



24 September 2024

Deputy C Curtis
Head of Scrutiny Panel for Children Education and Home Affairs
By email to: k.decarteret@gov.je

Dear Deputy Curtis,

Review of the Government's Proposed Budget 2025-8

We write further to your letter of 9 September 2024 in reference to the above. In responding we have used the questions set out in your letter.

The impact that the Government's plans could have on the Early Years sector:

- 1 In short, we believe that the Minister's plans are unworkable and present an existential threat to the very existence of the Private Voluntary and Independent ("PVI") Sector represented by our Members.
- 2 The Minister has launched pilot schemes in three schools (Trinity, Plat Douet and D'Auvergne) designed to increase access to unused space and resources in the primary school nurseries. This involves inter alia providing wrap-around care to supplement the free 30 hours offered by NEF. It has been explained to us that there are approximately 170 spaces available in the Pre-Schools attached to the primary schools and it is the stated ambition that these are filled.
 - 2.1 We believe that the wrap-around care that will be required will most likely be piecemeal. We have asked for the research that has concluded that this is in the interest of the children. No such research has been provided.
 - 2.1.1 When asked by JEYA whether those hours would be charged to parents, government were unable to confirm.
 - 2.1.2 It was acknowledged that this provision may need to be registered and regulated by CEYS.
 - 2.1.3 It was further raised by JEYA that if those hours are not charged, this would represent an extension of the NEF hours which are set out in law, so it would need to be legislated.
 - 2.2 It is understood that it is not expected that there will be any increase in demand for NEF spaces – on the contrary, we are living in an island with a declining birth

rate. Consequently, measures taken by government to free unused capacity in the schools can only be achieved by taking children currently cared for in the PVI sector.

- 2.3 The cohort for the Preschools in the PVI sector, consists almost exclusively of children in the age group being targeted by the Minister's plans. Consequently, if a significant number of those children are "sucked up" into the States sector, the viability of the PVI Pre-Schools will be threatened.
 - 2.4 Sustainability of day nurseries is largely dependent on the financial benefit of higher ratios of 1:8 in the Pre-School rooms and where the 0-3 age group is largely a loss leader – see 3.4 below.
- 3 The Minister has ambition to introduce funding for 2-3 year olds, starting with those with additional needs and expanding to a universal entitlement.
- 3.1 Currently the PVI sector provides almost all care for 0-3 year olds in the island.
 - 3.2 It is widely believed that introduction of widespread funding will increase the demand for nursery spaces in the 2-3 age bracket. The Minister's view is that the capacity that is created by moving 3-4 year olds to the government's provision (see 2 above) can be used to accommodate this additional demand. This view is unfounded and contrary to the reality.
 - 3.2 It is not as simple as increasing capacity for 2-3s in spaces previously occupied by Pre-School age children. The younger age bracket requires a higher concentration of staffing and currently staff recruitment and retention is the single biggest challenge facing the sector.
 - 3.3 Environmental changes would be required to convert spaces currently used for Pre-School children into spaces that could be used for 2-3s, if indeed it is even possible to do so. This would require significant capital investment and in some settings this would not be possible at all. This has been acknowledged by CEYS.
 - 3.4 The cost of providing care for 0-3s (without the financial benefit of the Pre-School children) would have to increase significantly. Currently the benefit of the 0-8 ratios tempers the cost of the younger age groups. The greater the share of children on lower ratios, the higher the overall cost burden. Whilst dependent on lots of different factors, it was suggested that this could be at pricing levels that would make it unaffordable for most parents.
 - 3.5 In addressing the proposal for an offering of 15 hours for 2-3s, we questioned how this could be universal if the offering was only in the PVI sector – a universal entitlement is predicated on families being able to access the offering without buying further hours, which is contrary to the Ts and Cs of many settings who do not offer term-time only places. This did not appear to have been considered.
 - 3.6 In a meeting with JEYA on 6 August 2024, the Minister said that he would not rule out using the unused spaces in the Pre-Schools attached to the primary schools to accommodate any additional capacity created by the introduction of a universal entitlement for 2-3 year olds.

3.6.1 We have not seen any research to suggest that it would be in the interests of young children to be cared for in classrooms.

3.6.2 If the spaces were to be adapted, this would be at significant capital cost to government.

4 In conclusion, the decision to build pre-schools attached to the primary schools was an ill-thought through policy. The offering is not in line with the needs of modern families in a jurisdiction where there is a high prevalence of working parents who need full-time 52 week a year care. Whilst we understand that the over-capacity in schools is a concern for Government with under-utilisation of both space and resource, his policies undermine the viability of the PVI sector.

