we have. Then every year she sends us a new copy of the document and we have to fill in various forms, what the staff are and what training they have had. Every staff has to have first aid training, training to do with H.I.V. (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and A.I.D.S. (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), training to do with blood-borne disease spreading. Those are all down in the guidelines that we have to do, all of which we have to pay for. They are quite good guidelines. We were recently accredited with a U.K. (United Kingdom) organisation called the National Day Nurseries Association and we have recently gone through their process, a little bit like Ofsted (Office of Standards in Education) inspections when they come and inspect you, and they commented on how good the regulations were that we have, the fact we are registered every year whereas in the U.K. Ofsted only do every 3 years, I think. So I think the standards are quite high here. Dr. Mountford will give us lots of advice on the layout of the room. She is quite helpful with that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

The standards or the regulations may be good and may be to a high standard but would you just like to comment on them from a private provider's perspective?

Ms. J. Rogers:

It is 2 sides of the coin really. We want to provide the best facility that we can but the fact that the regulations are quite strict means that it is an expensive process for us. I do not know whether this is the right time to say this but my one thing, my bugbear, is that private nurseries have to have all these regulations and school nurseries dealing with the same age group do not have the same requirements as far as first aid and H.I.V. and all that kind of thing. So their costs, as it were, if they were a private business would not be as high as ours and I do not think that is a level playing field. On the other hand, I agree with the regulations, I think it is right that they have all these things, so it is kind of like 2 hats.

Dr. C. Hamer:

Can I just take you back to training of staff. Am I correct that managers have to have a level 4 qualification?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes, the manager has to have level 4.

Dr. C. Hamer:

That is an additional cost?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes, that is an additional cost. Managers have to have level 4, which is approximately £2,000, I think. Deputy managers have to have level 3 in management and head of room, room supervisors, have to have this what they call team leaders course, which is all available quite readily locally and we can get that organised.

Dr. C. Hamer:

So in fact employees will pay half of that cost?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes.

Deputy S. Pitman:

Can I ask how long you have worked in this sector?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes. I have worked on and off for 33 years in the under-5 sector.

Deputy S. Pitman:

In Jersey?

Ms. J. Rogers:

All in Jersey, yes.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

So you have seen a lot of changes.

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Would you like to comment on the strategy that the Education Department have on nought to 5 years?

Do you think there is one? Is it clear?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes. I think they seem to have the best interests of children at heart. I do not know whether Dr. Mountford's regulations are her own implementation or she is being guided to do those by other people but always I think it is the best interests of the children at heart. I think what happened years ago was that people could randomly set up playgroups and childcare, little groups, and not be regulated very much. So that was open to abuse then. Now it is much more strict so they obviously have had some sort of programme of making sure that we all conform to the same standards, which can only be good, really.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

As an overall strategy for early years, are you aware of what the Education Department is trying to do or has in place, not in connection with the regulations but with care and advice as a whole?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Do you mean to do with the States school nursery places, the fact they are trying to give more affordable ...

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Do you think the States as a whole has a strategy on early years development, care, education, an holistic approach across departments?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Perhaps not an holistic approach. I think it seems to be they go down one channel and make that right and then they go down another channel but it does not seem to be co-ordinated. That is my feeling about it. For example, although Yasmine is overall in charge of that, I have never had anything to do with Yasmine at all. She does not even have anything to do with the private sector because that is Dr. Mountford's sort of line but we do not seem to be able to give our opinions about what goes on overall.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Are you consulted on anything?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No, this is the first time really we have been consulted at all.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

So the Minister's declared aim of providing free education for 20 hours a week for all 3 and 4 year-olds, you were never consulted as to whether you would be able to help provide any of the places necessary?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No. There has never been any consultation on that. I have attended a few meetings of a group called the J.A.(?) which are promoting equal opportunities for the under-5s but it has never been done through work, if you know what I mean.

Deputy S. Pitman:

How has the current States policy affected your provision?

Ms. J. Rogers:

To be honest, it has not affected it as much as maybe some other businesses because of the fact that we do provide the long hours and I think that is why we retain the children. So I can honestly say that it has not really affected us but the nursery I ran before this was a private preschool and we were very much affected by it. It was the beginning of the end of my business really when they opened all the ... I was surrounded by States nursery schools which was fine. It was just that was the end of my business because I could not take them until they were 2½ and they left me when they were 3½ so I could not really sustain a business with that, which was very sad. I know that has happened to quite a number of the private preschools.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Did you have any contact with the Education Department to tell them that because of their new policy it was causing you difficulties as a businesswoman?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes. I had various opportunities to make comments and I did write to a few people. I was just a very small fish so it did not really ... I was not really expecting them to not open school nurseries but I did feel very strongly then, because of that business, that it was not a level playing field and we were given no help at all. Also, because the regulations were getting tighter and tighter, that meant our job was more difficult because it is expensive to have the facilities, which none of us could do. So that was the way it went.

