

2024.09.10

**2.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet of St. Saviour of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning regarding the publication of the Early Years nursery provision action plan (OQ 165/2024):**

Will the Minister state whether he intends to publish a report detailing the Early Years nursery provision action plan as set out on page 10 of the Government Plan 2024-2027; and if not, why not?

**Deputy R.J. Ward of St. Helier Central (The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning):**

I thank the Deputy for her question. While this was a commitment in the previous Government Plan, I will be pleased to provide the Assembly with an action plan on early years' provisions. It will provide details of and progression against the ambitions I have set out in the Common Strategic Policy. Currently, I have asked officers to prioritise delivery of a series of pilots that show that we can make a positive impact at pace. I will present the plan by the end of October to help inform the debate on the Budget, which includes the financial implications of these plans.

**2.5.1 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I am pleased that the Minister is intending to produce this action plan. Could he outline whether his long-term vision would be contained within that, and give us some insight as to what the long-term vision for early years is beyond the targeted 2 to 3 funding that is in the current proposals?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

The crux of that plan would be to focus on the aims of the C.S.P. (Common Strategic Policy) and the delivery of 2 to 3 year-old spaces and increased provision that is both sustainable and appropriate for what we need on the Island. Beyond that, extending that into lower ages - is the best phrase I can think of - babies and so on, would absolutely be an ambition and aim. Whether that will happen before the end of this term, being realistic, I am not so sure because we have a lot of work to do in providing the nursery provision first. As the Deputy knows, it can be a challenging area because of the nuances of increasing that need and making it a sustainable provision in the long term.

**2.5.2 Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:**

My panel brought this amendment to the Government Plan with the intention of enabling the department to have sufficient time to compose a plan, and we consider a deadline would be beneficial. Bearing in mind that an extension of childcare is a principal aim of this Government, does the Minister not think that this should have been prioritised and continue to be prioritised?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I thank the Deputy. There are 2 types of priority. There is prioritising producing plans and ideas and there is prioritising delivery of actual actions. I have prioritised the delivery of actions which we will be reporting on, and I am quite happy with that.

**2.5.3 Deputy C.D. Curtis:**

Will the Minister confirm that the plan will have included full consultation with all nursery providers?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

Yes, it absolutely does. There was communication with all nursery providers that is ongoing. However, we also need to lead in terms of the nursery provision that is required, and that will mean actually starting pilots, testing their appropriateness, whether they are working, whether they are sustainable, and then trying to engage everybody so that we can increase that provision. We have a very wide provision of nursery on the Island, from private to schools to third sector, which is probably the wrong term, but I think everybody knows what I mean by that. We have to bring all of those together in terms to do that work.

**2.5.4 Deputy I. Gardiner of St. Helier North:**

The Minister in his answer used the word “realistic”. Would the Minister advise to the Assembly what he see as realistic to deliver by 2026 within this.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I am pleased with that question because it is about realism but within that realism there must be some ambition, and the ambition is to deliver a sustainable structure of nursery provision for 2 to 3 year-olds so that we can introduce a N.E.F. (Nursery Education Fund) provision. At the moment, the plan is 15 hours because that will help parents. I think that by piloting, by engaging in the way that we are, by looking at where that provision is, we will be able to do that. Plus it will also uncover what that provision actually is. I personally believe that if we provide more nursery places, make them available for 2 to 3 year-olds, there may be families that at the moment are not saying that they want nursery provision, but when it is there they may want to use it. Those numbers may change as well so we have to be adaptable and realistic but the ambition is by 2026 I hope that we can introduce the 15 hours of N.E.F. funding. But we will do that as appropriate.

**2.5.5 Deputy I. Gardiner:**

Just making sure that I understood correct, that the ambition and hopefully realistic is to introduce 15 hours N.E.F. for 2 to 3 year-olds. When I looked into the Government Plan, and I would like to check if the budget is realistic or we would need to require more budget; the rough calculation N.E.F. to 3 to 4 year-olds is approximately just under £4 million, which half of it will require £2 million for 15 hours. We know that 2 to 3 year-old provision is more expensive to deliver than 3 to 4 year-old provision. What budget does the Minister have in mind to deliver 15 hours 2 to 3 year-old provision.

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

The C.S.P. revenue expenditure growth table for extended nursery and childcare provision puts aside £1.517 million in 2025, £2.358 million in 2026, £3.423 million in 2027 and £4.629 million in 2028. So money has been put aside to address nursery provision as that provision grows. Plus also we will go through another process of government funding next year, and if the provision is in place before 2026 there will be an opportunity there. I will say, and I am going to say it again, I keep saying it about education, I do not like the word ‘cost’. I think we should use the word ‘investment’. So if we have to go for more investment in this, it is a good investment, it is a good investment for our families, it is a good investment for our young people, it is a good investment for our economy and therefore it is a good investment for our Island.