If relevant, how training and development for staff in the Early Years sector could be improved;

5 We believe that any attempt to improve training and development for staff in Early Years would largely be premature and ineffective. JEYA firmly believes that a new model for Early Years needs to be established, in line with those adopted for Primary and Secondary Education – see Appendix.

If relevant, how the recruitment and retention of Early Years staff could be improved:

6 We currently face a crisis in recruitment and retention. Constrained by the Early Years financial model, we are unable to offer salaries and financial packages offered by government and other sectors and commensurate with the roles, responsibilities and expertise expected of the modern practitioner. We are losing staff who perceive Early Years as being unable to fulfil their “Life Ambitions” of financial solvency and being able to rent / buy their own property.

By establishing a new model referred to in 5 above and the Appendix, the intention would be to determine the relevant skills and resources required of the workforce to meet the expectations that islanders have for children starting Primary Education and to ensure that employers (government and private sector) are in a position to provide packages that will attract and retain the professional workforce that is required..

What consultation has already taken place with the sector and / or what consultation would you expect to take place before changes are implemented:

7 In November 2023 and January 2024, Round Table Meetings were held, attended by stakeholders from a wide range of providers (private and public), organisations, agencies, charities, etc for the purpose of establishing the Future of Early Years. The meetings were facilitated by ISOS and they subsequently provided an overview of the discussions.

The intention had been for these “brain-storming” sessions to drive a set of policy proposals that would be brought back to stakeholders for validation, they would then be funded and put to Council of Ministers in the Autumn of 2024 for consideration, prior to being included in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The change of government and the requirement for a CSP to cover the period to the end of this political term brought a halt to the process.

The first we knew about the Minister's plans were announcements made to the States following questions from the house. Following which, two urgent meetings were called with CEYS / CYPES and a follow up meeting with the Minister was held on 6 August 2024.

7.1 The Minister holds the view that the Roundtable Meetings constituted consultation.

JEYA's view is that those discussions were "brainstorming sessions" from which detailed consultation was planned. Consequently, there was no opportunity prior to the Minister's announcement to the States to explore the issues highlighted above.

7.2 As a consequence of the 6 August meeting, we have held four meetings with Jonathan Williams, Director of Policy Change, CYPES, which to date have largely been focused on Workforce issues, see 6. No further consideration appears to have been given to the sustainability of the sector.

We would also be interested to hear your views on any other aspect of the Proposed Budget 2025-2028 on which you have an interest.

8 It is our understanding that the Minister has included a budget proposal of approximately £900,000 to further pilots for extended Pre-School hours in the nursery classes attached to Primary Schools and funding for 2-3 year olds, as outlined above.

8.1 It is JEYA's view that this is premature and instead the government should conduct a review of Early Years in the island, establish its goals and objectives for children starting primary school and determine the workforce and financial model to best deliver this set of goals. This would determine where EY care would be offered, by whom and how it would be funded – see Appendix.

8.2 In its place, JEYA would advocate using the £900,000 to establish a small number of "family-hubs" in the island, similar to the pilot being ran at Rouge Boullion. Creating a community focus for families and staffed with relevant professionals from across various disciplines, these family hubs were seen by the attendees at the Roundtables as providing invaluable support for families and children.

8.3 By combining Pre-School classes in two or more areas of the island with significant over-capacity, this could create valuable spaces in which the hubs could be housed, resolving the issue that had been identified pertaining to under-utilised resources and obviating the need to try to fill the unused capacity.

In conclusion, whilst we support the concept of both of the Minister's Policies (utilizing unused space and resource in State settings and providing funding for families) insufficient consultation has been undertaken and the effect on the PVI sector continues to be disregarded. Given we currently provide 75% of care to 0-5s and 100% of care to 0-3s, the effect on children, their families and the wider economy could be catastrophic.

Instead, the Government of Jersey should undertake an exercise similar to that already undertaken for Primary and Secondary Education, determining the resource and workforce requirements for a modern Early Years offering and an appropriate financial model to deliver it. In the meantime, the funding proposal from the Minister should not be lost but instead diverted to a purpose which has widespread support and meets one of the Minister's own objectives of utilizing unused resource through the creation of a number of Family Hubs.

For the avoidance of doubt this response was considered at a meeting of the members of the Jersey Early Years Association held on 24 September 2024 and was unanimously approved. Therefore, whilst it is signed by the Chair, it is sent on behalf of the whole PVI sector.

We remain available to discuss any aspect of this response with you.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely

Belinda Lewis
Chair