Deputy S. Pitman:

Firstly, when did your nursery close down and, secondly, did you write to Economic Development?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No, I did not write to them. It closed down I think 2003. There was quite a bit of publicity at the time but I did not write to Economic Development.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

You say there is lack of consultation, you feel. If the Minister gets the money to be able to afford to provide these nursery places, would you have extra capacity to take children in?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No, we would not. We would have a few places but not really very many places because we are pretty full up.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Have they consulted you on your available capacity?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No.

Dr. C. Hamer:

I was just going to ask about fees in terms of what parents felt about fees generally?

Ms. J. Rogers:

I think most parents think they are very expensive but they understand that is what you have to pay for full-time education. If you break it down to an hourly rate we are not very much money at all. It is just when you present them with a bill and the children are with you from 7.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. every day it is quite a lot of money but the fact that we are pretty much full means that there is the demand there because most parents go back to work when they have had their children because of various other things.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

You said you may have capacity. Does that mean that you have a waiting list?

Ms. J. Rogers:

We have got a waiting list. Specially up at Fort Regent we have got space to expand if we wanted to and if there was the demand we would look to that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Do you see parents bringing their children to you because you are providing care or education?

Ms. J. Rogers:

I think it is a bit of both really. Primarily we care for the children but naturally through activities we provide they are being educated as well. Yes, I very much think it is both.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

We seem to be racing through these questions. Just one here about the contact that you have with support services and other agencies. So perhaps you may need to contact Health and Social Services; do you have a link or a contact at the department?

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes. Both managers have a list of names that they can contact if it is special needs, or if we have children from the Children's Office or anything like that we have got contracts through that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Do you have many children with special needs?

Ms. J. Rogers:

I would not say many. We have probably 3 or 4 in each nursery. We are helped with that through the Jersey Child Care Trust because we have to have a member of staff who is our designated special needs person and the Jersey Child Care Trust run courses for her to go on to make sure she is up to date with all the latest things and also they will provide financial support. They will either give us cover staff so that one member of our staff can spend one-to-one time with that child or they will just support generally anything that we try and do. Perhaps if somebody specific has to come, physiotherapy or anything like that, they will support us. So that is very good support for us.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Just to go back to the fact that if the funding was found there may be more spaces required in the private sector, are you in a position to expand and offer more?

Ms. J. Rogers:

As of now probably not but if we knew that it was coming and we knew that the children were going to be staying longer with us or more children, we have the space to expand and we would probably try and do that.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

How much notice would you need?

Ms. J. Rogers:

It would involve building an extra room so probably a year, I suppose.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

So as much notice as possible, really.

Ms. J. Rogers:

Yes.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I think we have probably covered the questions that we had. Just for your interest, we have seen today representatives from the States nurseries and from the parish nurseries and we asking all of you fairly similar questions so that we can see the responses from each section. Is there anything that you would like to tell us that you feel that perhaps we should know or we should be looking at? You have seen our terms of reference; they are fairly broad.

Ms. J. Rogers:

Apart from what I already said about the level playing field on the training, I think it is disappointing that we do not get help with training of our staff but I do not ...

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

I do not know why T.E.P. folded, do you?

Ms. J. Rogers:

I do not know the specific reasons, I am afraid. We were given plenty of notice for that. That was quite a blow because every year we probably have 3 to 4 girls doing N.V.Q.s (National Vocational Qualifications) and that is quite an expense for us but we have to do it because they have to be trained.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

We will make inquiries on that one.

Ms. J. Rogers:

I am not quite sure what happened there. I thought it was just because they were cutting costs generally. I do not know any other specific reason.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Can I ask you another general question. This review has been publicised through the media, the J.P. (*Jersey Post*), we have spoken about it on the radio as well. Have any parents ever mentioned it to you at all?

Ms. J. Rogers:

No parents have ever mentioned it.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

Which shows maybe we are not getting our message across as well as we could or should be.

Ms. J. Rogers:

From what I gather by talking to other people who run smaller nurseries, they have much more perhaps one-to-one contact with the parents than maybe I do because I tend to be sort of sitting in the background a bit more. I know a lot of the parents are quite upset about the fact that if you do not get a place in a States nursery it is expensive. So I think perhaps they get more response than I do. I am not the best person to ask that really because I am not standing around every day talking to the parents. I am more in the background.

Deputy D.W. Mezbourian:

That is probably it, Jane. Thank you very much for that. It was a little bit quicker than we thought it would be but you have answered all our questions. So thank you very much for coming to speak to us.