**2.5.6 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf of St. Saviour:**

The ambition of the Minister is undoubted. I am aware, I think, that there was an indication that the plan would be available by 1st September, and we are past that. But I wonder whether the Minister could inform the Assembly that in order to deliver nursery as is envisaged, the staff will be required in the nurseries that are going to be funded there. What is the Minister’s view of the capacity, availability and actions they are going to take in order to ensure that the staff are there; moreover, that they are appropriately remunerated?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I do thank the Deputy because it gives me a chance to plug the campaign that we will be starting very soon for early years’ recruitment. I recorded a little piece myself. Perhaps Members can ignore that piece and move on to the more detailed piece. But certainly, one of the successes, for example, was to recruit teaching assistants in a similar way. So we are using the same process to look at recruiting for early years. The number of places of training in early years at Highlands College has increased. Please do not ask me the number because I genuinely do not know it off the top of my head. We also though want to try and attract a different demographic. There will be people who are returning to the workplace who may want to get involved with early years and train to that satisfying role with dealing with our young people. There may be certain people who have brought up their own families, are returning to work and have skills that with a bit of training they can use within this sector. I think there is a demographic, there is a workforce outlet that we can attract. Of course one of the benefits of a living wage is exactly that, in all of our sectors we will have a living wage.

### **2.5.7 Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

I thank the Minister for his reply but I wonder whether or not he would assist me and other Members in providing some data. We all laud his ambition to get locals into childcare; that sounds a great idea. But the reality is that there is going to be inevitably a requirement for inbound migrant workers. Is he able to provide some statistics of the split of existing childcare workers? How many are local? How many are under the 5-year rule? How many are subject to work permits? How that might change even despite his ambitions. If he could set out what his ambitions are in terms of local recruitment.

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

The simple answer is no, I cannot produce that here at this moment. That is an interesting piece of data, I think exactly the type of data we will be looking at because we need that if we are going to train our own. We will always have a balance between those coming on to the Island to work, those who are training here, but one of the things I do want to target is those who live on-Island and might want to return to work and enter that sector. Because the simple reason is that they are already living here, they have housing, they may have families, there is a stable workforce, and it is also a workforce that can train here. I have no problem with workers coming from abroad, we will always need that to some extent. But I think that balance will be there. In terms of the data and what that balance is now and what it will be into the future, I have to say I think that will be a very transient number because it depends on what we need and how successful we are in the provision of nursery places.

### **Deputy P.F.C. Ozouf:**

Just to make sure my question was answered, I did just ask the Minister kindly to produce the data, not on his feet, but could he commit to at least producing the data that is now, which was the subject of my question?

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

I would ask the Deputy to email me with the specifics of what data he is talking about because, if I am honest, I cannot remember what he said.

### **2.5.8 Deputy H.L. Jeune of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity:**

From the Minister's answers to Oral Question 142/2024 in the States Assembly on 16th July, the Minister made it very clear that the parents need to sign up to nursery places in February and March for the following September, so any actions that would happen would have to focus on February and March. So could the Minister give assurance to parents that there will be changes in February and March and there will be progression? Not an action plan but actually action, and we will see this in February and March when those places will come up for September 2025, and if not why not?

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

The simple answer is yes, but on top of that it depends what you mean by nursery places. If you mean 2 to 3 year-olds, there was also ... there are places for babies as well, which are much more flexible in terms of when they start. I think we need to build some flexibility into our system, so when nursery places become available throughout the year they may be available to parents. My answer would be yes, but when things come onstream, I would like to have the flexibility that they come in when they are needed. I know that is difficult, but when my kids were young and we were looking for nursery places, we would have snapped up any place at any time, to be quite frank, and worked around it, and I know that is what parents are doing all of the time anyway.

### **2.5.9 Deputy H.L. Jeune:**

Just to ask the Minister: so, will anything new and additional be happening to help parents in February, March to sign up for nursery places in September or will it continue as it is at present and was last year? Is there anything new that we can see an increase in additional for February, March.

### **Deputy R.J. Ward:**

If the Deputy is referring to next February, March, which she must do because we cannot go back in time, yes, I would hope that there would be more of those places available in September 2026,

absolutely. My issue was that they are not available early enough, and so we are trying to introduce some earlier in 2025. Yes, absolutely, certainly in 2026, that is what will be available. Of course they will be applied for in February, March 2025. Yes, I do not see any change to that system. I hope I have answered the Deputy's question.

**2.5.10 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:**

I wish the Minister luck with delivering all these priorities. What I wanted to understand was the growth money in the proposed Budget. Is that to serve families who are not already receiving any 2 to 3 spaces or is this a continuation for families who are already accessing this for their children?

**Deputy R.J. Ward:**

The main element of it would be to extend because it does say extend nursery and child care provision in the line, so it is about extending. This is the point, we could ... I mean there is a decision to be made: do we introduce the 15 hours now and just pay what is already there and not extend or do we want to target the money to extend nursery provision so it is more across working families? Then we can make that decision as to how we are going to support families when they want that provision. But, yes, the C.S.P. is about extending those places.